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**THESE MATTERS MUST BE MEASURED
ON CORRECT SCALES**

For silver, gold, and precious stones

Troy Weight:

¼ carat = a single grain

2 dozen grains, one pennyworth—

of which twenty will comprise that ounce
in sapphire, pearl, or bullion
to be exacted of me every night
by my expensive dreams.

For potions, drugs, or poisons

Apothecaries' Weight:

20 grains = one scruple

3 scruples, one dram—

I measure carefully for the deep
eventual cost of sleep.

One scruple, even a grain, could shift

my balance, tip the sensitive beam

against all prior dream of voices

coming to me in decibels of light
but slower than light—

so that time seems to hold false

like the skip of pulse

between the telling of a word

and what is heard.

Virginia Elson

TWO POEMS**Letter From Brooklyn**

“Mrs. Rosen,” thirty years ago a warden of
a Nazi extermination camp, was recently
recognized by two of her former prisoners,
in New York, and subsequently arrested.

Thirty years
I've lived here safely, but
Today a look of recognition

Stopped me, as if
Out of the corner of my eye
I'd seen drapes rustling,

As if rolling over
In bed, I'd seen a spy
Instead of clothes on hangers.

I know that woman, all of them, they say,
“He vanished so fast . . . the water
Was left running. Upstairs, footsteps

Scattered like dropped silverware.
We fled like roaches.” So did I,
I changed my name, dyed my hair,

Yet recognition spread, a bruise
Across her face. Whispers
Seep under my door like gas. What now?

A porcupine in a taxidermist's box,
For every needle on my back
A murdered Jew. She lifted the lid and shined

A flashlight on my terror—
I'm stuffed, packed away
In sawdust, but today she saw
The pupils of my marble eyes contract.

For Joshua

You count years on your fingers. Now you're four.
We've a cake and candles, ribbons, chewing gum,
A brush and jars, like rainbows, of thick color,
Marbles like cloudy planets at your thumb.

I'll start profound but end in common sense,
I'm moved to make a wish in your honor
Against a birthday, maybe decades hence,
When a slightly fishy angel may appear

And whisper, *How is longer life an advantage?*
Look out your door: the tide recedes too fast
For you to scrawl what you should have done,
a message
Sealed in a bottle, and hurl it into the past,

Or, *Men of good will and bad come to the same.*
It's true, good deeds are needles buried in hay,
We light a birthday candle to blow out the flame,
Valleys surge up and mountains erode away

Yet men rise not an inch, Pisces the Fish
Has swallowed his fill and struggles on the shore.
But before you shut your eyes and make your wish,
Accept, as blood, these words, and mark your
door:

Like others, I've observed gray sidewalks cracked
By grass. Some find a moral, as well we might,
Such as, *The mask breaks at the smallest act*
Of life. The blank, blank mask, If they are right,

That likeness in the street is yours and mine,
 Breathing dust in, 'laughynge with oon eye
 And that other wepyng.' And every time
 The mouth questions, and one ear hears reply,

The other hears, between the words, a hush.
 By which I mean that, as our masks are drying,
 We can let the colors stiffen on the brush
 Or let love billow like a paint-drop dyeing

Water in a glass. This hasn't sufficed
 As evidence that we should wish, should say,
Bless the day that I was born. But, Christ,
 It seems so right, it seems so right today.

Gjertrud Schnackenberg

THE DANCER ON THE WALL

The friendship quilt, patch-work
 for my bedroom wall, to present
 with one green and orange leg
 the present dance, dances, yes,
 with one gold leg above my bed,
 one pink leg, one pink chance,
 in careless violation of the land-
 -lord's lease, which plainly says:
 no nails/ no late guests/
 no dancing on the walls.
 He should only live so long.
 The illicit patches pirouette
 above my head, above her head,
 on floral satin legs of chance.
 One velvet leg out-stretched
 a different leg, a different dance.

