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*Cover:* Late nineteenth-century Navajo silver pendant.

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**FOR MY MOTHER**

I listen each night  
for the sound of the dipper  
striking the bottom of the pail of water  
downstairs in the kitchen. Listen  
to my grandmother's mumbled protests;  
it being hard for a woman to bear so many children.

I relive my mother's midnight confrontations  
in Orly's car between our south forty  
and a neighbor's fallow field. Listening to the frogs  
in the gathering warmth of late May, she is still  
proud enough and desperate enough  
to turn his car on its side into the ditch  
and say, "All right, damn it,  
we'll both walk." She knew  
generations and generations had started this way,  
that the whole swell of history pushed  
into the small of her back,  
and made her feel sick at the sight of stars  
and the moon half-full.

**Deborah Allen**

**THE KOSHER GROCER'S DAUGHTER**

You asked for pate, then watched  
while she planted the black eye of a truffle with pimento  
pupils,  
rays of almond lashes. (Her own eyes were Java brown.)  
Then she took a hunk of brawn from a platter  
and, while you breathed on the display case, sank her teeth  
in it.

Your hot Catholic heart fell gasping in the pickle barrel,  
re-surfaced rich and strange: you floated out on clouds of  
dill.

Called later, she would, and did, go with you to a movie,  
a restaurant, home to drink wine, and then, just before  
your painfully  
bided time ran out, to the sheets  
you'd been frantically preparing for a week.  
Sexually she was a gold medalist,  
a queen of the Roman rings: you could barely hang on  
with both arms and both legs.  
(She'd been married and divorced, and neighborhood  
gossip said  
her neck was already clustered with garlicky adulteries.)

Pressed, she moved in, bringing a side of beef—rose-red  
loin,  
tender enough to cut with a tongue—and her half-caste  
Siamese cats.

They pigged down odds and ends of shellfish, then dotted  
the apartment  
with exotic green droppings, florid puke. She too  
ate here head off, soaked in the tub for hours,  
had many messy little ways.  
But she baked bread, and for you  
the sourdough bubbled with hallucinogens.

You took her to the park, and she, who'd seen  
a Mafioso gunned in two a dozen feet  
from the fish counter, walked with one hand on your neck  
ready to jump into a tree  
at the first sign of a chipmunk foaming at the mouth.  
She was the only woman you'd ever known who, after a  
bath,  
would hang around for hours forgetting to get dressed.  
When she did, her little eyelet camisole  
twanged you like catgut.

After a month she left, telling you that because of the high  
holy days  
coming up, everything was going great guns at the shop  
and they needed her at all hours, corning beef, rendering  
chicken fat.  
You'd bought some new towels, suspiciously cheap, and the  
night  
before she left you saw her in the bathroom, rubbing down,  
stark-staring back at you with savage red breast and  
haunches.

When she left, a few things stayed.  
There was a saucer of darkening chicken hearts, meant for  
the cats'  
nervous stomachs. The washer suddenly began to go  
screwy,  
shaking and banging its head against the wall.  
A workman's horny hand probed deep in the works, fished  
out  
the tag-end of a shredded bra.  
You called your old Army friend John, and he said:  
What you need, son, is to get *laid*.

You hung up, decided to have supper. One last yard-long  
black hair  
turned up in the soup.

**Margaret Benbow**

**FOR ARAN**

- I. A fox canters the granite slide  
down into a bog  
and up again. Look how he draws the light  
off silver waves  
and off the splashed white scapulars in rafts  
of goldeneye.  
He flames, quick footed, over stones  
and vanishes.  
The old stones dream.  
Their long gaze rests  
upon grey water and the grey ducks dive.
- II. These thin birds sliding  
sideways  
into marsh pools  
insist upon distance. All afternoon  
they sickled the air  
and raked it down with a high whinney,  
raced their yellow legs through the low red sun  
and pranced upon the whorls  
of flattened grass.
- Night brims the marsh,  
washes in a cold sense  
of space and time.  
Beyond the window's half-lit dark  
the night drops off  
and the moon coasts absently  
across the backs of migratory birds  
and stones.

Susan Shetterly

## TWO POEMS

### Speaking of Tongues

*Michael Jack, local historian for the island of Inishbofin, keeps the tongue of Paddy John Halloran, the community's last real shanachie or storyteller, preserved in a tin of Three Nuns tobacco.*

*Our Like Will Never Be Seen Again:  
Notes from the West of Ireland.*

—Lawrence Millman

(The tongue speaks)

My best story — my escape into the air again!  
Paddy was me, I am Paddy, as whole as I need be, and  
free,  
For early Mass. In church, I'll hoot like owls  
That sing of the next death, swear through the prayers  
That lie to us, sigh for the wine the priest hoards for himself.  
I'll bathe in it, smell sun that never cuts this island's salt  
and rain,  
I'll lick the priest's hands while he blesses two crones  
Sagging before his altar like sea birds who can't catch fish.  
I'll ride on a nun's fat shoulder, kiss her ear,  
Bounce down her breasts while she prays.  
She'll lose count along her beads and I'll count into her  
ear —  
Tell the times she swears, doubts  
That God still strides around his heavens,  
Times she aches for a bed less vacant than her own.  
How I'd drink, if I could. Swim through whiskey like wet  
flame,  
And burn into a fish. I'd learn new languages of salt, rocks  
And bones the sea holds tighter than our flesh could grasp  
or love.

I'll weep for my stories, lost like old smoke in snow,  
 I'll fly through the salt rain, kiss whole towns of women,  
 My tales lie in a heap of tongues lost to those who loved  
     them,  
 Tongues bitten off by mouths so close to death  
 Even lies can't save them.  
 Any tale's a knot of lies, but death twists tightest  
 On our hearts, our tongues, and bites us off.  
 A bitten tongue heals quickly;  
 Language heals itself with lies.

### Poem

God, my sons were right, they scorned religion, said it's a  
     death  
 Wish, and I lie, praying for an end to this. I woke with an  
     old quarrel  
 Pounding through my ears: my husband, alive again,  
 Screeched me from the attic corner. How could I know he'd  
     marked  
 That place to die in, like a beast?  
 He'd go up at dawn to feel the gray light grow, see the  
     naked  
 Trees shake loose their shadows, curl out like smoke.  
 Just once I followed: crouched at the window  
 When the light came, he pressed his forehead, lips, palms  
 To the blank frost and it ran like rain and he cried  
 Into the frozen morning. He came back to bed,  
 Hands splayed like frightened lizards on the cold wall  
 And cried and bit my hand when I reached to touch his lips  
 And I held the pillow to my stomach like a child  
 And he clung to the wall and slept.  
 And God, I think you are dying too, with me.  
 I think you crouch at some door that bulges against your  
     back,

Afraid to tell me death sits eagerly behind that door.  
But see, he seeps through the cracks like smoke  
And when you tire, he'll flash out, embrace us both  
And ride us off to sleep. You can't run,  
Crouched there, my lips are at your ear,  
I'm telling you, don't be afraid, it's only sleep and slow  
Breathing. Come, let go.

Deborah Burnham

## THE WEDDING POEM

*for Mary*

- 1 The air conditioner exhaled  
all night, never breathing in,  
its breath growing colder and colder.  
I'd forgotten how to take, I'd come  
to expect unhappiness  
like a man who lives near a hospital so long  
that he hears, in any silence,  
a distant sound of sirens.
- My hand stretched out  
on this bleak shore of paper  
stiffened like driftwood in stranded light.  
My mind was a village where people try  
to beat the night back with sticks.

