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CERTAINTY

Early light comes
taut through the curtains.
Plums ripen on the sill.
The sheets are cool and do not yield.

My body is drawn down
to the center of the bed; you groove
a hollow and pulse warm,
welcoming me even in sleep
to touch what is dry in you.

Hard sun after the last
night threatens to open
your eyes, but I want to awaken you
to press
my breasts against your back
and find our harmony.

We have no dreams, only
a sustaining rhythm, solid
as bread.

Jennie Orvino

THREE POEMS**Getting the License**

I am causing a sensation here in the County Clerk's
crummy
office, but it is only because I am not wearing Hush
Puppies
like my colleagues in near-groomdom. Yes, that must
be it,

there is nothing else it could be: the prancing
Arabian stands
docile at the curb, the ocelot lies quietly at my booted
feet,
the canaries and kingfishers are active but not noisy.
I wonder

if it can be the salamander? I do not think so, that
man
over there has one also, or is that his tie? No time for
conjecture now, they require our signatures. My
child-bride

looks up at me as we swear the information given
above is the
truth and the whole truth. I give my love a ruby for
her smile,
hand the unmarried clerk a check for a zillion dollars
and

shake hands all around. In each eager palm I leave a
coin, a
gold doubloon still cold and wet from the sea. Outside
the crowd

Ahhhhhhhs as I throw her across the saddle. The
steed whirls once,
twice and suddenly rises into the air. As we float into
the
evening sky a million children light their matches
and her name
appears in flame across a hundred square miles of
wilderness. She
looks down at the speeding earth. "Yes," she says.
"Of course,
but do you love me? Do you really, *really* love me?"
What a
girl! I lean forward, spurring the horse to incredible
heights.
As the galaxies spin themselves out behind us, I call
to her,
"Look," I shout. "Look at this." I rise in my stirrups
and —
because she wisely prefers gesture to emotion — I
eat the moon.

Number 10

Excited

I remove
her bra.

Out flies

a dove,
nestled

Between her
breasts.

Surprised

Isn't the
 word. Now
 I resemble
 A lazy angler,
 no more the
 lancer.

Mirror Man

There is a strange man in my shaving mirror
 these mornings. His lop-sided leer and hunched
 back remind me a little of myself, me of the
 even teeth and level frame.

Certain lupine qualities and a general unwholesome
 toothfulness in him lead me to make notes on my
 Things-To-Do pad:

see who that guy is in
 there. Call mgr.???

He is half-ludicrous, half eerie with those faun's
 ears and that withered arm. He is for sure a lying
 bastard, all he can do is lie. He tells me he loves
 me. He promises me the world and all its charms if
 I'll just —————.

What? Me do that? What the hell do you think I am?

And then he lies some more, says that he's the only
 one
 left, that he's all I've got, that my number was up
 months ago, that I'm not even a laughing-stock
 anymore.

Well, those are lies, all lies. I know who loves, is loved. I know what it takes and where it takes it. I am cunning and blond and hard. I look good, real good.

Ask anybody who knows me, look for yourself.

There's
nothing like me this side of the Mississippi.

Ronald Koertge

TOAD

Coruscate eyes of gold in sable,
Intuitive lessons in ancient depth;
Cellini cried when he saw these eyes.

The mouth is wide, habit of hunger,
Stretched-drum throat trembles, alive, and
The fourth finger quivers in its sleep.

In greens and blues a fly shines and preens.
A white nerve throbs between sight and hunger,
Tense the quickened throat, bright eyes compelled:

Tongue-song! a wing spirals in jarred light.
The gifted eyes sink closed, content,
And slow as their depth arise and gaze again.

Eyes coruscate dream in depths of gold
Sanguine consummations, and
The fourth finger quivers in its sleep.

John Caddy

OFFICE HOURS:

Students trickle in, talk awhile, leave.
I hear myself drone counsel and support—
a pseudo priest.

The rites drain me to loneliness,
loneliness brittles to waiting:
I'm waiting for the boy I once was.

I think of the California slope, notched at the ocean
edge

with innumerable canyons that water cut,
then nourished into green veins
now choked with liveoak, sycamore, buckeye, ma-
drone, and laurel trees.

In the wet North, redwoods plume up,
with fern, trillia, sorrel underneath.
They're still there—even housing tracts avoid them.

I've plunged into them, slid, stumbled down
the leafmold banks, snapping twigs, panicking
through cobwebs

to the bottom, as in a river,
bathed in the shimmering green half-light,
my gills sucking in the brackish air,
branches like waves fanning out above,
lapping over and over: not a pinpoint of sun
breaks through as they shift.