Kenneth Fifer

ENERGY BURNING

father
its true
i swear
the wire
tap picked
up clear
wet messages
trapped inside
the heart stream
hiding
from the air world
cowering
in blood net vessels
afraid to let go
with flying
father/ flow
words must fly
let loose fly
and fly invade
the suffocation
with electric shocks
of steaming breath
let loose
words must bear out the body
in all its truth
overtake space and height
marked advance
marked flight
father
words must soar
in speed currents
brandishing sun
from streaking wings
intone
intone screaming

shout
 and spell out
 soundown
 gotta be found
 free of blood
 free

of twining muscles
 grabbing at the throatsound
 shutting off the wordsound
 drowning

father
 the wire
 tap picked
 up clear drowning

convert to read out

patiently
 i listen to blood

*heart pressure up 20.
 words pump thru thick
 and loud
 echoed noise crowds
 the eardrum
 thumping*

. . . read out . . .

*control and code
 sort out the confusion
 channel clogged with dreams*

i cradle myself carefully
 in cupped hands
 rock myself gently
 with whispers
 to the sun
 poised in hushed suspension

i wait the brain transmission
of the music signal

father
the music sings.
intake
with breath waltzing
i sail my arms flashing
along a deep crescent
once up then downslide
inertia pull
into the upglide
arch sweep
into the zenith ride
release
fingers burst
in rhythmic flourish
scatter words to charge the air
i laugh
squeeze myself dancing
free from blood

the moon glows soft
like friends
i know i see
but cannot touch the light
that streaks the trees
and sweeps me home at night
in quiet talk
then leaves

yes
the mechanic works
at the moon
the mechanic lives
beside the night
im sure.
he never lingers

near the door
 that rushes in the day.
 yes
 im sure
 the moon burns soft
 like friends

*resolution:
 to solve the problem.
 to examine energy mechanisms.*

father
 im afraid
 ill never be free of blood
 i cant listen
 i dont want to hear anymore

*energy must have a link up.
 to pull out the plug
 is to go insane,
 energy must flow.*

i know
 i know
 i felt that power sheer
 comfort driving
 when the mechanic
 worked at the sun
 triggering signals
 to tap the heart
 words were said
 words were done
 let loose
 to fly
 into the eye of the sun

*in time
 in time again*

time buries

in life
in life again

life is buried

crushed under
the plodding weight
of time
life slips away into the time
of movie shows

the same screen
that is energized
with cruel light and dark patches
razor swift flashes
of joy and pain of
dreams and wishes
that seem to be real
is wrapped around my eyes
i cant help but view life as haphazard
mosaic
clicking off frames
(without direction)
of spliced in nightmares
that drain reflection and
consume the energy
poured into words
that no one answered

now there is no answer
to fill my eyes

no one here to shut off the machine
peel away the screen
and head off drowning

the mechanic
works at the moon
with pale energy

close to cold
 so far away
 his world is night
 my world is day
 and i can only fly inside of sleep
 the door that rushes in the day

*plan what words should say
 energy is exact
 pressure is mounting.*

its just that
 the air surrounding me
 strangles words
 sounding me
 before they get off the ground
 i cant condition my heart to speak
 what my eyes see flashed
 on distorted sheets.
 the heart feels through
 the glossy screen
 reaches for texture
 not for letters
 if im not exact
 thats what i mean
 feel beneath the surface
 past arrangement and shape
 into sources of darkness
 and figures of light
 is your world the day
 or do you live in the night?
 no one has answered.

father
 i dont want to listen anymore

energy burning
 burning holes

in the floor
energy burning
burning holes
in the door
want some more
want somemore
wansomere

*heart pressure erratic.
immediately code and control.*

waasomor

code and control

wahsom

immediately

wahso

code and

wah

wah

*immed
con*

wa

wa

*imm
co*

no

fly

no

moon

drown

im

yes father
it hurts to breathe
the words
that force contact
with the air
burn out
fast dissolve
into disappear
their strength
drained thru
the dark mouth of space
that engulfs the distance
between my hands
and the voice
that answers from across the room in disbelief

im afraid to reach
to care
now
speak less
(speechless)
for safety's sake
stuff the last
of the sacred words
into the heart well
where they clot and tangle
with springs and dials

energy wastes away inside
i hear the meshing of bloody gears
tear into sound

drown

i

into dreams
search the dark side of the moon

Harry Purdy

BIBLICAL

So many of us are still so many of us;
My sister, now seventy, looks like my mother did
One morning during the last world war;
My brothers, like my father looked one morning
When the Depression made America different
again.