- 2 When we first knew each other  
we were floating in space, two  
asteroids of doubt — you,  
certain you would burn to nothing  
  
if you fell into the earthly  
atmosphere of love;  
I, certain of nothing but the cold  
and the miles of blackened planets around me.  
  
Then, slowly, we began to undo  
the buttons of fear.  
Your body was a harbor sizzling in sunlight,  
my hands were sailors made of loneliness and flesh;  
  
you were white sand, coral, wild  
horses galloping on the beach at night.  
And beneath your talk, I could see  
the woman of that Chinese poem I love:  
  
“When the moonlight, reaching a tree by the gate,  
Shows her a quiet bird on its nest,  
She removes her jade hairpin and sits in the shadow  
And puts out a flame where a moth was flying.”
- 3 The night before you left, as you lay  
asleep on your stomach, I touched  
the smooth, sad curve of your waist and hip,  
not knowing if you would come back.  
  
The year you were gone, it would rain,  
the sidewalks and streets  
grew dark; that wet, lonely smell  
would rise from the pavement.  
  
I rapped the copper pan on the range  
just to hear it ring. My days  
were winds that blow against an alley wall,  
or steam from a simmering kettle

forgotten on the stove.

When the sun sank down near the hills  
flocks of birds would hurry toward the woods,  
toward fir trees like narrow tents against the sky —

sparrows, chickadees, swallows, and crows,  
in broken, swooping lines, as if pursued.

And I longed to take shelter  
in the forest of your hair.

- 4 Together now, we talk, we try to forget  
all our fancied ugliness and fault.  
You help me not to be afraid of my hungers,  
I teach you not to be ashamed of your blood.

At last, the haunted houses  
begin to burn, the knives turn into blades  
of grass. My sexual arsonist, my softest music,  
everything gathers in the place we've made:

the smell of oranges and sweat,  
your sleepy thighs squeezed between mine,  
the plucking of koto strings, the feel  
of your thick hair spread out on your breasts.

You are the bride the groom was prepared for,  
a missing piece of the fire puzzle.

When I press my key gently  
in your lock and we turn

the hidden doors open to love.

Lawrence Russ

**TWO POEMS****Persephone**

My mother is still beautiful.  
Her hair has the sheen  
of an oak struck  
by lightning.

The field hands will do  
anything for her.  
They gather the sheaves,  
grapes, olives, all  
she asks. They heap  
the harvest in her lap.  
They do mule's work  
to please her.

She says it is because  
of the light I cast,  
the pigment I put  
in the leaves that shade them  
after work. And yet  
I'm only a shadow  
dragging after her.

White hills and houses  
hurt my eyes.  
The sea sends up  
its slime, its jellied hands.  
I stay indoors and wait  
until I can replace  
the iridescent greens  
with greys and browns.

My mother falls asleep.  
Her fields dry up.  
I go back underground,  
lungs black as a miner's,  
my husband, a shadow,  
holding out his hand.

**Pilgrimage to Lourdes, 1958**

*"Flannery dreaded the possibility of a miracle . . ."*  
**Robert Fitzgerald**

**Morning: The Baths**

She sinks back in the tin tub,  
waits for the vapors to soothe her,  
rubbing her arms with lilac  
soap she bought in Paris.  
The cubicle stinks of disinfectant.

She stares through steamy windows at  
the pink basilica, black roofs, shops  
crammed with jars of sacred water  
and imagines the town before the virgin  
appeared: a quiet village, the river

clean, but not especially holy  
until frail Bernadette looked up  
and saw a woman drop out of the sky,  
touch earth, vanish. Her halo hovered  
where she landed; water rushed from rock.

She drags herself out of the bath.  
Her back aches, her crutches  
are too far to reach, the edges  
of her robe are damp, her bones  
have grown no better and no worse.

**Afternoon: The Shrine**

The crowd of cripples  
shoves her  
toward the cave

to witness  
canes and crutches,  
tips singed

by the flames  
of votive candles.  
She's seen it before

in Georgia:  
the healed ones  
unwinding their bandages.

Here, wheelchairs whirl,  
emphysema victims cough  
as the priest says mass.

She'd rather sit  
on the porch at home  
and watch her peacocks

bite the heads off  
zinnias, drag  
their tails through dust

or lift them to the light  
like delicate  
stained glass.

**Evening: The Hotel**

Church bells pealed nine times  
and hushed the town,  
everyone turning in early  
to take medication. Drowsy  
from her sleeping pill she pulls  
the brush through her hair.  
Her hands hurt more  
than usual tonight.  
She is disintegrating  
as her father did,  
bones becoming powder  
in a sack of flesh.  
When he died he left her  
his disease.  
She turns back the sheets  
wishing she could leave  
this bed unslept in  
and evaporate  
in the quiet evening air.

**Helena Minton**

## FOUR QUESTIONS REGARDING THE DREAMS OF ANIMALS

### 1. Is it true that they dream?

It is true, for the spaces of night surround them with shape and purpose, like a warm hollow below the shoulders or between the curve of thigh and belly.

— The land itself can lie like this. Hence our understanding of giants.

The wind and the grass cry out to the arms of their sleep as the shore cries out and buries its face in the bruised sea.

We all have heard barns and fences splintering against the dark with a weight that is more than wood.

The stars, too, bear witness. We can read their tails and claws as we would read the signs of our own dreams; a knot of sheets, scratches defining the edges of the body, the position of the legs upon waking.

The cage and the forest are as helpless in the night as a pair of open hands holding rain.

### 2. Do they dream of the past or of the future?

Think of the way a woman who wanders the roads could step into an empty farmhouse one afternoon and find a basket of eggs, some unopened letters, the pillowcases embroidered with initials that once were hers.

Think of her happiness as she sleeps in the daylilies. The air is always heaviest at the start of dusk.

Cows, for example, find each part of themselves travelling at a different rate of speed. Their bells call back to their burdened hearts the way a sparrow taunts an old hawk.

As far as the badger and the owl are concerned, the past is a silver trout circling in the ice. Each night he swims through their waking and makes his way back to the moon.

Clouds file through the dark like prisoners through an endless yard. Deer are made visible by their hunger.

I could also mention the hopes of common spiders; a green thread sailing from an infinite spool, a web, a thin nest, a child dragging a white rope slowly through the sand.

### 3. Do they dream of this world or of another?

The prairie lies open like a gentle eye, blind to everything but the wind. From the tall grass the sky is an industrious map that bursts with rivers and cities. A black hawk waltzes against his clumsy wings, the buzzards grow bored with the dead.

A screendoor flapping idly on an August afternoon or a woman fanning herself in church, this is how the tails of snakes and cats keep time even in sleep.

There are sudden flashes of light to account for. Alligators, tormented by moss and vines, take these as a sign of grace. Eagles find solace in the far glow of towns, in the small yellow bulb a child keeps by his bed. The lighting that scars the horizon of the meadow is carried in the desperate gaze of foxes.

Have other skies fallen into this sky? All the evidence seems to say so.

Conspiracy of air, conspiracy of ice, the silver trout is thirsty for morning, the prairie dog shivers with sweat. Skeletons of gulls lie scattered on the dunes, their beaks still parted by whispering. These are the languages that fall beyond our hearing.

Imagine the way rain falls around a house at night, invisible to its sleepers. They do not dream of us.

### 4. How can we learn more?

This is all we will ever know.

Susan Stewart

**PORTRAIT OF A WOMAN IN HER EIGHTIES***For Malka Tussman*

When she was twenty, she was  
a giantess, a raging sun  
of a woman.

As years grew  
like trees in the light  
of her poetry, her fire  
consumed her from within  
and the sunfire fell inward.

