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**ON OFFICE STATIONERY**

By one with features deep as paper barely  
flesh eyes in shade slight embossments  
depth measured in millimeter a rare  
and precious image is made of me. Toss  
the old into a heap of ruined foolscap:  
there's pain. He'll pluck a hair from my scalp lay  
it on a sheet right it to a rule  
then cut it up construct me so my name  
will cast a shadow substantial as ash breath  
on bond place me in a grid that gives  
him space to ascend or descend impress  
my title anoint my claim with ink print  
five thousand times for all the world to see:  
I would not be without typography.

**Deborah Barron**

**GRENDEL**

Lies—damn lies—  
they used me—thought I wasn't human—  
huge and drooling—gluttonous and stupid  
as one of their shambling frost giants—fumble tongued—  
but I could shape words in my mind.

The roiling oily smokey smell of roasting lamb meat  
first drew me to them in their wooden settlement—  
I don't know what came over me, headlong charging  
up the hill—enraged—bullroaring—my belly aching—  
they pissed their bearskin pants  
when I burst down the door—ho ho, oh I was wicked  
in those days, hulking naked and scaley, grinning, stinking—  
full of myself in my youth's red-eyed, rogue strength.  
Before sly Holgar, the priest, tamed me;  
left me offerings of blood pudding and spiced wine—  
boiled beef bones and warm organ meats—  
it was he, Holgar, who showed me the place  
I could hide by the wall winter nights to hear  
the harpers tell stories . . . of Ireland,  
land of peat fires and dreams,  
of Cuchulain and cattle raids,  
and of Ae MacColeman and Coleman McAe  
who called mad Sweeney down from the trees  
with talk and singing underneath,  
and to the silverfall of Ae MacColeman's  
plucked harp strings, the wildman wept  
(as I wept) hearing their stories . . .  
healing their prince of his jabbering wildness  
and returning him to his proper place among men.

Used me, but I was necessary  
to the stay-at-home heroes grown fat  
as imported shipboard cattle  
in their horned battlehelms  
boasting at the trencher night after night  
in Hrothgar's smokey meadhall  
to a supporting cast of kids and in-laws,  
the royal old lecher's mistresses and bastard sons,  
the sullen, beet fed serfs and their unwashed brats—  
I was necessary to the free-loading wordsmiths  
in their scarlet cloaks spinning their alliterative lies—  
playing the ogre for suet and porridge, greasy leftovers,  
in the well-rehearsed manipulations of Holgar and his gang—  
Grendel—humpbacked bogeyman  
living in ice-fogged terra incognito—Grendel—  
oggle-eyed ice-rimed world-rim-roamer—Grendel—  
every father's fear for his blood weird daughter  
when she came of age—godless Grendel—the victim  
of every cringing, soused ex-soldier's last meadbowl boast  
as his treble-doublechin sank to chest—

before Beowulf spoiled our little scam, that is . . .

I crept into the hall on an ordinary midnight,  
suspecting nothing, just the usual bleary-eyed,  
skull-bashing, piss pants berserker tamed by drugged wine—  
'Grendel's fatted calf,' sniggering Holgar called the victim—  
a Scyfling that had overstayed his welcome, perhaps,  
or some unsuspecting enemy that unctuous Holgar's  
smiling curse had condemned to bloody sacrifice—  
suspecting nothing, as I said—off-guard, plodding—  
when suddenly Beowulf was there in the torchlight—built  
like a bullock all broad shoulders and broad forehead  
and before I realized what was happening  
he dodged in like a wrestler and vise-gripped my arm  
twisting and snapping it like a trotter on a squealing pig  
till I whined and blubbered and bucked loose with a scream.

He followed me out into the night,  
I could hear his steady clip-clop shod tread  
behind me down the cobbled path, climbing among the rocks—  
pain numbed half my body, hard work it was  
hauling it unwilling with me—out of shape, soon panting,  
exhausted, stumbling, barked my shins, slipped on a rock—  
a sudden glissade of loose gravel—grasping—reeling—  
I fell into the dark.

In the greylight when crows gather  
I watched him climb down and down the fjord's shelved cliff.

He approached me on my altar of heaped rubble and stones—  
back broken, tongue hung out of the corner of my mouth.  
He had stripped off his mail armor and encumbering outer  
garments before his descent—his skin glistened with sweat—  
he was pink all over, hairless, nose freckled, eyes grey—  
casually he flicked rubble off my chest and legs  
then half-turned my head so I could watch  
as he drew a short sword from his loincloth sash,  
murmuring, 'Grendel, the fattened calf,' as he wrenched  
my arm free out from under my crushed vertebrae,  
and with one hack, twist and tug severed it  
while sidestepping the sluice of raw blood as I screamed—  
screamed in my mind—screamed again and again . . .

Iron clashing, voices, laughter—the greasy smell of cook  
smoke—out of darkness, reddened darkness, wavering, receding,  
slowly thought and vision came back—a party of king's men  
had set up a make-shift camp nearby,  
the sun had long since risen, it seemed to be nearly mid-day—  
Beowulf was speaking, reciting his supposed midnight  
exploits—how he'd followed me even when I dove into the sea,  
how we thrashed underwater, churned in and out of sea caves  
till he tore off my arm with brute, desperate, last strength,  
then dragged my carcass up out of the deep,  
hauling, lugging, staggering, carried it up onto the beach—  
Oh, they loved it, but I nodded off once or twice—  
he had courage, I admit it, but none of my flair  
for outrageous theatrics, commanding awe by just being there—

he was too stiff—halting—mild-spoken—Lies,  
I tried to say—Lies . . .