So many of us will not end this century;
Will not, can not, extend any solving mysteries;
Given what we were, we are the midnight
walkers
Of rooms, making nothing heroic in our times;
So many of us go from crises to nothing
Biblical.

So many of us look no different once again;
An apartment houses us like red winds in rains;
Like birds, dogs, cats, wombats, flametrees . . .
In the open seasons raging into tomorrow . . .
And God said, and Noah, and Moses . . . and my
father.

Harry Roskolenko

TWO POEMS**Wonders of the Invisible World**

A northwest wind has maddened the river.
Waves churn and flatten and lose themselves in ripples—
Swirling in frantic half-circles—
Breaking on the high-banked ice—

Yesterday the river ran swiftly to the east.
Now it plunges everywhere, drowning.

A small brown-painted box rocks in the wind.
It turns from side to side in that nameless tree—turns halfway,
turns back.

Empty, its roofs sloped like the roofs of our house.
Where are the birds? Hidden everywhere.

There are absences heavy as the ceilings in old houses,
thick-beamed, built too low.
There are memories thinly poisonous as the smoke of old
wood-burning stoves.
There are slashes in the flesh that become eccentric scars.
That noise in the brush alongside the house?
Sparrows, invisible.

A woman is forbidden abstraction.
She must heal; she must touch.
She must braid us all together.
By love, as by roots in the soil, we will be connected to
one another.
We will not fly off the surface of the earth and drown in the
Void: so secretly rooted.
But the connections must be underground,
Such wonders performed invisibly.
If you are not wonder-working,
Who will have you?

Sinners in the Hand of a Righteous God

Newly brittle, the snow's crust resists our weight.
Our booted heels can hardly crack it.
And what of the earth we must imagine now,
 miles and years into winter?
Frozen hard as moon-rock.

Nothing has changed, or everything.

The wind is as insolent, the sky as razorish a blue.
The same people in the same overcoats are walking
 muffled, heads bowed into the wind.

Is it winter that burdens them, or their innocence?

We, having sinned, stride through the freezing afternoon.
Our eyes burn with tears, but only from the river's wind.
Our guilty smiles shade into steam.

Sinners may be cleansed pure as snow,
 by snow.

No God abides in this landscape but the landscape:
Brittle the crust, perfection in each footprint.

Joyce Carol Oates

IN THE DARK

Alone in his home close to the park
lives a certain plumber who will swear
he has seen one night every year
in the middle of autumn the dead awaken.
They yawn. They rise like a deep groan
from the grave and brush beetles away
with wide leaves left in the loam.

Around the vacant park they parade
under old oaks, break into song
and circle a cedar which shed its shade
all summer. He may be mistaken,
however he vows their shrill noise
harms the hearing of a hungry squirrel
and drives your dog to attack its tail.

See how cats shy from shrubs shaken
by a breeze? Whether anyone believes
his sober story, there's a trace
of evidence something is stirring.
Rumor has blown about the county,
debated by birds, mentioned among mice.

What's in the wind? Do the dead dance
all night and sing ballads as he claims?
Are fine footprints engraved on the grass,
or old bones strewn in the lawn when they leave?
Or do we deceive ourselves and hear
some ghost whose voice visits the ear?

Nevertheless the eve of All Saints' Day
comes and goes, the sky grows grey,
and it snows. And snows. Fast flakes fill
orchards and fields and all but bury
St Paul's small churchyard and chill
an angel's loins in the cemetery.

Meanwhile our friend the plumber stays
indoors and drinks apricot brandy
from a fat jar. People wonder
if he told the truth, how will we know?
For what it's worth in these cold days
the answer lies close to the earth
under our eyes, under the snow.

George Keithley

THREE POEMS

Narrative Continuity

—a poem in 10 chapters

1.