Now,  
she is a dwarf sun,  
the raging sunfire white and heavier than gold  
and years still grow  
like ancient evergreens  
in the light of her poems.

One day,  
the flames will fall so far inward  
that the weight of worlds will be contained  
in each searing speck of sunfire,  
her gravity pulling even the light  
even the poetry back into her  
while the trees wither  
and die  
beneath the dark and living sky.

**Gershom Gorenberg**

**GONE****An Adagio before Dawn: Band 6*****Lamentoso e crescendo espressivo***

It's all gone now, gone.

Stripped, rendered meat-life boiled off the bone,  
marrow sucked down to shadow, lard simmered  
out of every sigh. (The skeleton of the ship  
shows through, ribs and rigging shine through the shadows  
stretched tight around the creaky frame. The skin  
is a shopping bag of birch society bark louder  
than its bite stretched around a canoe-frame of X-ray  
bones shaped to transport Pharoah on his journey  
through the sewers of conception across the River Styx and  
stones

and back, beyond the Bronx and back from Newport  
Beach,

oh mighty whale-beached Mississippi manitou.)

My sight is lean now, corneas clear of cholesterol  
and the fat-cat saturated scales of justice. It's  
all gone now, gone. So I can see  
the cutlassed sinews all hanging out from a yardarm  
and open like short-circuited synapses on meat hooks  
in a butcher shop all aboarded by pirates, trained,  
shanghaied meat hookered in a massage parlor  
of the mind by that madam of monopoly, Ma Bell, who has  
lost her common touch for muscle tones and nickel-and-  
dime

operators now preferring push-button champagne  
whose cork is popped by computers and chemin de fer

and Monaco to tacky Atlantic City salt water taffy boardwalks and riding the rails and cheap New York rye; so she can't reconnect her relays (sex is connected to an escalator clause in the dangling cost of living index) or Boardwalk or Park Place to Chance and Passing gallstones like Go and go-go dancing (life is a hedging clipper with all her sails rigged against living like pneumonia futilely Galluping from polls to a fixed roulette election for a Paul Revere polestar) and so she can't reconnect the parlay vooing black-and-white camptown races that run between Community Chest and the utilities that cauterize the bloody black rigging blown down on abandoned country roads, hairs crazily waterfaling down the hurricane face of a lunatic, broken wires dangling like a participial penis into ghettos, looped-de-loops of black, gangrenous spaghetti cut by heavy al dente ice and wave-breaking roller-coastering wind — sinews from the 60s that the 70s cannot cure.

Crossing the equator into the 70s didn't cut it; we've cut chicken teeth instead. Impossible. So all that "philosophy" and art turned out to be a hernia of the heart (how I've come to hate the fine and clever phrases impersonating passion, now that passion is no longer spent, no longer is to be misspent, pent or housed in hoards of hatred camouflaged as hope.)

All is only longing, yearning — lust disguised as longing — lost now, gone. The nerves of lust are cut, the head of hope is numb. The head conceives but does not penetrate. The intellect inseminates by mail, makes deposits with withdrawals from an artificial bank, through a story teller's deposit box unseen by human sweat, unfelt by human flesh. My chromosomes are Xeroxed to the bank,

blue genes wrangled into an IBM memory worm of tape, insatiable DNA means "do not awaken" (except for a visit from the FBI). My birth was bugged by St. Augustine, wire tapped with puppet strings from the Pentagon and birth control pills given by a grant from the government in the form of a

gynecological  
 handout up your dress: federal amniotic fluid  
 conducts musical electric current better than  
 Ma Bell's trained electric chairs. The fetal position  
 is fatal for sex (withdrawals never make deposits),  
 but they can tap and dance that bier to a different tune,  
 too, X-ray and vaccinate the will within reason  
 within the womb to name any tune that froths to a head  
 in pursuit of any prize. Rubella is no longer a sacred  
 right of spring. Breaking out with pimples feet-first  
 is now a rash breach of faith, the freedom of information  
 act. The state is a closet like a womb  
 where conformity is king and the fetus is fed by a cord  
 hooked into the Capitol where grist for the mill is graft,  
 a world where currency floats free to find its own spiritless  
 level and the fetus drifts in a twilight world,  
 a ghostly world without a center of gravity . . .  
 regularity is best for this feverish state, a necessary  
 evil cured by a free speech movement of the bowels  
 in the ship where it belongs (constipation causes chaos  
 causes anarchy) even if the price you pay for cancer  
 is right is the pill is a game where you bid on auction  
 for happiness is an OPEC saddle block like Entebbe  
 against waste, even if constipation is the cure  
 for cancer. Safety first is the only cure for hysteria.  
 The best cure for this state is a hysterectomy  
 not an abortion. Look out for unnecessary surgery,  
 however, for the state is a closet — cluttered with old  
 clothes, odds and ends of evolution, instinctual  
 memories — like a womb where conformity is king (love  
 and marriage go together like a) coming out makes you  
 a queen, a debutante not allowed to be nubile until  
 her first ball has made her numb. The pill means hitting  
 mankind below the pelt with peace of mind.  
 If God had intended man to fly, he would  
 have installed chastity seat belts as standard equipment,  
 no optional vasectomies allowed. Safe  
 from misconceptions, no mongoloids allowed. (Is  
 death God's way of recalling the defective models?)  
 What's good for original sin is good for GM —  
 not to mention Madison Avenue and ecology.  
 Is it I, Lord? So which of us is spared? Then  
 heaven is a junkyard scavenged for spare parts used  
 to recycle the soul through endless reruns of M\*A\*S\*H  
 and *Mary Tyler Moore* until Madison Avenue can get  
 its transmigrations of commercials right, catch-

as-catch-can 22 in the can its treatment of the treaty with Panama right, with residuals on the laugh track to run until the year 2000. The soul was given away to science, flushed down the alimentary Canal by the Senate — but why not, since the Bible is also full of bribes and blackmail? The soul is a slapstick Senate hearing like *The Honeymooners* over and over like *Sesame Street* and *Genesis* and *Star Dreck*, stupid science fiction repeated in pursuit of perfection (and residuals, incidentally) but duping

us all. Can the soul perfect what it merely repeats? Can Hollywood improve on its endless remakes of the Bible and *A Star Is Born* over Bethlehem and *Hee Haw* until HEW is bored with the politics of abortion and sells its copyright to PBS as a cat's-paw and the soul resurfaces as a miniskirting series around the scar tissues of sex and salvation, patriotic mini pads wrapped like a flag, like a mantle around a politician's loins on days when a little light bleeding from the mouth for your nation

is enough? Or until a misconceived mini series about war issues in a national menstruation in the name of national security when there is no danger of conceiving peace and aborting the business of America is show business bought from the BBC like socialism for *Masterpiece Theatre* where it becomes a bloody hit, man? (You can't miss with the classics — besides, those limeys

are so clever with the past, they created those state traditions, they like creaky plumbing like the momarchy.) And so Madison Avenue steals back the rights to its option on the soap opera called the soul and the karma of Oxydol tools into prime time again for the robots of the 60s who never heard of Hitler until Henry the K came around. Reruns are as close as modern TV man is ever likely to get to immortality.

Thus progress is a recycled prostitute called soul, a pig that wants a prize for permitting assembly-line pregnancy.

So new ideas

I have none, nor ever really had since Eden. (I became certain, moreover, that I didn't want any once I had lost my virginity to Eve. Once you turn them upside down, ideas like the soul are all alike. Ideas are like whores at the beck and call of the highest bidder; only the penniless cannot play.) I was a pauper; I was pure.

Only the crooked robber barrens of the Bible are rich (can you hear me, cop-out Colson, and you, too, oh brother Billy?)