I dozed—shouting men woke me to the smell of burnt fat . . .  
a slurring, familiar, lispng voice beginning to speak  
slid towards me out of the billowing smoke—  
Holgar—lies—bastard—I tried to sit up—tried to rise—  
Grendel and the devil, I'll take you with me to Hell—  
spent—remote—forceless—then I knew I had died—  
felt nothing—thought nothing—almost blind—  
still I painfully rolled up the whites of my eyes  
like a good ham stage monster—glared at the sky.

Marty Walsh

## ASSAULT WITH INTENT TO KILL

It was about the size of a nickel—no,  
the size of a dime—pressed against my temple,  
and cold. At first it was only that, the cold,  
I could consider, how unpleasant it was,  
nuzzling through the short hairs, against the temporal nerve,  
where only a week before the Hong Kong barber  
stroked with his clippers, the last person in the world

to touch me. Gradually, as the warmth of my skin  
unfolded by convection into the metal,  
I was aware of the smoothly rounded ring  
that was the lip of the barrel, considered  
its bore, the exact diameter of the hole  
that the bullet, fired from that distance, would drill  
through my head. Another man would feel lifelong  
pleasures pour across his mind, which you have heard  
a drowning man gains as he thirstily sucks  
the last thin airs of life. I could only think  
of the pain my death would bring to someone I love,  
the uselessness. Imagine my quiet as the hand  
that held the gun shuddered, drawing it away,  
veered in a wide arc and sighted it pointblank  
at my sister. I could not make out his face,  
but I knew by the tone color of his voice  
he was clenching his teeth, hard, when he described  
with intimate hunter's knowledge how her brains  
would erupt from her skull as soon as he pulled  
the trigger. Within two feet of her ear, he fired.  
She did not flinch. The shot leapt into the soft wood  
of the window frame. If the neighbors heard that shot  
and looked across, they must have seen the precise  
scalene triangle formed by the three of us,  
one brother, two sisters, seated at the ellipse  
of the dining table, the infinite vectors  
which the brother-in-law was making with respect  
to the focus of that ellipse and the transverse  
axis determined by the three fixed at each  
vertex of the triangle, by the slightest  
modulation in facial features, by every tinge  
of error in our speech. They must have seen us waiting  
for them to call the police, waiting in vain,  
waiting for a counterweight in chance, minute  
but meaningful, waiting for something to change.

Roger Finch

**HAWK COMING*****1. Hawk Coming***

Leaves down, October sun  
penetrates the mint bed where blood-  
red fingernails of chrysanthemum  
arch south. The few zucchinis  
and green peppers barely  
swell from day to day.  
Stuffing my hair in a wool cap  
I play tennis early at the high school,  
before the yellow buses  
roll into their neat formations.  
I serve hard to warm my hands.  
Some mornings, fog floats on the court  
and yesterday a hawk  
lay dead on the baselines, feathered  
like tweed with angora tufts.  
Black people hereabouts say *hawk coming*  
meaning winter. I turned it over,  
its head wobbled and its body cooled  
in my hands. I thought the sky  
must have cracked open like ice in a rainbarrel  
and the bird, confused by a drop  
in temperature, plummeted  
through layers of air only to bounce  
off the chain link fence onto the court,  
while mouse or mole  
escaped under the marigolds.

## 2. *Union Maid*

A wedge of geese flies south, honking,  
and ducks hold up traffic.  
Inside, at the union meeting  
only a few women dare open their mouths.  
What did we ever want  
that we could name in public unafraid?  
I wear a button that says *fifty-nine cents*,  
how much women earn for every man's dollar.  
Expert at symbolic gesture  
some full professors—men—smile.  
“Why didn't you sue for a raise?”  
“I was feeding five and couldn't risk my job.”  
At home I reassured my young dog  
that birds have a right to use the feeder.

## 3. *Cold Frame*

Built a cold frame today:  
plexiglass—fifteen dollars,  
wood from the old garage,  
slope—about thirty degrees.  
Nailed it together right above  
three tomato plants bearing  
heavy green bellies weighted  
down to cold dirt.  
Transplanted remaining peppers,  
tossed chard and the last beans  
and eggplant into a stew.  
My kids call the stew “soup”  
and pick out lumps of beef,  
heads hanging over the pot  
for a good look

as if they were bobbing for apples.  
The world is full of plants,  
I tell them; most people don't get meat.  
Tonight Orion the hunter hangs in the sky  
and I can see my breath.

#### 4. *Leaf-slick*

In the leaf-slick driveway his bike  
jack-knives like an old pumpkin grin.  
My son falls and breaks his right wrist.  
We rush to the hospital over back roads  
—dogbite, hernia, past emergencies  
flash in my eyes. I'm late  
to a union meeting.

Wearing a splint like a golf glove  
he dictates his math homework in a language  
altogether new to me.  
I remember the first autumn  
the yellowing trees puzzled him.  
Like our dog, his whole body  
followed the fall of a leaf  
—and then another, and over there another—  
tracing autumn's accidental grammar.  
He needed comfort: *the trees*  
*won't stay forever bare.*

I watch him now, picky meat eater,  
left-handed pianist, and write the jargon  
of his maturing in his world.