I've always wanted to write a novel . . .

2.

"I have taken great pains
and gone to great expense to procure these
for your mistress, and now . . ." —and here
she extended one gloved hand in a gesture
of approbation withheld— "I fear
the culmination of all my arduous scrutiny
is demolished by this near-piratical action
from a person
whose view of human nature is so emphatically
base
as to allow him to initiate his heinous plans
with the nonchalance of a parlor-maid
dusting a figurine. I
am discredited!"

3.

. . . but have no knack
for narrative continuity, a Bedouin or thieving
politician
always bouncing off the wrong mote
of Brownian motion, and a tangent
to my life becomes my life, as an amoeba's
sticking
a trifle of itself out into the ecosphere
becomes the amoeba. I'm speaking
of locomotion in unicellular structures
now, in the middle of what
was to be a love poem, see?

4.

And with those words
she turned upon her heel, leaving
the startled shopkeep to his surmises of the
universe
as a clockwork, and in the sunlit streets
was immediately abducted by a Bedouin
or a thieving politician.

5.

Meanwhile, back at the ranch,
a woman I love is leaving me. There is nothing
I can do or say to stop this, and a word
I use loosely, every day,
inevitable, is defined in the ridge
where the blouse is taut through anatomically-
manifested
determination across the tightened bones of her
distant, diminishing back.

6.

I'm rethinking chapter 4 and revise the word
immediately
to *welcomely*. In his desert tent he covers her
with kisses from head to foot, inbetween
the two of which he lingers, then slowly
undoes his robes and turban or
unzips his gray flannel pants and hangs them
so the crease keeps. Then his whole life enters
where he extends to her
like an amoeba.

7.

Or *I'm leaving her*. I always forget
which is which, my lack of narrative continuity
always
confusing which side of the bed
initiates action, as if the Foil

pouting petulantly in one half of the blanket in
 another world could be the Protagonist,
 sympathized-with, wept-over —and this
 befuddles the best friend
 standing all day in the Brownian motion of dust
 rising
 sunstruck off figurines
 and ready to enter the plot with a bundle
 of blame to lay
 with a gloved hand imperturbably
 on one of us or the other.

8.

Say it's the man
 who leaves the woman,
 Reginald. Even with a bloody
 smack of loss and guilt
 to either cheek, think, my
 boy, of the freedom! That lack
 in his life of continuity, of
 knowing the next way-station
 that the carriage pulls into is definitely
 Falling-Actionshire, if you'll forgive
 my trifling wit, is a way of saying anything
 is possible! No, I guarantee you,
 despite the onus of social responsibility,
 this man we have imagined and tossed
 so precariously about at our whims
 to serve us, is let go
 and serves no master now but
 each new day, and who are we
 to say that the next day's carriage is not
 from an exotic land and laden
 with adventure! Even now it's on its way,
 and he may climb the howdah and ride off
 whooping gay as a Bedouin.
 He's ecstatic!

9.

The chill sea slapped its face. The porpoises
had been fun, and the sea-horses
frolic'ed with it, zooming out
spawn from their bellies, each new wave cupped
new sun. But now
all was night, was cold, and the giant
amoeboid creature had tossed it
hither and yon in a mucky polyp
with no regard for the straight line, and bitter
brackish water cut
deep in its hairline fractures. Oh
the world wasn't always easy for a porcelain
figurine
come to life at the touch of a magic feather-
duster! Swimming
home, to Dresden, across the Atlantic, from
Tampa,
Florida, was no lark! And what
of the air force pilot, the rum-drunk Klondike
dancehall girl,
her faithful collie, the one with the eye-patch
and ineluctable Georgian accent, weren't they
possible, weren't they due?

10.

Or he's sad.
In the final chapter
there is no resolution.
There is no climax.
A woman I love is leaving me.
There is no continuity.

The Wine-Dark Sea

1.