Once more I drown,
Here & Now on the bank above calling for me.
My lungs again fill with strangeness.
Bushtits swim in schools between dark saplings;
I flounder through years of leaves,
a crawling thing,
out of my mother's earshot, but not beyond the
 lifeline of the path
that dangles down the edge out of my backyard.

Older, I trudge upstream, the ravine winding and
 narrowing,
till I step into the full sun at the source:
a gully cut into the bare clay,
pointing to the drip of a corrugated stormdrain
littered with beercans, old tires, smashed papercups,
at the edge of a city.

Yet older, I walk seawards where wracks of fog drift
into the mouth of the canyon, to the flat stink of
 backwater,
circle the skin-tearing sedge, plod over the humped
 tongue of sand
tufted with grass that hides the sea.
I sit on a dead-white log of driftwood
surrounded by patches of wilted seaweed
humming with flies that rise to torment me.
The sea's dregs are becoming the land,
only the driftwood is stubborn and lovely.

I can't see beyond the first row of flaccid breakers;
the fog closes in on me.
The water is oily gray;
sand, dark with moisture, numbs my feet.
My legs are cramped from the long walk—
I don't want to go back,

but there's no road down the beach, only the rocky
fold
at the bottom of the green notch behind me.

I have come three or four miles that seemed like a
continent

and have found a fetid beach.

A terrible shame grows out of my belly,

fills the hole of my awareness,

funnels back into the groin of the canyon.

It shrivels the leaves and ferns like a September wind,
touches away cobwebs, chaps treebark into shreds.

I walk back now.

I don't see what's ahead or beside me.

I don't care.

Here & Now is sitting on the bank pulling blades of
grass.

We nod.

I nod.

Another student leaves.

James Mauch

THREE POEMS

Man Made Egg

(for Judy)

I am starving, a jackal
by the sound,
turning gut-burning circles
round a big, pink egg,
to which I am bound.

Tyrannosaurus Rex,
perhaps, resides within,
two feet high when
stretched, with scales,
and teeth enough
to mush a jackal's heart.

They say a python coils
very small when it wants,
but can hold objects
larger than a dog.

Baby snapping turtles
can maim toes.
An ostrich youth
would kick going down.

I hear through the
outer skin — heart
beats, heart beats —
faint but ominous.
Were I not carnivorous,
grass would do, or
just the shell.

At Thirty-Three

I am alright; we have talked
and you know — also know
that, despite commitments,
I have often touched her
in tender ways, eager to
hail my wet-haired boy.

Ear to her belly, I whisper
through her skin, never
knowing if she hears. His
voice calls me in, though
never by my name, but I
deny my inclination to
join him in the swim.
I am no longer embryonic.

Reminds me of Magoo watching
Florence Chadwick churn
to Dover in a side-load
Bendix, waiting for her
greased, joyous form to
crawl from the sea. By
such jokes I know I am OK.

But for a dream.

At thirty-three, I see my pink
heedless boy flail by, doing
antic strokes through waves
of clear, liquid plastic,
a fat-fingered doll to whom
I call and call, mouthing
like a goldfish in a bowl.

Why does he reject my element?
I know he's in there. Do his
slit, swimmer's eyes know me
out here, squinting? Do I
embarrass him; does my world?
Has he made a vow to her her
silence hints, and must I be
thirty-four, tuned to skin?

Grass, Walt

In current use, you find
that grass blows
all colors: people, blood
and bellow. Not: cold,
intellectual and thin.

Grass, then, like a
brass hen found deep
down in India, cradled
in the swarthy beam
and bosom of a wavy
Mama-sutra, can be many
things. It has nocks,
strums and bush-fiddies,
like the God Zig-Zag's
gun. Not: cold, intellectual
and thin.

Thin as T. S. Eliot, ranged
in his leather chair.
Cold as old Ezra, shawl and all.

Intellectual as Fuji
in William's tidy flicks.

No. Grass grows greener
than Anglicans, lovely
and balmier than teachers
and word gardeners.

That, Walt, is what they
say of grass to me and
blackboards — what I
wrestle with as I break
chicken legs and salt eggs
in the forty minutes
between flights of them.

I try to let them say
how much it cost to cross
Brooklyn Ferry, to grow
grass from mouth tops.
But grass is greener,
higher and tickles more
where they are. And you
and I dream of wavy Mama-sutras
in real beds of warm, green
blades, like swords through
the cold, thin snow, two
anticipatory ants, toting
several times their
weight in eggs.

Paul Nelson