For I too fucked but refused to pay. Only my heart was not half-baked, hand-me-down, inherited from a bankrupt testament of books, counterfeits of fits the great ones minted truly. My lust was fear and flight, a flight so blind its force was felt as bravery. My poems are a bubble blown like blossoms out of bubble gum, the rubbery baloney of ballooned despair. (Contemporary poets are competing with the past, matching images — the baseball cards that come with baloney gum — heroes with what the players of the past have managed to produce: what was Shakespeare's earned-run average? how many tragedies did Babe Ruth write? did Elizabeth I need an ERA to rate? will Enrico Caruso top Ty Cobb? Buonarotti was a bum because he couldn't switch hit as well as Oscar Wilde.) My bubbles also were a hernia of the heart, blown by breath squeezed out by a force that was not with me, forcing rebirth by artificial respiration, reviving the victim of a heart attack . . . caused by straining to lift too little weight with too much heart. How long do revivalist conversions last? Until the next politician cuts red tape to the stump with more promises of paradise? The next campaign by John the Baptist will recall all the cars so that GM can switch the motors of the camels back? (After all, who wants a T square if you've paid for a T-Bird? Who wants the top tier if you've paid for a box seat at the witch's burning? Or the pits if you've paid for the top tier of paradise? Paying the scalper's (Tetzel and Calvin, for example) — paying the pope's prices, top dollar for your point spread-eagled on the doctrines of birth and mind control, you're entitled to the indulgences, the pop and power and pennants and options and other perks, right? Where is it written that heaven is a workers' paradise? The bookies have handicapped the game at birth, Gus said, and he should know, he wrote the book on bribes in 426 A.D.)

So the bubbles always ballooned until they popped and fractured back upon my face the way they were supposed to, according to *The City of God*. For the bubbles held the hot air I

was brown-bagging to the picnic hosted by posterity. If I had timed the tip of exhalation to the moment of climax banked in a sperm-fire of ambivalent delight, a comatose orgasm of delayed midnight, would it have ticked off a difference in the timeless design of death, the preset biological clock running a sandstorm of excrement down through the hourglass

shape of our guts? Would a different time of the month or equinox have shaped the offspring into a different shell of desire or racial memory? Formed the perigee of pregnant meaning into a short circuited but lasting egg shape? (Humpty Dumpty is an egg dropped from an ovary at the wrong time of the month, an aborted overdue bill, a menstrual memory of Cro-Magnon mutation which science has straightened out by implanting a pacemaker computer into every cunt, a pocket calculator into every pill box.) So the machine gun trajectory of death is tracer bulleted in the carbon arc of sperm from limb to life like a flying squirrel, death is traced by an overlay from life, by a seismograph onto carbon paper cloning exact copies of invisible evolution leaping from limb to limb like a frantic monkey trying to escape its predator, the monkey on its back, death. If, if — instead of emptying my heart and forcing me to face the farce that is and was . . . .

And yet, who says that heart is not enough — or all? Why *not* lust enlarged as longing — like liver from liquor — rage rusted into resignation by leaking hope? Do ideas last beyond the rust-proofreading fashion of their age? Maybe a heavy heart hangs over longer than a fifth of sour grapes, the by-pass surgery of formaldehyde? If I had lain back my head and closed my eyes and trusted to the trades (especially *Variety*), would my bubbles have lifted and ridden me like a hot-air balloon? The first to ride the current rudderless across the uncracked Atlantic course? Would my seaweed blossoms have buoyed me like a bell — a life jacket in the Sargasso Sea — clanging in the kelp, once I had crashed? Or, submerged, to make it as a submarine spurting torpedoes of sperm — duds and warheaded nukes alike jam-packed with the explosive power of plankton — into sexless mermaids sterilized by the menopause of myth,

alas, into Lorelies, alas, whose songs no longer  
 fission fish tails into alluring legs, the radioactive  
 hot reactor rocks of Charybdis cooled into the Scylla  
 of sweet scintilla science, the modern myths my psyche  
 is baited to accept?

For I am a submarine submerged,  
 snorkeled into a fetal storm cellar, waiting for the gale  
 to blow itself out . . . the politics and prattle, the TV  
 ratings and reports of progress hoked-up by a laugh track  
 tape recorded in Bedford-Sty or Bergen-Belsen, Uganda  
 or some gulag in Siberia . . . the fashions and fashionable  
 star

wars at the Networks comic stripping down to the basic  
 Nielsen verities: TV commercials, the final deposit  
 of bankable faith, the communion of saints presided  
 over by a born-again pope whose bottoms-up line  
 is a brother who pushes beer. Oh brother. Meanwhile,  
 my penis is up like a periscope and  
 my torpedoes are primed and targeted onto her tied  
 up tubes on the disconnected telephone, wire-tapped by  
 the wampum work ethic and the heat-flash fire alarm  
 system

live wired into her womb and triggered by the merest  
 remote

control switch — fire one! fire two! (oh number pul-ee-as?  
 are you getting a busy night signal again, Nagasaki?)—  
 bombs away, you rolling barrage across the river I'm  
 bound

away from because her ovaries on hold answer  
 my shafts amidships with time bombs, booby traps,  
 shallow

depth charges dropped like the Seventh Cavalry at the  
 Little

Big Horn, like eggs custared on a canceled credit card  
 timed to abort into the frying pan when you least  
 expect it, ambushed eggs calling in the OK  
 before the monthly blue note is due at the ole corral,  
 selling the mortgage short and passing on the paper to a  
 ticket

scalping big medicine road show out of town. No!  
 It's not fair! I won't go! I'm sick of one-night last  
 stands! I want to settle down before I get scalped  
 in my beer-ringed prairie schooner. I'd like to complete one  
 cycle

at least without being flushed prematurely down the tubes!  
 I'm sick of playing in a sea-circus like a gypsy

for a mighty ring master I never see who shakes down  
 free passes for every performance, rain or shine, and then  
 has the moxie to charge me admission so I can see  
 myself jump through hoops of predestination like a dolphin  
 performing for a fish. Religion is a protection  
 racket the Godfather would be proud of. Bingo. Yeah,  
 you've come a long way, baby, migrating through the  
 migraines

of history. (How many I've-got-a-headache-tonight,-  
 my-dears does it take to produce a population explosion?)

But it's not fair! I had nine snug months more  
 in the belly of the whale before the note was due!  
 Why evict me now?

Ah, progress can ease the pain  
 of death with dope, can dampen the joy of birth  
 with bombs. How can it darken my daydream of despair?  
 I am allergic to penicillin now, a modern  
 man immune to the makeshift nature of myth,  
 the nightmare of contact necessary to cause conception.  
 No, life is a ramshackle contagion, at best.  
 Rubbing sticks together boy-scout style will not  
 cause your legs to spark to life around a campfire burning  
 hot dogs at the stake to satisfy a sterile  
 creed. Why, oh why, perennially we cry —  
 why and wherefore, oh ye mysteries? Well, given  
 a choice, I'd prefer the big bang (as in slam, bam,  
 thank you m'am), theory as an answer, as opposed  
 to the steady state (socialist, or otherwise) guess about  
 goodbye, it's been good t'know yuh, for accretions  
 of coral are turning my shipwrecked arteries into  
 skeletons of sclerosis, antlers of coral which  
 will reef my remains into an atoll of time  
 payments of flesh melting away the meat  
 after my time has come and gone. Brine  
 will be my brain and salt will be my song . . . in spite of  
 science  
 and insanity . . . I mean the other one, the state . . .  
 I'm in . . . .