For the color of amino acids;
for the whispered conversations taking place
in your amnesia;
for the pencil's tracing village ruts
on a map as sweat in this forehead's wrinkle
follows a convolution on your brain
where the definition of senility is stored;
for the breasts and pubis
still in a gene;
for times: the chronological flick
of your life when the ocean's blue descending
rises clear in cupped palms,
takes on the color your hug is;
the moment a high vibration
nails your wrists
fast to a bomber's shadow;
for any porch light's halo of moths,
a ring
with which pure radiance marries
substance; for what eyesight drains
down the o's on a page of Whitman;
for the hand
letting go the knotted string
of the red kite
her kiss sucks to your neck;
for the spiralled, splitting, somersaulting
denizens of the rain
washed in the single tractor-tire track
you use as a unit
to measure your life's accomplishments by;
for the sound of the vertebral cartilage expanding
to full size during sleep
or compressing under the vertical strain

of a man sprinting into the horizon;
 for the bubble breaking
 the toilet's surface, a gasp
 only your day's waste
 could give voice to;
 here, in the room where your heart ticks time,
 for the doorknob's silent turning
 counter-clockwise to the planet's;
 for the flake, yes, for the hundredth flake
 of snow the Eskimaux categorize
 so accurately, the face it reflected
 when water
 is still frozen, perfect, inside;

2.

for the wavering layer (thin
 as the acid in limes, flecked with white
 gloss as is a spread of menses, and pocked
 by black breves above a sestina
 of freshwater fish) the sun
 blazes onto the laketop as it sets,
 a blinding of liquefied light

*

we have no word in English.

3.

The last dog eaten, so raw
 its eye still blinked at the touch of blue hands
 on its liver; the last stick of sled
 now splintered, a spray of straw, no good
 for beating his cheeks till they warmed
 at last with bruises; and the brick-built Mission
 still days away on the outer side
 of the snowstorm:

the Eskimaux tusks a poem
 in a block of ice, then tips his head
 to that last transparent word. The tongue sticks
 in punctuation.

4.

The language thinks of the shape of air
in my nostril, and weeps.

The language licks up a woman's leg
and weeps in a runnel of FSH.

The language says rhizoid,
glyptodant, buncombe, pellicle,
tamandu, furbelow, wherry,
and weeps, salt in lakewater.

Rains, and weeps.

5.

I open my mouth in a cloudburst,
no matter how cold, and let my tongue absorb
one drop. Perhaps the best poem
ever written was done a century ago
by a seal-hunter, on ice, in language
melted and vaporized high
above anything I've ever said in my life
or read in America. Its word
could fill the eye, could rinse the throat,
could pry the lips with a rush
of the body's percentage of water.

For The Day

Alan, I dreamt we were impressed.
We sat in a room, maybe two of fifty
guys focusing on a tv set
as if to teleport it, when a rifle butt cracked
the door down, soldiers poured in almost
as if from a hydrant, in full bayonet
regalia, and to a man we were shanghaied
into the Lithuanian Army. This is
the truth. Some parts are fuzzy but others
gleam with portraits of you and me

against a tintype background, and it's this alternation of lapse and clarity I think convinces me the dream could be honest biography; a full account I'd mistrust. The time: indeterminate: an 1890 capital or 1970 hamlet; lots of wood, buildings shingled and citizens straight as planks though some still apple-cheeked rather like two-by-fours not yet given up blooming; pushcarts, derbies, and there we were, privates on patrol. I guess we passed basic training, and none the worse. Our uniforms were dun, but the buttons shone like small suns against a dusty plain, and made enough show. We were confident and swaggered, and reached the high apples for the little girls, proffering them with a polish of our starched cuffs, and winking assurance to the greengrocer; all the while we bantered urbane witticisms and never doubted we'd soon escape through the quarry forest, maybe dressed as charwomen or smudged dung-boys out to pail a good day's fuel; and this lark, this small vacation, this comedy of errors simply spiced our usual repartee. We were strolling the promenade with a Hans or Lars —I can't quite remember— a smiling ox-shouldered lout we must have met in goose-step class, and trading our metropolitan buffoonery among the shops, when Hans or Lars leaned on the door with a sign in Lithuanian reading DON'T LEAN ON THE DOOR; it was brutal. Who knew? or knew to know; but a sergeant bloodied Hans's face with a huge meat-cleaving fist