### 5. *Sex roles*

Smartly snapping each garment taut  
on the clothesline, where sunshine's down  
to a few hours a day, I hang  
my husband's jeans and sweatshirt  
washed clean of creosote  
from chimney-sweeping, a job  
he finished that I began ineptly last week.  
We're back to old roles.  
Fathering, he says, teaches physical risk,  
canoeing or crawling in chimneys,  
For all I scoff, he splits the wood.  
I can't swing an axe  
so it lands in the same place twice.

### 6. *Cat's cradle*

One is fifty, one is black, one wears jeans.  
Five, six, closeknit  
we sit around the table, the only table  
of women at the club.  
I smell musk: the woman next to me,  
once my student and now on her own.  
"The other day I looked at my hands  
and neither of them had money in it."  
The grievance hovers between anger  
and sorrow. We lean over coffee cups and papers  
as if a cat's cradle string  
pulled us into a pattern  
for the plot to spin along.  
Shuttling between life in a private house  
of beds and small bodies  
and work at tables like this—so much to do—  
I worry that the energy I feel  
will hurl me flat.

I draw back and mumble a bitter phrase,  
but the knot of despair passes.  
Only the ideal is seamless. Speaking  
the truth in a gold-leafed courtroom  
becomes imaginable. Hands  
too long held still, our words now jab or heal  
and none of us is on her own.

*7. Time change*

Now begins the period of darkness.  
For a while longer I'll wake to light,  
but by late afternoon the dark  
drives me cold from windows once bright  
toward the core of the house,  
toward stove and woodstove.  
Often I return home in the middle of the day  
to see sunlight  
aslant on the living room rug  
and smell the salt hay mulch.  
The heart booms in the walls  
and fertile soil; bitter chard  
surviving into winter heralds the daffodils  
that bloom year after year.  
Our children reach out like tendrils of peas.  
I've dreamed that all my family  
was in the garden, wearing blue denim,  
and I could not tell them apart.

Joan Joffe Hall

## THE SAGA OF SAM WHITFIELD

*Born in the Midwest in a wintry blast,  
Exposed to the common round—  
Family, school, church, state—  
Sam Whitfield breathed spring winds fragrant  
With pink, white, yellow,  
Fall winds fruited with apple-pungency,  
And he had reason to believe  
Courage and cowardice are step-brothers  
That share one mother, experience,  
Courage fathered by familiarity,  
Cowardice by distance, the unknown,  
And he had reason to ask:  
What of luck and no-luck?*

### *I. Indian River*

The willow, large as an airy house,  
Languid as a braceleted arm trailing  
From a red canoe in Indian River,  
Overhung the green of the deep pool  
Where men and boys swam naked by day,  
The entire town in suits by night,  
Where, slender and supple as eels,  
Sam Whitfield and Dan Painter learned  
To swim, working their way upstream  
From the wade-in gravel bank  
Till they could drop  
From the long-roped water maple.  
Diving came easy when, like minks,  
They ran the riverbank by day,  
Cleaved by night the silver water.

Claiming the village swimming hole  
By squatters' rights, they could but stare  
When they visited Ned and Ted Rink's  
Luxurious country estate  
And were led to a dammed five-foot brook  
Forming a pool eighteen inches deep,  
Twenty-five or thirty feet across.  
King without lieges or castle,  
Whitfield thought, for Ted Rink,  
Heavier, taller, older by two years,  
Ruled the schoolground with fists of stone.

"You don't swim here?" Dan Painter asked.  
"Oh sure we do," Ned Rink replied.  
"Ted's better than me. He'll show you how."  
And Ted did, slipping out of his clothes,  
Jumping in, stooping, stretching out,  
Kicking up mud, and crawling on his hands  
Amid darting minnows and water skippers.  
"You swim like a fish," Dan said,  
Avoiding the sheen of flung water  
And eyeing Whitfield, who nodded.  
"I'll bet you two could swim Indian River."  
"Maybe I couldn't," Ned spoke as one  
Who had learned humility the hard way,  
"But Ted could—"

"Could and will!"

Ted called, "Next time we come to town."

There, under sun-filtering willow and maple,  
Four naked boys stared across flowing green.  
"It's pretty wide," Ned observed. "Yes.  
Whit and me'll drop in," Dan said,  
"And show how deep it is." He grabbed the rope,  
Swung, and jack-knifed above the river;  
He came up, flipped his head, and said:

"I'll let down right here, Ted,  
And show you how deep it really is."  
His fingertips lingered, waved, and disappeared.  
Ned bit his lower lip and glanced  
At his brother. "It ain't that deep!"  
It is," Whitfield said. "Eight feet  
Or so right off the bank, twelve or more  
Toward the middle."

Fear and pride  
Fought in Ted's eyes. Terror  
Closed on Whitfield's throat; he sought  
To shape words to inform a king  
He didn't know what he didn't know:  
In a strange land he wore no clothes.  
"You coming in?" Dan asked Ted.  
"Hell yes, I am." Ted leaped  
As he had in his sunny wading pool.  
For years Whitfield would measure nightmares  
By that face registering the feel  
Of nothingness: nothing to touch, nothing  
But water, rushing  
To fill a mouth opened to shout  
The word the water rushed to silence.

Whitfield dived and swam deep,  
Fought free of clenching arms and legs,  
Embraced the gargoye face. With Dan's help,  
Buffeted and beat, he bore aloft  
The thrashing burden: a king berserk;  
Against the bank they pinned the body,  
Fixed clawing hands on willow fingers,  
Then boosted the babbling boy ashore,  
Where he lay head-down on the bank,  
Water rivuleting from mouth and lungs.