For now I am immune to myth;  
 I'm dead. Gone, all gone, washed salmon-deep undersea  
 to death, spawned in the belly of the whale to be  
 reborn upstream. Death is returning to the womb  
 to spawn. Science? Religion? The religion now  
 of science? Her breasts are the boulders of Charybdis,  
 her vagina the vortex of Scylla, you see; and yet,  
 I admire the science of precision, no doubt; and am grateful

for the anesthesia of an easy death vouchsafed by a whore with a heart advertised as neutral but is really only numb and making it harder to make it come alive. Now I can't feel my hernia; by-pass surgery has cured my heart. I don't need it any more. I can't feel anything. No more tachycardia attacks, no more tacky shocks of adrenalin at the wrong time, no more fish-gasping sprints to the toilet when I should be turning on in bed. No more bubbles or blowouts caused by straining to lug the weight of love. Now I'm Mr. Supercool — so don't crack wise about the sickness being better than the cure. Who needs it, life? Heart attacks can be prevented by cryonics, deepfreeze your heart into a cube of French-fried fat, dehydrated love, add soft water for a hard-on. Science has litmus-papered over plankton and turned oil spills into cancer cells sterilizing whales. I'm Captain Nemo and Pinocchio trying to escape by using the bowels of Moby Dick as a diving bell. But David is gametizing sad Goliath once again. Now coral is the creeping sclerosis of the sea. Now poisoned plankton is a pill and Jonah will never be reborn from the belly of the whale, and mad Moby Dick will die without knowing the morning sickness cured by belching Jonah on the beach. Sometimes vomit can mean salvation if conception is merely caused by sin. Between the bump-and-grinding boulders and the sewer I'm calling Scylla, there's no place left

to hide or to misconceive another burlesque myth like science (unless it's outer space or psychiatry). Psychiatry is a striptease show. What's left after you strip the skin and expose it to ugly sight? Mystery is merely a matter of twelve muscle tones, disciples run amok with antidiatonic stories, atonal pentecostal puppet cords coordinated to work in self-contradiction, unaccompanied by an arrangement of reason. Faith is the willing suspension of disbelief in self contradiction. (Does outer space, with all its scar wars and wonders, have anything to compare to that?) For liberated ladies play local politics with special effects called love; now they seek Lebensraum. Jackbooted, now they seek Anschluss with the male psyche. Hitler also gave the goyim guarantees;

so did Goring. Today, ERA — tomorrow, the goldfish  
 will need a bicycle! Space-minded — uppity! — they won't  
 stop until they make it to the moon! One small  
 step on man, one giant step for chairpersons  
 up the corporate ladders of the world. Rebels,  
 unite! You have nothing to lose but your play techs free  
 spirit-level bras and unnecessary hysterectomies.  
 After making it, libbers stop all leaks from the bored  
 room by douching with Liquid-plumr (it won't eat  
 out your plumbing, they say, like they said about birth  
 control pills, continence and male pesticides  
 planted like a bug) in the name of national  
 rabbit security tests, oh yes, ovaries  
 are wiretapped, fixed like a Vatican roulette wheel,  
 the percentage is always with the house is not a home  
 unless housewifery is merely whoring, libbers say.  
 (Nixon had antipollution plumbers, too.  
 People are nothing but pollution, after all.)  
 No fetuses should be allowed to get a freebie  
 foot in the door — there's no free lunch! — and  
 James the Baptist has lust in his playboy heart  
 but won't allow the three-martini lunch  
 to help you teeter into eternity,  
 to HEW your way out of the womb by deficit  
 funding from the Fed. Abortion is a cure  
 for inflation, of course, a Friedmanite form of birth  
 controlling the flow of money from the Fed.  
 Only Avon makes house calls on your no account;  
 pregnancy does not have its perks, however, no  
 free rides smuggled into the diplomatic pouch,  
 no black market money smuggled in by the CIA  
 disguised as green baby wetbacks, subversive human  
 secrets  
 smuggled across the Rio Grande borderline of birth  
 in the back-alley dead of night in a dirty back room,  
 no hookers' coat hangers-on coaxing me out  
 of my uneracked, safe fetal crouch, gerrymandering me  
 into a lifetime of jury-rigged duty and cheating me out  
 of a job as de judge of who lives or dies — no,  
 no spies can sneak out of the embassy of her body (a  
 stranger  
 in a strange land, seeking sovereignty — sneaking  
 past the pill and the HUD border guards foaming at the  
 mouth,  
 oh I've fallen down a rabbit hole, the mine shaft of a land  
 mine, oh

look before you leap, we'll explode into caesarean  
midsections! —

I've gallows-dropped through a hole in the ice where  
Eskimos

fish or cut bait from abortions, I'm an egg  
dropped into hot water to poach into shape)  
to steal a look at life — but not while the CIA  
surgeon is on the job, you don't. So you better  
cut the mustard or we'll cut the cord. Get out and push!  
No Jonahs are allowed — the real miracle is progress,  
I'm grateful for its dead. Only war and rock and TV  
interviews are real. (Walter and Barbwa are  
my favorites, especially when they scoop ole Henry the K  
on a solution to Israeli settlements in the deserted  
Sinai.) Body counts don't matter unless the die  
for the dead is newscast at 6 o'clock and the coffins  
are re-counted at 11 to tuck the middle class  
Count Dracula in with the correct point spread of legs  
at birth. (Birth is the Super Bowl of cherries; death  
is merely being traded to a losing team.) So stay  
in training and fight, team, fight! Rah, rah, rah!  
Eat your Wheaties and wait for endorsements from God's  
surrogates on earth, the pope and Billy Graham and Anita  
and David Begelman (the expert called in to check C.B.  
de Mille's embezzlements from the Bible for likely  
forgeries),

all meeting at Ma Maison to play let's make a deal  
over the corpse of Michaelangelo, that creep, all *he* ever  
cut was statues and never a torch hit record like  
"You Light Up My Life," oh yeah, baby, yeah, for the real  
arson money is in the commercials for salvation is  
to come once again for those who missed the brass  
wedding ring-a-ding-ding of the merry-go-round  
the first time around, oh yes, yes, indeed, it's better  
the second time around for outdated vamps who divorced  
the divinity and now are depending on, oh looking forward  
to,

those lovely perks, those prime-time transfusions of  
plasma

from killers and cops, those sunset sitcoms and reruns  
which lure the junkies out after dark in search  
of a bloodless fix like Dracula, oh those timeless residuals  
going on and on and on! It's terrible getting old if you  
date

from the silent era, before de Mille revived the Bible,  
before

the residuals made your wrinkles seem unreal. Talkies  
 were the ruination of religion. Radio was real,  
 a ruse wherein God was re-created and revealed anew  
 without benefit of clergy or special premarital effects  
 borrowed from de Sade or de Bible (burning bushes and  
 whirlwinds  
 and whips and buggering bugaboohos) without limits  
 or human condition or unfocused stonewalling interference  
 with the rushes in each bullish mind stock marketing belief  
 in the Busby Berkeley chorus line of golden calves  
 promised  
 to each man by Moses for being good for die casting out  
 devils  
 in the loaves and fishing scenes in the Colosseum in the  
 sorority rushes  
 with ravenous social lions and with Hollywood wolves in  
 the miraculous  
 unnatural child *Birth of a Nation* on the West Bank,  
 K-K-Katie, my beautiful Hebrew melody from the Muse-  
 Argonne mountaintop of Bach's B-minor en masses  
 where each lumpen is a monarch, his own mighty Moses on  
 the mountaintop is  
 D.W. Griffith debunking de Bible  
 to suit his own bedsheets of clothes to shape  
 a burning croes, a book burning out automanic  
 transmissions  
 of meaning in autos-da-fe, used-car party congresses,  
 gang bangs at Nuremberg uncovered by condoms for the  
 benefit  
 of each man's *Triumph of the Will* and private reading of  
 the Bible  
 for his own camera obscura mind and party crew,  
 producer, director and each man his own dark room,  
 enlarger and Salvation Army self-projection booth.  
 Distributing unfocused mental movies is a problem without  
 war,  
 without a blood bath and fixer to four-wall the profits, to  
 front  
 war footage and fake weapons from, oh gunrunners are  
 good  
 guys for a profit from OPEC now that Polaroid provides  
 an instant fix on death, no time-lapse required for  
 highlighted  
 still lifes, oh Allah be praised there's always the Middle  
 East  
 to count on for body counts in the slack TV summer season,  
 and oh don't forget those pointless, house-nutty settlements

in the Sinai where God's scenes play best on the cutting  
 room floor,  
 displaced by commercials concocted by St. Bernard  
 for fire-bombing infidels, a worthy crusade, indeed.  
 Imagination, that's the key to contentment and a closed  
 unchristian mind. Ask yourself for God's autograph on  
 a rubber check, since the bank will bounce it in your own  
 brain.