out of nowhere, and he emptied like a sack
on the ground; it made a vein of the gutter.
This is the truth. And I'm not proud:
but we kept walking on, as if our backs
could lid our eyes to the scene; we had our plans,
you see, important plans; we had a place to get
home to. And we said by the silence
between us that we knew now we were watched,
and just two buttons on a starched Lithuanian
uniform so huge it basketed the nation
in its stiff sleeves; and we couldn't sweat
if the rule-book said it was cool outside,
or ever impersonate officers for a frolic,
ever again; or grimace, or limp, or carol.
But though I'm not sure what happened
over the next few years, only that we were good
soldiers —and scenes of lavishing bear-fat
on boot-toes for hours on end come to mind—
I do know we never gave up the hope
of escape; I don't see us planning escape,
and perhaps we didn't —we never forgot
Hans or Lars— but a feeling permeates
this dim-lit decade, much like an itch
while sleeping: not bad enough to wake you
but, under the monsters and rose-tit courtesans,
there. Maybe it's all that kept us going.
Or maybe we did scheme while peeling potatoes
and add one line a day to a plan passed
secretly in a hollowed spud; I don't know;
but, whether any lieutenant recognized it,
a subtle nuance of North Side Chicago
clanged like frosted trash can lids
through our Yessir, No sir in Lithuanian.
There were good days, and bad days;
equal, I guess. Exercise was no joy,
or war games. But I see us sometimes lounging
at an outdoor cafe, a carafe of white wine

on a cream-and-red-checked tablecloth,
slicing cheese beneath a wicker awning
and bartering garrison gossip for news
of town goings-on with the waiter. Saturdays
were our days off, and we saw two plump
town shopgirls; surely they minded their dress,
bobbing like cork above whatever neckline
was in fashion; yet I see them always in bright
peasant garb, with scooped necks smiling
under a fleshy expanse of breast, and heavy
drape
dresses a lightweight man
could hammock in; they were always laughing,
and we were always telling jokes. Eventually,
one Saturday, we married, the wine more white
than ever, the cheese more sweet —a desert
cheese.
They were good to us, and one Sunday when
we woke
up middle-aged we hardly noticed; and all
distinguishing us from any two parasol'ed
couples
snoozing Sunday in an arbor shaded
from the great Lithuanian sun was the eye
I'd open, or you'd open, much like a knot
in a panelled wall through which can be seen,
for a second, the forest
it grew in and put forth fruit from.
And then we'd wink shut.
The lopped-off limb still itches; that's medical
fact; and this is the truth. And then of course
I woke from my dream,
and scratched myself wide-eyed,
Alan, alone in bed,
and buttoned up for the day.

Albert Goldbarth

SISTERS1. *The one*

has a head of curls
orange & intricate as a new Brillo.
Perfect white half moons gleam
at the tips of her fingers & toes
& rise out of her placid bodice.
Her cheeks are pink as fever
& when she thinks, when her little
round mind forms words,
her cheeks swell & swell, deepening
her dimples as if a witch finger
had poked a muffin, & her red mouth
tightens to a candy heart.
Just when her chlorine-green eyes
begin to protrude & a gagging
noise gurgles in her throat, suddenly
a fat rose bulges her lips apart,
a dozen pearls splatter around
the room in a volley of coughs,
& a hummingbird pops out of
her face, officious as a cuckoo,
mumbling gibberish with its wings.

2. The other

used to spend each day
somersaulting in the grass
with the frogs & intricately decorated toads
she could let out of her mouth at will
as easily as some people can belch,
as easily as telling a joke.
She filled classrooms & laps with her jokes
while her sweaty orange hair yelped
with laughter like a pack of foxes.
One day as she stared into a mirror
(green eyes wide in the streaky dirt)
to see if it was true, what the boys whispered,
that her swelling front shook when she jumped,
something wormed out between her lips
& drooped down on her chin,
something with bristles that made her bleed.
It was the stem of a rose.
She crushed its fat head between her teeth
& spit it in the toilet. She tried
to hawk up a frog but nothing came.
Opals drooled out at the corners of her mouth
& even hung from her nostrils.
Under the dirt her cheeks flamed & puffed
but she had no fever, she was toad-cold.
The sharp-smelling hair of her head,
armpits & crotch curled tight as Brillo,
& though she shaves her body
bald as a frog once a month
it keeps growing back that way,
& her pets have not returned.
She can't believe what she sees, but
look, there she is now, big as life:
the breasty one, the fat-faced one,
the mute one in the mirror.