## II. The Crossing

When driving the basketball team to games,  
Bert Dryer, coal hauler by day,  
Wore his military jacket and cap. Festooned  
And trailing lengths of scarlet and gray crepe,  
Bus #5, notorious for fumes  
And a faulty heater, loaded in fog:  
The two coaches, first and second team players  
(Whitfield among them, least of the twenty),  
The roly-poly red-haired insurance agent  
Schoolboard member score keeper,  
And the two team managers, who, as usual,  
Wallowed on board last (except for  
The ladies and privileged Mr. K.).

"Gentlemen, the ladies," announced Mr. K.,  
Ushering on board three cheerleaders,  
Raincoats hiding gazelle legs, and Whitfield's  
History teacher in her red velveteen suit  
(She his favorite, he hers,  
Whose smile mouthed at his heart's core).

Last to board: Randolph A. Kleer,  
The monumental manual arts teacher  
Scout master, cock of the school,  
Of top-sergeant mien, commanding voice,  
Who rode point man at the door  
Maintaining order going and coming.  
"Gentlemen," he had growled in the locker room,  
"There'll be no feeling up of our female guests  
Including Miss Peters—not one pass or pinch—  
So long as I'm in charge. And Whitfield,  
Keep your huge animal where it belongs,  
Padlocked within the barn, preferably asleep.  
What you blushing about, boy? You're burning red."

“Loaded out, Bert,” Mr. K. announced,  
“All hands on board, so let her rip.”  
Bert Dryer worked the lever, closing the door,  
And snapped off the inside lights.  
“We’ll slipper through this soup,” he said,  
Deftly shifting gears of the purring bus,  
Stabbing the fog with brights,  
Then quickly dimming to cast  
A fifty-foot bowl of white ahead.  
“Right,” Mr. K. exclaimed, “Right as ritual!  
We’ll creep through fog and surprise the Rexville squad  
Like Washington crossing the Delaware.”

Mr. K.’s hand settled on Miss Peters’ knee,  
His voice rose: “Merrily we roll along,  
Roll along, roll along, o’er the deep blue sea.”  
Miss Peters excused herself and moved to sit  
Next to Whitfield, behind Bert Dryer,  
To help decipher the white center line  
As Bus #5 crept out of town.

In the low fog bed between canal and river  
Bert Dryer down-shifted and felt his way  
Toward the double-tracked railroad crossing.  
Miss Peters whispered at Whitfield’s ear:  
“The signal lights are flashing.”  
“Right as ritual,” exclaimed Mr. K.,  
“One if by land, two if by sea.”  
Bert Dryer braked to a stop, and worked  
The door. “I can almost see—”  
“My hand before my face,” asserted Mr. K.;  
He climbed down and stood beside the bus.  
“I hear it now!” There was a moment’s hush,  
A whistle, and then the clamor of wheels  
On the farthest track. “Now we know  
Exactly where we are and why,” announced Mr. K.,  
“When it goes, we go.” He got in.

The freight passed, caboose lights barely visible.  
Bert Dryer opened the door, and waited.  
“Silence!” Mr. K. commanded. “Silence in the bus!”  
The signal lights were flashing: red, red, red.  
“They’ve been known to stick—malfunction  
In this kind of weather.” Mr. K. proclaimed  
As he got out, knelt, and laid his ear  
To the track. “Metal carries sound,  
Hence the invention of the telephone.”  
He listened again, then arose and beckoned.

Bert Dryer glanced at the red signal,  
Live red. “I’d rather not, we’ll wait.”  
“Bert,” Mr. K. commanded, “Come along!  
I’ve tested the track, the signal’s stuck.”  
Bert Dryer hesitated, edged forward,  
The front wheels cleared the track,  
Mr. K. swung on board. “This kind of night  
Brings out the scout—”  
Bert Dryer jammed gas pedal to floor,  
The bus leaped to escape the eye,  
The on-rushing maw that gobbled fog,  
Tore and devoured the trailing crepe;  
He let out a breath, a sigh,  
and drove on, letting Bus #5 settle back  
To the patient speed the fog allowed.  
Whitfield, who had out-stared the on-coming eye  
With a wish for the woman beside him,  
Heard a voice murmur at his ear:  
“As sure as hell was meant for fools  
Bert Dryer will drive in heaven.”

### III. Landing Ship, Tank

The day before, they had done the locks  
 From Cristobal to Gulf of Panama,  
 Headed west. In the blue Pacific gulf  
 Whitfield had adjusted to sea change—  
 Feet, legs, stomach, heart and head—  
 Long slow sweep after Atlantic chop,  
 His hammock's drift the instinctual swing  
 Of his mother's womb.

All afternoon

He had tended Al Barker, Machinist's Mate First,  
 In welding the starboard smallboat davit,  
 Affixing it again to the deck,  
 And between blinks of blue arcs  
 He beheld in peripheral sight  
 Countless warblers flitting,  
 Gold sparks gathered from jungle trees  
 When the LST rode the locks, now  
 Chilled by fresh Pacific breeze,  
 Searching for sun in Navy gray steel.