(See Dracula with his searches, the silly stories of  
 soap operas.) TV is modern man's eternity.  
 The *TV Guide* is the Bible to modern man;  
 good or bad depends upon the Nielsen ratings.  
 Soft Soap will not sell the Cross today. Death  
 is merely a blown picture tube; sickness and insanity  
 is only something off-color (check your focus)  
 and settle back to remember how we all loved Lucy  
 (it's better than heavenly choirs and trying to decode  
 the Trinity.) Reincarnation is caused by a switch  
 of channels; craziness could be caused by static from a CB  
 operator in the neighborhood of heaven, voodoo is merely  
 a lack of vitamins. With a remote control switchblade,  
 you don't even have to roll out of bed to roll  
 the channels over, mug your way to immortality,  
 from the cradle to the grave, the welfare state is willing.  
 The repair man carries resurrection in his tool kit — be  
 careful,  
 they always rip you off, worse than auto mechanics  
 and ministers, charging more than the worthless job is  
 worth.

The IRS allows deductions for bookkeeping at the blood  
 bank (do you hear me, Count?). Whatever happened  
 to Viet Nam? The non-kosher war (Henry wasn't much  
 of a Jew) switched channels in midstream  
 to the Middle East for lack of a sponsor (aspirin  
 can't cure what ails a corpse any more than Geritol  
 can revive God) losing interest in all them gooks —  
 them minute rice Christians, precooked in napalm and  
 radiation

ovens (Himmler could have completed the final  
 solution with the help of such modern technology, yet  
 he didn't cope too badly at that considering the handicap  
 of having to trooper through the storm with a Bronze-Age  
 brain:

imagine the marvel of the pyramids and constructing  
 the Colosseum with little more than ox carts, without  
 the wheels and deals of high finance! True,

King Tut's tomb has been cracked and raped but who  
 has decoded the secret of his embalmer's art?  
 Who knows who created that 18-1/2-minute credibility  
 gap between God and his creation? Does the Shadow  
 know,  
 and can he say why he's sticking his head in the quicksand  
 of national  
 security instead of storing his tapes at Qumran  
 with the other Dead Sea Scrolls?) — whatever happened  
 to Viet Nam? to Baby Jane and to nickel beer and to  
 Prohibition?  
 Oh the oil-and-weapons cartel switched the war to a  
 different  
 channel subsidized by the state once it became as clear  
 as won ton soup that hard-sell antipersonnel  
 bombs wouldn't work to convert them gooks into  
 permanent Christian corpses any better than leaky  
 microwave  
 ovens exporting leukemia from the final solution  
 test sight of Hiroshima and bikinis burn, burn,  
 it's better to marry than to burn, baby, burn my eyeball  
 atolls bugging from my body erupting like  
 a volcano in heat, lava overflowing to form  
 a baby island for no man's land is a part of the broken  
 main sewer system siphoning off conception . . . .  
 So they simply switched the war to a different Swiss  
 bank  
 and did business as before once it became clear  
 there was more and safer money to be made from  
 Prohibition  
 as supplier: why press your luck in the streets  
 down among all them guerilla-warfare freaks tryna  
 cop a nickel bag for patriotic purposes? Scoring  
 can be dangerous in the jungle; patriots have been known  
 to OD on the high they get from prohibition, from the legal  
 sale of cannon barrels of booze to both sides, from  
 the protection racket where busy big brother is  
 the referee who takes his cut from the top before  
 he cuts the marked cards . . . .

So the wheeling-dealing

world boogied  
 on by Buddha, reducing the war dead, et al.,  
 to a microdot stored in a forgotten memory bank.  
 Computers are more efficient than those acres of bankrupt  
 crosses at Arlington. Who cares for erased tapes,  
 blank lives placed into receivership? The deposits

in graves don't pay interest, so don't bank  
 on your stock splitting into a bull market up above  
 after death. Invest in life instead. For the afterlife,  
 as we don't know it, is an 18-1/2-minute credibility  
 gap no one can explain, no one can account  
 or take commercial credit for . . . except in pulpits  
 or on talk shows with David Frost to sell your latest book.  
 For the dead don't disco to Saturday night fever, are  
 no longer susceptible to sinister inside forces.  
 It's always blue Monday at Forest Lawn, even  
 with Muzak caterwauling in the crypts.

So, submerged

to make it as a submarine, embalmed in the Madison  
 Avenue

(Babylonian branch) myth of the whale's belly (birth  
 was invented to sell paper didies for infants, God-sex  
 survives to sell the insulation of deodorants to  
 hot gospelers hitting below the Bible pelt in the Negev  
 deserts of Cleveland and the Curia, the potholed up  
 ski slopes of Aspen and Dade county where the real  
 juice is orange (not Anita) NOW that honey-and-locust  
 harems

are no longer kosher, if they ever were —  
 submerged, would my baloney-gum bubbles have saved  
 my life as air tanks before turning into seaweed  
 and anemones, polyps and tumors clinging to my kelp  
 of hair, ballooning fish inflating to fend off  
 a shark, discourage a predator from the possibility  
 of swallowing my lifestyle poetry whole? And poetry  
 can cause a pain much worse than gas; the true  
 ptomaine is not prepackaged for a weak digestion.  
 Those sugar-coated breakfast foods all rot the tearing  
 teeth and liquidate the liver. Questions raise  
 more questions — puffed rice paper piles its reasons  
 onto saki-liver shredding machines — and the circulating  
 Gulf Stream currents of the head close on the bivalving,  
 clamming operations of the open heart. By-pass  
 surgery will also fail. I'm willing, nay,  
 anxious to admit my failure. Art contains  
 more calories than cholesterol, more arteries  
 hardening than master strokes. My bubble has burst;  
 there's nothing left of all that "hope" that hoisted  
 its dream from lava flows of lust by my own petard.  
 Longing now is a muscle oil-welling cholesterol  
 out of cliches of shale, mountains of isometric  
 smut. My collapse is self-contained, you see, pressing

upon itself to safeguard that surface against time  
 strip-mining skin. Beneath the wrinkles of  
 erosion is only lust. So now I measure  
 heat in metrics instead of Fahrenheit. Converting  
 to another system of measurement is hard.  
 How high is heaven? Does barometric pressure  
 vary on the surface of the brain? Now  
 fact is fact and no longer the camouflage  
 of flight.