Clarinda Harriss Lott

THE BIG CITY/a footnote

Three dreams on a broken balcony
 And one pitcher of lemon juice and gin,
 Black raincoats and pale green women
 Slung over wicker chairs; Manhattan
 Below a mix of yellow and grey snakes.

To these eyes, after oracles and divinities,
 Come three frozen exhalations, clouds
 With features caught in white altitudes
 Moving to the east; rivers all around
 Have banks of jeweled mud and light.

Piles of dust and puffs of smoke,
 In the trainyard the leaning man
 Blows dust off his white sleeve,
 Directs actors who paint their faces
 With letters. From high windows
 The sun is a continuous curve, but not a circle.
Nicholas Christopher

CHICAGO, LORCAN

My final slag evening in Chicago, Lorca.
 She walks me through the iron winter
 down the leafless concrete pathways
 to Lake Michigan, tamed tubercular lion,
 encaged by heavy railings like cold shackles,
 then asks me to write poetry,
 to find words that unlock the rusty sunset waves.
 And the park branches open
 And the winds rattle and unlock the stiff fences
 And the waves grate against the icy shore
 casting up old baby carriages

and small fish dead on their sides
frozen upon each ripple
fuzzed black at the gills like cankers.

So she tells me he did it.
Lorca stood on the beaches and whistled once
until the waves crept over his feet loving him
rubbing their green manes against his bare toes.

You great green Catholic sonuvabitch,
 Holofernes
 Holofernes
we have seen her at the gates
seen her face cast like the marble
seen the palms hung dry with dates
 Holofernes
 Holofernes
while your neck bleeds in the tent
your head brought to her elbow
from blind guards upon the gates.

 I say Judith
 I say Judith
here the shackles here the cage
here the dead fish lap the concrete
here cement scratches waves
 but she softer
 she says softly
see the moon high with the clouds
past the beach sand past horizons
where whitecaps wear no shrouds

She asks of beyond.
Dressed in your deep green,
her hair died the silver of your spurs
roped and tossed free like winds across the sierras,
she still believes in gypsies
healing your bullet holes with water

dissolving the rope burns,
 the hard blood cobblestone of Granada with song.
 But I, cold beside Lake Michigan, must look here,
 listening to your broken guitar
 singing through the spokes of a dead baby's
 wheels
 played to the dead fish in a dead lion's eye.

R. Michael Benson

BOOKS IN BRIEF

THE OSPREY SUICIDES. *Laurence Lieberman.*
Collier. \$1.95 paper, \$6.95.

For density of detail, perceived as freshly as by a naming Adam, Lieberman has no equal. The nine undersea poems of the section "Skin-Flying into the Storm Center" would alone proclaim this poet superb. His poetry sounds like nobody else's. He has his own sense of the poetic line, and he plays it, tightening and relaxing, dramatically, as though playing some great precious fish. Whether this metaphor applies to the subjects of the poems or their readers, I'll leave to each reader to decide.

Sometimes a book is worth buying for one wonderful poem. **SOMETHING TUGGING THE LINE**, by *Roderick Jellema*, *Dryad*, \$1.50, has one of my crazy corny favorites, "On Vacation, Teaching Bass." **HALF LIVES**, by *Erica Jong*, *Holt Paperback*, \$3.95, has the enchanting "Egg-plant Epithalamium" and lots of other fine sex poems and food poems and wild and witty poems. But on the whole this collection is more brittle, more self-conscious, than her first, the gorgeous **FRUITS & VEGETABLES**.