At evening chow Whitfield and Barker  
 Joshed Machinist's Mate Cannon—  
 Shoddy outfielder, perfect fart snatcher—  
 Who had sat on the stepladder  
 In the compartment below, catching  
 Stray sparks in a water-filled fire bucket.  
 "Dog-do trumps cat shit," Cannon said,  
 "You buzzards don't think I rode that ladder  
 All that time. You worked so slow  
 I set the damned pisspot on the ladder  
 And caught a smoke and snooze on deck."  
 "Asshole," Barker growled, "suppose  
 We had shifted welds while you goofed off?"

Whitfield came off his twenty hundred bow watch  
And sank into his hammock.  
Minutes—or hours—later, fire quarters  
Sounded: fire in the hold below the weld.  
Out of hammock, legs into dungarees,  
Sockless feet in shoes, bare of chest,  
Watch cap on head, Whitefield fled,  
He and his fire-eating detail  
To where the hatch belched black and  
Deck plates simmered, rusty red,  
Where Captain Barr, having learned  
The fire was next to the ammunition locker,  
Placed Ensign Wand in charge  
And found it necessary to take the conn  
To steer the ship through miles of calm.

“Running won’t save his ass if the ammo blows,”  
Barker snarled. “Give Whitefield and me  
The fucking fire hose, rope our waists  
And lower away.” And it was done.  
Whitfield drew a breath free of smoke, then  
Into the hot-laddered smoke hole  
Two half-naked apes on two slim lines  
Wrestling the writhing water hose,  
Praying two lines would hold, one breath  
Would last the descent to hell.  
Seconds as hours, seconds as lives,  
Sizzle and pop, a heady aerial feel,  
Water played on smoking grids,  
Compartment awash in boiling ship’s stores,  
Breath spent, played out like the life  
It was, slowly spent, the dead-fish yank  
Drawing him back to the land of air.

Lying in spotlight on deck, he and Barker  
 Coughed and coughed, cried and coughed,  
 Till Barker caught a breath  
 In his blackface comic's mouth: "Wheatfield,  
 You'll live to fry in hell." His eyes' whites  
 Rolled as a warbler dipped above his head.

Officer of the Deck Wand duly recorded  
 In the ship's log: *Two hundred three: Watch  
 Discovered a small fire in forward hold,  
 All hands manned fire stations. Captain Barr  
 Took command at scene. Fire tapped out  
 At three hundred thirteen. Negligible damage  
 To vessel, no injury to officers or crew.*

#### IV. The Flight

In the western reach of cerulean sky  
 Whitfield saw one fast-moving storm cloud  
 Like a fat gray goose in flight,  
 As though the ancient twin-engined plane  
 Had already taken off. Dead ahead  
 Two attendants, smiling, checked tickets,  
 And welcomed the milling crowd on board.  
 Last to enter, Whitfield thought:  
 These old sky boats are like a schoolbus,  
 Always room for one more.

Seating himself by the right window  
 As if assigned to tend that motor,  
 He heard the doors clang shut,  
 Engines start, rev to rhythm,  
 Attendants' voices, seat belts' click,  
 Then felt the turning, taxiing,  
 Lunging aloft, and saw, underneath,  
 Flowing concrete, brown corn rows  
 Falling away to fields,  
 Persons to ants, cars to toys,  
 And close at hand the gauze of clouds.

Undoing his seatbelt, Whitfield glanced  
To his engine—stared transfixed  
At snake-tongued flame, puff  
Of smoke, white then black;  
He motioned the attendant and pointed;  
She raised a finger to her lips, moved  
To the cockpit door. The co-pilot  
Leaped forth, beheld, exclaimed:  
“Oh, my god—My god, no!” His face,  
Wrenched in disbelief,  
Hung in the doorway long  
After he had gone inside.  
Out the window, now speckled  
With oil, Whitfield saw the propeller  
Stop, then idly circle.  
Over intercom the pilot said:  
“Fasten all seatbelts, we’re returning . . .”  
Whitfield heard the single engine left  
Straining, responding, taking the load,  
Throbbing like a runaway heart.  
The fat man opposite grabbed  
Two pillows from overhead,  
Hid his face; a second man began  
To curse the airline, shouted “Goddamn,”  
Collapsed. Somewhere a child  
Began to cry; his mother’s voice  
Rose, saying: “Jeffey, Jeffey,  
“We’ll be all right; we’ll be all right.”  
In a long slow turn the plane  
was sinking, creeping closer  
To its good motor. Whitfield felt  
The downward glide, saw a cornfield rising:  
Rows, stalks, leaves, tassels in their  
Feathery blowing, then concrete  
Down which sped three red trucks.

Paul Bennett

**RAPE**

Our teachers wore neckties and so  
do the men whose letters  
I type, curving fingers over a monotone  
keyboard, unmusical words like  
*expedite* that slash the tongue. Lee  
Heishinan was laconic, beltless  
Levis slung at his waist,  
Converse sneakers. He never  
wore a necktie. Instead, he unzipped  
his jeans in the lunchroom and dangled  
the real thing at us. It was the worst  
offense he knew, and how could he  
understand our stupid lack of fear, how  
our hearts hurt for the blunt, blind  
helplessness of flesh. We were  
young then, slept alone with hands  
huddled under pillows, eyes  
sealed against the blood  
thrust in a boy's fist. We did not know  
what they clenched in their palms  
in playground fights, aiming  
for the nose, to split a lip. The Spanish  
girls fought, too, yanked  
gold hoops through earlobes. It was the first  
penis I ever saw. I felt tender,  
as toward the doll I had laid  
aside, that boneless semblance  
of daughters. Now that they are fleshed  
the fear rises like statistics, perhaps  
a man can love a gun, a slick  
blade in his palm, and the body  
fights its way from the ugly envelope  
alone.