So how come the bubbles that broke and  
 collapsed

on my face stick to my lips and skin, clot  
 in my beard and pry into my pores? How come it's so hard  
 to scrape and rub the rubber off, ingrained into  
 my skin? I'll have to pick the pieces off bit  
 by bit, rub them into tiny blackheads  
 of hope and nit-pick them off, snipe them off  
 my telescope-sighted fingernails, the bubble-gum lint  
 of longing collapsed into my beard — which I'll have to  
 shave,

incidentally, as they shaved my belly for  
 an appendectomy (cutting that useless internal penis  
 off, atrophied dead end of evolution),  
 as they prep-school a woman for delivery. (They don't  
 include the baseball playing-card portraits of heroes  
 anymore with the bubble-gum balloons of birth. Hope  
 reappears like shaved pubic hair. Did they cut away  
 conscience  
 in that appendectomy?)

So if I'm standing here  
 with a death mask of omlet on my mug, how come it's so  
 hard

to scrape the scabby yolk off my teflon-treated  
 frying pan, abort the fetus with a fencing safety  
 razor? In fact, since teflon is a major spin-off  
 of space exploration and the profit motive of scientific  
 progress, how come the eggs stick to my teflon-frozen face  
 at all, lathering into a thick souffle stroked  
 alive morning, noon and night by the teflon-coated safety  
 razor dicing away, day after day, in a futile  
 effort to flay my face clean, once and for all . . .  
 gone?

L.C. Phillips

**MOTHER AND DAUGHTER PHOTOS**

my mother and my sister  
near an old black fifties  
Chevy my sister in a  
nest between my mother's  
arms you can just see  
certain parts of my mother  
like a branch in a back  
drop I'm in several with  
her standing in back her  
arms around me her prize  
melon a book just she  
could write I remember  
the rabbi said enjoy  
your wedding after that  
it will be your husband  
and your child I've  
noticed this in several  
other photos of mothers  
with their girls the  
daughter held up close in  
front like someone with  
a desperate sign words  
pointing west or saying  
Hartford the daughter  
almost blots the mother  
out it's as if there  
was some huge dark hole  
only a camera would pick  
up where something that  
had got away had been

Lyn Lifshin

**APPROACHING A MOUNTAIN**

Approaching a mountain  
not in the window view,  
the winning name,  
(this "Flying Moose"), more

a particular yellow birch  
that takes some finding  
growing somehow  
out of a particular granite boulder

and not just that,  
which could be pinned  
44° 36' N/68° 37' W  
just north of Gott Brook

if, that is,  
time too were given  
(the birch not being there forever,  
1939, say,—1978, at least)

but, as I say, it's not just that  
approximation in space & time,  
there's the matter of leaving tracks,  
and in sufficient numbers

as the deer have, moving through soft snow  
in the days of the thaw  
and how you can see their tracks now  
frozen at the bottom of each hole  
3" down, set in blue ice,

how, if you went there soon  
you could lift one out & take it home,  
or, for that matter,  
one of mine.

Sylvester Pollet

## TWO POEMS

## Clover

“She’s her daddy’s girl!” my aunt called  
from the back seat of the clackety Model-T.  
I was in front, on my dad’s lap, next to  
Uncle Lester, who was driving.  
“She sure is her daddy’s girl,” Lester laughed.  
I was four, sitting snug, jiggling, holding  
my dad’s thumb.

*That was the day IT started.*

We stopped at a ramshackle one-room schoolhouse.  
The door was open. We all got out and waded through  
the tall grass—even my mother and my big sister Cora,  
who were scared of snakes and crickets. Inside we saw  
the rusty stove and some coat hooks and a shelf with a  
tin can on top. Dad took it down—a big can with  
a lid and a wire handle. He grinned: “Here’s my  
dinner bucket.”

“It is *not*,” my mother said. “Anyway, it’s a  
*lunch pail*.”

My dad sighed. “Well, Lester, we can’t go back to  
those days.” And he put the can back on the shelf.

“Don’t start *that* stuff!” my mother huffed.

She was always mad at him. I never knew why.

Dad turned and went out the door. I thought he  
was walking away from her, as I did sometimes,  
to cry, and I hurried after him.

He stood, back to me, hands clasped behind,  
and I noticed his hair was getting gray.  
A warm wind blew over the clover,  
and I knew he was thinking about dying.

Then we all piled into the Model-T,  
I on my dad's lap again, and Mamma and Cora  
and my aunt and cousin in back, and we went  
jiggling down the dusty road.  
I could feel my dad's sad gaze wandering over  
the fields of corn, the fields of wheat, the oats,  
over the cows grazing, and the sheep, and the trees,  
and over the blue sky and the peach-colored clouds,  
and when we passed a field of clover and that  
sweetness came over us, my heart hurt. *That was  
YOUR dinner bucket*, I wanted to say, but I just  
rubbed the furry back of his hand on my cheek.

A *smoothness* was gone.  
There was a stick in my throat.  
And I knew it was the clover-thing.  
Sometimes I'd go over to my dad and  
take hold of his hand.

“Hangin on yer dad all the time,” my  
mother scolded. “What's the matter  
with you, anyway?”

I was ashamed. I ought to be able to fix it,  
like when the elastic in your pants breaks,  
you can grab it quick and poke open the hem and  
find the end and fasten it with a safety pin  
and the pants will stay up good as ever.

The next summer, when Uncle Lester came for us  
in the car, I felt sick. But I had to go along.  
We didn't go to the schoolhouse, but the fields

and trees looked the same. And the stick moved  
in my throat. Everywhere—corn fields, wheat fields,  
pastures, trees, sky, clouds—where my dad's gaze  
had sown sadness last year, Sorrow had sprung up.  
Mostly in the fields of clover.

*Maybe it's kinneygarden I'm worried about,  
I told myself. A mean teacher, maybe, or  
mean boys, and Daddy not there to say,  
"Leave her be."*

But kindergarten wasn't bad. The  
teacher was kind, and the boys weren't  
so mean. Just dumb.

The next summer, the clover-thing was worse.  
We didn't even see Lester, and nobody took us  
out for a drive, but something—like termites—  
was digging at my throat.

*Maybe it's first grade I'm worried about—*

But first grade wasn't that bad.  
I got *was* and *saw* mixed up and numbers  
made me nervous, but most of the kids were  
a lot dumber than me, and the teacher gave  
me A's.

The next summer was worse.  
My dad looked sadder and grayer.  
Sometimes when he was shaving at the  
kitchen sink or staking tomatoes or  
reading the newspaper, I'd just go stand  
next to him.

"That man's got no more use fer you  
than he has fer me. Can't you *see*  
that?" my mother whispered. "He's  
all *Cora*. The sun rises n the sun  
sets in *Cora*."

I thought maybe I could get Cora on my side against the clover-thing. So one day when I found her alone, I sneaked it on her:

"I feel so sorry for Daddy," I began.

"Me too."

"He's so *old*."

"And Mamma treats him rotten."

And she dashed off to play Rin-Tin-Tin with her pals.

It felt like termites, even in my stomach, but maybe that was The Devil working. So I prayed.

In second grade kids started calling me "Skinny." The school nurse said: "Why! You haven't gained one ounce!" I thought maybe it was my Cross-to-Bear—but then I didn't think God would lay that on you before high school . . . . It was really more like termites—no, like ants, building sandy bumps.

*—Please, God, I prayed. It's been three years, going on four. Fix this clover-thing.*

When my dad brought the Christmas tree into the living room, and Cora started to tug it around with him, my mother whispered to me,

"Those two don't want you n me inter-ferin. Can't ya see?" She went to the kitchen to cry, as she always did on holidays, for her father, who was dead. I could never make myself care about her crying. It was like the dust on the floor.