The muzzle is a good surrogate, a curling iron will do, you strike her to the ground, cover her mouth and the scream she has to swallow, push in.

I bit down so hard the teeth ached for a week in my mouth, but I sliced his blood onto my tongue and he whimpered, shuddered, rolled off easy as a blanket when I pushed back. Now I look again: blind luck. How do the dice roll for Gwen or the girl who gathered her bloody skirt and ran from Lee Heishman's Buck knife, ran to the policeman's notebook, syringes and rubber gloves of the doctor, who gave over surety to ten thousand dollars bail. The girl who could have been me, pushed down behind the backstop, worried for the gold balls drilling her ears. When his hand failed, her scream lay down in the blue light from a cold revolver. I know he trembled, he could have been tipped over with a finger. Even now, when he remembers, you could tip him over easy as my husband slid from me last night. In the cell where he waits he remembers and slides toward the blurred cyanide fist, covers his mouth and the scream he has to swallow.

Carol Henrie

**BEIRUT: SUMMER OF '82**

*"The blood-dimmed tide is loosed and everywhere  
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;  
The best lack of all conviction, while the worst  
Are full of passionate intensity."*

—*W. B. Yeats*

**For Susan and Raya****Prelude**

Once on a ridge at Faraya —  
gravel rib at Sannine's back —  
I found a stone shell.  
Hardened sea bottom  
    gradually lifted  
                    to a mountain peak,  
fragmented in my hand.  
What if it was thrown back  
    in a wet curling wave?

\*\*\*

Worked all day in Emergency.  
In mid-afternoon, a young man,  
    a gaping gut wound,  
        cried loudly,  
"mother, mother."

I cradled him to wipe his face.  
He knew I was she,  
    "Take me away," he whispered  
        and died.

Easing him down, the lower half  
    rolled away from the  
        husk of the upper half.

\*\*\*

Abraham's river rages red with clay,  
Adonis' blood running into the sea.  
Adonis was killed in the spring  
and forced by pushing tree roots  
into the earth above the cave roof.  
From the dark liquid pool  
his blood slowly seeps through the cavern,  
the trickle growing  
until it echoes at the cave mouth.

Words gush out into the light,  
killed in the spring  
killed in the spring  
killed in the spring  
killed  
in the spring.

\*\*\*

In Saanayeh's garden  
only the eucalyptus remain, hanging  
limp, above the metal lean-tos  
squatted on the trampled flower beds.

In the choking arid air,  
we sit beneath the balcony's overhang  
soothing the vestiges of the day  
with sips at dregs of strong and bitter tea.

The unforgiving light bleaches walls  
and crumbled building sites, and sets  
black shadows burning in the alleys  
and playing over faces.

The heat shrivels the small green lizard,  
or any other frivolous hope we might entertain,  
while inside your parrot screams  
"whiskey soda," and again "whiskey soda,"

then incessantly, "rata-tata,  
rata-tata," into the dead of the afternoon.  
Along the now vacant street the answer echoes,  
echoes, "rata-tata, rata-tata."

\*\*\*

Startled, standing  
awakened at the last edge of night,  
I am at the slatted window.  
Jets are scorching the sky.  
The sweeping arm of the lighthouse has been cut,  
its weightless touch across the bed,  
pulsing and rotating,  
marking the faceless sea,  
light two three, light four five  
light two three,  
is gone.

\*\*\*

The wall on Mme. Curie street is bombed out.  
The cook's family camps in the garden  
in relative quiet.  
Their clothes, washed colorless,  
pucker dry silently on the *fitna* trees.  
The heavy smell of cooking meat invades the house,  
the ground lamb is smoking slowly  
on the hand-turned spit.

\*\*\*

The pair of scrub women still come daily  
from the camps  
crossing a battlefield.

Mary of the gold teeth  
and black dress gone green  
bends double over my bucket and floor rag.  
At home she waters geraniums  
grown in Tatra milk tins  
with water from a single pump  
brought across acres of mire  
and its splattered children  
to a shack by a peeling tree.  
Her life is created from leftovers:  
secondhand clothes  
secondhand food  
secondhand everything.

Abla  
poverty with no shame and a loud voice  
“fifty piastres more madame  
my son needs books  
he must leave the camps  
I am too old, 40  
no teeth,” she lifts her lips,  
“I pay for a Christian school  
it has heat  
bread is ten piastres more  
no meat this week, madame  
'Sm'allah, 'Sm'allah.”

\*\*\*

I saw dawn briefly  
quiet  
in the hills  
above Ba'abda,  
  
but now my eyes ache so  
I cannot mend  
the sound-rent sky  
to see the day.

\*\*\*

Today I go north  
 crossing the Green Line —  
     green for faith  
                     fertility growth or knowing  
     green paint  
                     or try gangrene  
                                     feeding on self —  
 passing bread lines  
 passing water lines  
 to Jounieh to where  
                     the cement Jesus stands  
                                     above the bay's waters  
 to where the stench of dead fish rises  
                     in quivering puffs of heat  
                                     to the cement Jesus  
 reaching north  
                     and south  
                                     reaching out  
 in the air.

\*\*\*

Aida, Aida  
 your hollowed eyes dart fitfully  
 over emptiness,  
 and your hands move like frantic birds  
 trapped in a room.  
 You tell how the farm  
 is burned to the ground,  
 but you will stay to show your faith,  
 to show your faith and sleep little  
 in the noise crazed nights.  
 "Only cowards leave," you say.

Dear friend,  
 faith now requires  
 pain.

\*\*\*

How can you make love to machine gun fire?  
How can you make LOVE TO MACHINE GUN FIRE?  
HOW CAN YOU MAKE LOVE TO MACHINE GUN  
FIRE?

make believe  
make believe  
make believe

\*\*\*

Marwan, I see you, gun shoulder-slung  
running down the ramshackled alleys.  
You attended a school of hate  
in a stretch of Libyan desert.  
"Gone to visit a saint's tomb,"  
you said, "a pilgrimage."  
To what god?

I remember Tripoli at sunset,  
wandering in the souk's maze  
I saw lambs slaughtered there  
for the feast of Eid el-Kibbir, blood  
dripping from the handprint on every door  
to keep evil away.  
A muezzin called in the gathering dark.  
I was part of the shadows in that spring,  
foreign to that land, that blood.

\*\*\*

"Atrocities" has enough syllables  
to take the edge off  
almost anything:  
a hand  
clawing on the floor,  
testicles  
thrown from a window,  
a cross  
carved in flesh.

\*\*\*

Item:

At Quarantina, they brought  
the people out and separated  
them by sex, and lined the  
men and the boys up against  
the wall and shot them down.  
It was all on the television.

\*\*\*

Item:

The mayor's son was ca-  
strated and his hands  
cut off. He was set on  
a donkey that carried  
him back to the village.  
The donkey knew its way.

\*\*\*

Take Damour and shoot it up,  
shoot it up, shoot it up,  
Take Damour and shoot it up,  
some are killed.

Shell Damour to get it back,  
get it back, get it back,  
Shell Damour to get it back  
more are dead.

etc.

Ashes, ashes we all fall down.

\*\*\*

On dark nights when the moon does not  
rise from the hills to be impaled  
on the stakes of ranked antennae,  
I am convinced it was shot  
accidentally during the last eclipse.

while hiding in the earth's shadow,  
for everyone was gunning down,  
willy-nilly, the evil spirits that  
rape the heavens  
when the moon is dark.

\*\*\*

My children have lived with war seven years:  
blood, rubble and the stench of unrecovered bodies,  
rats common as housecats on the corner garbage heaps,  
rotten vegetable slime and putrefying flesh  
garnished with the stench of burning plastic,  
and all wafted along on the outrage ignited  
in a burning tire's pitchy smoke.

My children sleep to machine gun fire,  
one since birth,  
five or six volleys on a calm night.  
The small one sleeps only to a cassette —  
a taped call to prayer from an unseen parapet.

\*\*\*

Last night a monster hatched in some Jerusalem  
bursting the earth's shell in a killing frenzy;  
breaching walls and havocking dreams, it tossed  
bodies in heaps along the streets.

They were concrete stiff and arms  
were hooked around disjointed legs  
at every angle, features bloated  
slick with fly-ridden blood.

The wail of souls ripped loose  
trailed from the human midden heap  
and filled my ears with pulsing shrieks  
that pounded on the limits of my dreams.

The beast's voice shouted  
booming from the mountains, "an eye for an eye,"  
and eyes rained on me;  
"if your hand offends, I'll cut it off,"  
and hands flew, battering and flapping,  
grabbing at flesh.

"I am your keeper!" the beast proclaimed  
striding over the foothills.  
I ran for the sea which kept receding  
and fell upon the blackened sand.  
It filled my mouth and ground between my teeth

"Don't run from me," the beast cried out.  
"Your brother and keeper,  
your keeper and brother."  
The shrieks and shouting rose to a shrill  
that sawed away at the cords of the sky  
until it dropped, a blue millstone  
pressing me flailing me to the shore.  
There each particle of sand skipped,  
reverberated to the grinding howl,  
refined to fill each ear's shell  
and clog its bones.

As I clawed upon the shore,  
the sea's tide turned red and rising.

\*\*\*

At dawn trucks came,  
men with covered faces dug pits  
and cast lime in them as for cattle,  
and as before at Auschwitz.  
The knees and elbows snapped when broken straight  
so men could stack, side by side,  
man, woman or child — however they came —  
carried on stretchers and in plastic bags.

People stood by to find their own.

Oh! Aida, Abla, Mary, Marwan  
it was no dreaming.

\*\*\*

There is:

gunfire for the new year  
gunfire for weddings  
gunfire for a son's birth  
gunfire for funerals  
gunfire for mountain churches  
gunfire for a new president  
gunfire for leaders  
gunfire for ex-presidents  
gunfire for Baalbek cafes  
gunfire for Chouf gas stations  
gunfire for Sunday busloads  
gunfire for holidays  
gunfire for Quarantina  
gunfire for Damour  
gunfire for Sabra  
gunfire for Chatila  
gunfire for the moon.

\*\*\*

B'ism'allah

where is the name of God?

It is written in the book

and woven on the Qa'aba's silk

or banners, or framed in gold on walls,

in mosques, carved on screens

and painted on hanging lamps.

It is woven and written across vaults,

God intertwining,

God multiplying.

Pillars of billowing smoke rise  
arching over a burning sky.  
Shells zigzag in calligraphic dance  
and flare, lighting the smoky ceiling,  
leaving sulfurous banners to plume  
above the city.