So I went right in and sat down on the couch.  
*(God wants me to see this sunrise-sunset for myself.)* Dad and Cora argued about which branches to the front and which to the wall. They strung up the lights without a word, until Cora said: "All blue ones this year." Dad said—with a very slight grin and with a sigh, too—"You're the boss." Then he sat down in his chair and opened the Bible. Cora screwed in the blue bulbs and hung all the baubles and then she asked me to help with the tinsel. That was all. No, not all: The tree smelled like clover. Which didn't surprise me.

I grew too tall to sit on my dad's lap on those few summer drives, and I grew too stiff to take hold of his hand or to look at him much. The clover-thing stayed the same. I'd say: *Oh, well, maybe after fourth grade . . . or maybe after fifth . . . or maybe if I gain some weight—* I drank a lot of Ovaltine,

which may have helped. I got all A's and even some A pluses.

*O.K., Smarty, I said to myself. Get to work on this clover-conundrum. Look: That sweet smell of clover coming towards you is a BALL, and before you can catch it, this BAT (Daddy will die) pops up and whacks the ball off course. Grab that bat.*

Which was dumb.  
 It was the worst summer yet.  
 My dad was grayer, and he started to cough. His chair that had smelled of creosote wafted clover.

*Dear God— I prayed. Do something—*

Those ants were pushing my shoulder blades  
out and making me shakey. A neighbor said  
to my mother, “Your younger daughter is starting  
to resemble you.”

*Dear God, don't let my life go bad,  
like my mother's—*

The prayer dropped through a sand trap.  
Those ants had packed me brimful of  
bumps. I was so tired that I let them  
climb right out on my face and nail up  
their little NO VACANCY smile.

## Whelping

“At last!”

Your baritone nicks me . . . then your  
familiar grin.

Your hand gallops towards mine.

I recoil

He thinks when he pressed her doorbell  
she walked twenty steps from her study?  
Wrong. A thousand miles Up/Down, she  
crawled out of a den, shook off quills,  
ripped out fangs . . . and as she stumbled,  
slapped this smile under her snout . . .

clapped in this tongue . . . to pronounce:

“Hello?”

“I’ve traveled *eons* to reach this  
island of yours!”

—had first un-nippled a fuzzy smile,  
un-lapped a mewling metaphor.

You squint to slow down the reeling of  
my wintered face into your mind.

“I traced you through your poems—  
in magazines.”

Trapped . . . I escort you towards  
this upholstery. Your aura snags mine.

“. . . Have you been ill?”

Your voice scrapes my jugular . . .  
You don’t know that Mr. Muse loves  
the wounded woman:

He stalks along the Edge, watching  
for that One most sloshed by the status  
quo. Gently He’ll lick her wry smile,  
and if it bites back, He’ll bash her  
wound into a womb.

“. . . You’ve been ill.”

My glance has sagged through your  
monologue. “Mmmm?” You expected the  
schoolgirl-me, her attention a tram-  
poline for your patter. My lip curls:  
“Ill?” Is that croak mine? “You  
could call it *ill*.” —but a Heaviness  
settled. The net split—

She tucked the tatters, somehow,  
into a kind of pouch. Where her

attention had been concave, it turned convex. "*Dazed!*" her husband groaned, and consigned himself to groceries and neighbors.

"You seem—depressed."

Your squint is a stethoscope.

"Mmmm? Well, *tired*—"

Unsnapped from the mundane, she crouched in that pouch . . . which soared like a balloon into Strangeness . . . and slipped. It was on that Brink Mr. Muse found her.

You drag the stunned-me around in your skull. "—a sort of drop-out, I'll bet—"

I bare my teeth. "Last year, in-laws dropped in—" (The fat prose is still flapping in my net.)

"I'm groping for the word—"

Your gaze pries my fist. "'recluse?' 'cloistered?'"

". . . They took us to a wedding."  
(I'm still mopping up the oil slick.)

Your gaze strays kitchenwards—

to be trounced by mine. "'Farouche.'  
Is that the word?"

Eyes downcast, you taste the term;  
you nod. "Would you—could we—  
maybe walk on the beach?"

Let her lean towards him with the lightest breath of *maybe*, and Oldman Muse will flip her gullet upside-down to fart:

"No thanks." *My poor whelps!*  
*Flubbing their finny wings—*

You rise, and your feet falter towards  
the door. "I tried—I mean—You're  
not in the phone book."

"Unlisted," I snarl. "And I don't  
answer it." I'm twitching to flush  
you from my cochlea . . . to snort you  
out of my nares—

"I should have written you—"

"In fact, my answering the doorbell  
was an accident: I thought it was  
my husband, who'd lost his key."

Your hand grabs out of your drowning  
and locates the doornob.

*My darlings! Here I come!*

**Karen Snow**

These poems by Karen Snow are from her first  
volume, *Wonders*, winner of the 1978 Walt  
Whitman Award from the Academy of  
American Poets.

**BLAKE** says "All deities reside in the human breast"

or All Authors within the Likes of You!

or *Shake your authority very well*

**EDUCATION EDUCATION**

I follow you around as if you were a giraffe very tall she is a fountain

very poem it is a giraffe it is a fountain

it has a flower between its teeth

**EDUCATION EDUCATION**

I follow you around as if you were a zebra I read between the

lines I am a zebra

the alphabet is born in space

who honors the alphabet from A to Zebra is already winning the

race, this is the summa cum laude place,

summa summa she said

cum cum they said

in Swahili.

**EDUCATION EDUCATION**

look I see Aristotle following Plato following Socrates

following that old woman Diotima.

**EDUCATION EDUCATION**

look I see Picasso following Charlie Chaplin

I see Bodhidharma following the Buddha.



**PIETA**

I followed the sirens to the end of the block  
Where the river and the woods pulsed with spring water.  
The lowland woods flooded each year  
And the fertile silt eased into green underbrush in May.  
But now the raging waters cut at the trees,  
Snapping at branches, higher and higher.  
Firemen in hip boots, encumbered with ropes,  
Stared down at a woman, chest-high in water,  
Who clutched a young oak tree with one hand,  
And a small forearm with the other.  
The current held the mother against the tree  
As securely as the child underneath.  
The woman's long brown hair was parted in back  
By the surge of brown water, and it cowed about  
The neck and breasts. Her face was polished  
By the river's dark swirling.  
She gripped the wrist, and the small  
Marble-white hand reached toward her.  
The crowd, now assembled and whispering, knew.  
And I knew by the woman's face —  
Knew she had already asked the great favor —  
The mother's face — fierce, outraged, violent.

V. Hodgson Siders

## UNBELIEVABLE EARTH

Tired from the ten hour flight  
on Olympic's Zeus from Athens,  
I relax on the short night flight.  
I forget to finger my worry beads;  
leave off praying for the pilot,  
and doze with other folk.

Ears cracking awaken me;  
sign flashes "Fasten Seat Belts."  
I fumble at my still-fastened belt,  
relieved to be done with alien air.  
We slow, we drop and settle,  
wings sighing, beak searching,  
and just about touch the earth  
when suddenly we roar skyward,  
shocking us, cracking ears cruel.  
Stewardesses race from nose to tail;  
hands grip seat arms tight;  
alarm tautens all faces,  
and my bones crumble to pulp.

Comes the pilot's calm voice:  
"I suppose you wonder what happened.  
We didn't have quite enough space  
to land. We will try again."  
Not enough space on earth to land?!  
Ohio had shrunk in two weeks' time?!

Again I move my Greek worry beads  
around and around, say prayers  
for both dispatcher and pilot  
while we circle and circle like a hawk  
pin-pointing its prey, and then  
we swoop down through rain to touch  
our good, unbelievable earth.

Margaret Secrist