\*\*\*

Today I was shot  
so fast  
so simple, so ridiculous.  
Near the door, a lug of metal put a hole  
in my skirt, and another behind it  
in my hip.

No pain  
while blood welled from the hole  
just surprise, some sorrow and  
a fire that rose flooding  
my chest.  
The street went red then black.

\*\*\*

Lined up with many others  
many, many  
beneath a forest of metal trees;  
saps dripped red and colorless  
into veins.

The swinging doors jumped open  
four men entered  
guns bobbed up and down in their arms  
smelling around the room  
nosing out the doctor.  
"Fix him first," they demanded,  
and flipped a young man on a trolley.  
Blood pulsed from his side  
splatting on the floor.

"Leave the guns here,  
give blood there," the doctor said.

A stream flowed beside me;  
beside me a young man  
died silently  
beneath the metal trees.

\*\*\*

Each morning a line of sun appears,  
above the bed, on the wall,  
expands rhomboid and crosses the grey plane  
arcing high and bright to descend, fade red,  
shrinking to a line that dips  
and again disappears.

\*\*\*

A woman in labor is in the next bed,  
her family clusters around:  
the father in a worn tarboush  
and all the women in black dresses and white scarves.  
They raise their arms and cry, "Allah,"  
for each contraction,  
and stare at me.  
Their eyes ask, "where is your chorus,"  
but at last they leave.

The rattle of pans, carts and trays  
comes with the midwives.  
They work to break the waters;  
the child's head emerges, squeezed  
along the bloody passage.  
Little by little, the wax covered crescent of  
her forehead becomes a full face.  
Her arms and legs stretch  
into the fluorescent light;  
from a closed sea of dreamings she unfolds  
in a sterile steel basin.

\*\*\*

In the darkness of the ensuing night  
poised on a cresting wave of pain  
I try not to breathe,

but need to.

So I make dreams.

Snow cools the shoulders of Sannine,  
and an odorless rain washes the hills  
to crystal

as it

musical beats

upon the building, streets

and moistens

upturned faces

before it

humming flows

into the diluting

swelling sea.

\*\*\*

#### Coda

The mother has returned,  
and curls beneath her daughter's bed.  
Simply lying on the floor to sleep,  
she warms an oval of marble with her body.  
Her rhythmic breathing flutters on the stone.

Catherine Evans Latta

## PASTORAL

A grey March afternoon,  
I walk the land I plan  
to buy, plan to build a house on,  
plan to raise the children on  
until they grow and move away.  
Snow fleas swarm in the melt pools by the millions,  
their bodies buoyant, waterproof. No one seems to know  
why they seek the water and pile on top of one another  
until the buoyancy of some gives out  
and some go down.  
We learned that life is unfair years ago.  
The ground is cold; its underlayer, hard.  
Yet, green stubs poke through the prostrate grass,  
The mosses never did die back.  
A grouse springs up  
and beats away  
like an explosion in the mind.

Long migrations, somewhere to the south,  
move from field to field, over the worn  
Appalachian ridges. The birds thrust into the night  
where stars are the only things their eyes can see,  
as if the stars themselves provoked the urgency, like triggers  
in the brain which propel the muscles  
in the wings and spark the small, high voices  
crying back and forth to those who fly  
beside them and they cannot see.  
Because the last report I heard  
was that cancer tumors in your brain,  
inoperable, a harvest before season  
(for you and I are not yet forty-one),  
I wonder what you do today, and how you read  
these first, small indicators of spring.

You know, of course,  
of losses in the flock: individuals who beat  
hour by hour through the night and then fall back and hear  
the voices up ahead fade and disappear.  
You have read of lighthouse keepers  
finding in the morning on the rocks beneath their towers  
whole flocks of warblers,  
in mating plumage, bright as jewels, dead.  
You have seen for yourself  
the care with which a moth breaks  
from its winter pupal crust and quivers both its wings  
upon the sun's pale light; how carefully  
the spider, ravenous, tiptoes up the variegated bark.  
You suffered  
when the black dog in the night's overcast  
stood in the road and turned  
his eyes to the oncoming stars for a second only.  
A second is sometimes all there is,  
and dirt. And, I suppose, within the dirt,  
a clean configuration of the bones.  
We didn't learn that much.  
Not enough to understand how close these lessons  
were for us. Not enough for comfort  
against an early harvest in ourselves.  
I walk the woods again, looking  
for something else.

Susan Hand Shetterly

**THE WOMAN PAINTING CRATES**

*"All structure is a manifestation of underlying process."*

—Fritjof Capra

The day after the physicist speaks  
I paint crates frosty berry blue  
as if to confirm they are solid

or else to admire their masterful  
illusion—there is no solid stuff  
in these structures made of particles

no one can touch or stop  
from spinning at fierce velocities.  
I am mostly empty space

and for an instant the terror  
of flying apart rushes through me  
like a close call on the Interstate.

Even this body, old paint,  
that I am finally comfortable riding  
is made of nothing but process

is no different than the crate  
or the atoms of hydrogen in this brush.  
Once all things could be understood

if broken into smaller pieces.  
Now, the physicist tells me, matter  
disappears into haloes

of transforming, unexpected  
connectedness. But I am more  
than that accidental assembly,

though to say it is like trying  
to copy the curved face of Earth  
on a flat map. If I could know

that process of energy in myself  
I could know what continues  
after death. But knowing

is what I try to train myself  
out of, painting these crates  
a new color, closer to a certain blue.

Alison H. Deming