

**CONTENTS**

- |                          |  |
|--------------------------|--|
| 1 Hal Sirowitz           | <i>Father Fingers</i>                            |
| 2 Heather Tosteson Reich | <i>Two Poems</i>                                 |
| 4 Frank Dwyer            | <i>Holiday in Moonache</i>                       |
| 5 Keith Moe              | <i>Thinking We Get Away</i>                      |
| 7 Felix Pollak           | <i>Three Poems</i>                               |
| 11 Carole Stone          | <i>At a Lunch Counter in<br/>Downtown Easton</i> |
| 12 Susan Anderson        | <i>October Birth</i>                             |
| 13 Ellen Levine          | <i>When My Father Appears</i>                    |
| 14 Paula Rath            | <i>. . . For My Daughters</i>                    |
| 15 Ricardo Pau-Llosa     | <i>Four Poems</i>                                |
| 18 Marianne Boruch       | <i>Sympathy</i>                                  |
| 19 Carl Lindner          | <i>Shooting Baskets in a Dark<br/>Gymnasium</i>  |
| 20 David Johnson         | <i>Two Poems</i>                                 |
| 22 Susan North           | <i>The Fiddler's Bitch</i>                       |
| 23 John Hildebidle       | <i>For Harriet Quimby</i>                        |
| 24 Leigh Perez-Diotima   | <i>Three Poems</i>                               |
| 26 A. McA. Miller        | <i>Words for John Ruskin</i>                     |
| 29 Lawrence Watson       | <i>Fishing Lesson</i>                            |
| 30 Cynde Gregory         | <i>Moving by Touch</i>                           |
| 32 Susannah Robbins      | <i>Seattle</i>                                   |

Cover: Franklin Boggs

*The Beloit Poetry Journal* is indexed in *American Humanities Index* and *Index of American Periodical Verse*.

**FATHER FINGERS**

My father was darning my socks, his broken  
knuckles standing out like rings.  
"I'll be a mother to you," he said.  
But though I was mad at her, at least she kissed me.

I could love my father as long as I didn't tell  
him anything, & just listened to his sounds.  
Coins in his pocket jingled.  
I played with his keys, hearing his speeding car.

My father's fingers were covered with calluses.  
He would press along the neck  
of his mandolin with such force, that days later  
I could still find marks formed by strings,  
traveling through his fingers like white veins.

I thought love would sound like his mandolin,  
the harshness of his fingers lost in the pride  
of his music lingering in the room long after he left.  
Love sounded more like a gun shot  
on his favorite cowboy show; some days  
I didn't even know where I was hit.  
I fell in love the way cowboys fall off horses;  
threw myself at people with my play wounds already  
showing.

Hal Sirowitz

**TWO POEMS****Carl's Game**

On the lawn an old man is playing croquet.  
Absent-minded, he competes with the dead  
and forgets which wicket to aim at.  
He calls me by his wife's name. "Prudence,  
please come and mark the wickets for me."  
My fingers are dirty handkerchiefs.  
I tie them on the rusty wickets.  
They hover there like cabbage moths.  
He is pleased.  
"Now we must find the ball."

He's half blind, I share my eyes.  
Like his mallet, the ball he seeks is white.  
It hides, a child's skull, in the uncut grass.  
I break a peony from its stalk  
and give this to grandfather instead.  
He thinks it is my doll. Gripping the sides  
of my skull, he places a kiss  
on my forehead. His lips are dried petals.  
His face is yellow. It dissolves  
on the wind like pollen. His laughter  
takes flight, a great white bird.  
He tells me: "Joy, like death,  
respects no ritual. Be thankful."

**Prudence Plays Skittles**

Rarely, my mother could be coerced  
into speaking of her childhood.  
I enjoyed the stories.  
In the basement playroom of every child  
the persistent damp is anathema  
only to adults. It defies  
panelling, disinfectants, and  
dehumidifiers. Water wells  
through the brick foundations.  
The pools on the brown linoleum  
gleam like wax in the dim light.

The old man trapped in the storm  
cistern taps on the grimy window  
trying to attract his wife.  
He times his Prudence  
with a scarred gold watch.  
Adoration films his eyes  
like cataracts. He smiles  
as he watches her bend,  
rotund, with that luminous  
absorption of the deaf,  
to bowl oranges down a lane  
made of shattered mirrors  
toward a maze made of bones  
from past Sunday roasts.

His white hair breaks like unreaped wheat  
under the weight of the snow.

**Heather Tosteson Reich**

## HOLIDAY IN MOONACHE

Winter outside. Inside, warm in bed  
with a tender, elegant, vigorous wife,  
not mine.

With everything to lose (this fantasy  
already so long taken for granted as real),  
it has not been an easy berth; nevertheless . . .

What ridiculous fears you had, Lady Bulova;  
you pole-axed me with curt, precise instructions.  
This business is as easy as lying down.

If I were a student again, I'd study the water  
that comes mysterious in unnoticed waves  
that wash us breast to thigh and breast to thigh  
as we press naked our dry bodies facing.

When I push up and back, away from you,  
to look along the length of you beneath me,  
I blow upon your breast and flat, tan stomach,  
I blow along your body, as it arches  
to catch a longer breeze.

To bring you a small, unexpected pleasure,  
I blow the wind that sailed the Yankee Clippers  
(it's the same wind) across your hot, wet breasts,  
I blow the wind that flapped the Saxon standards  
on Hastings plain along your small, strong thighs,  
I blow the wind that blew Ulysses home.

Come out of the bathroom now, pathological bather.  
That fragrance is the national flower of Eden  
and all your scented secrets cleaner than soap.

Aren't you surprised to be in this bed with me,  
after all this time? Naked, easy, ready,  
and ready again, daring the world to wreck?

It makes me laugh to see and feel you here.  
And you are here, beside me, coolly tumbled,  
relaxed, unafraid, affectionate (all unlike you),  
coasted out of time. Surprise. Hello.

I can tell you're here by your strong little arm around me,  
by your warm, unguarded chatter, unwonted laughter,  
and inconsolable tears.

Frank Dwyer

## THINKING WE GET AWAY

Like slipping coins  
into porn machines,  
you've always wanted to do this:  
being french kissed  
by a half pint of early times  
bourbon in the belly of a fat  
greyhound choking along at night.

The driver curses new ice while  
your mommy splutters somewhere else  
to a grizzly snore her pulpy  
mommy-fear of Where You Are.  
*"Here's to you, Mom:"*

two bloodshots squint sideways  
at the saggy milky moon,  
hot liquor laughs  
past your hard lips.  
*"Don't whine for me!"*  
Aren't we all busy  
on roads winding away from her?  
The old man fondling  
a surreptitious cigar  
snickers to himself,  
the pimply girl rocks  
on her hands in time  
to a hissing radio.

Too soon you're drenched  
by grey grey grey hound neon  
bobbling across both godless eyeballs  
scolding *Too Drunk, Too Drunk,*  
pale and lost as you'll ever be.

Wakened by early-morning nightmares,  
your swooning mother vomits  
slowly in a tar-black room.

Keith Moe

**THREE POEMS**

**A Plea of Guilty**

I fear they'll never catch me.  
I stand, conspicuous,  
in broad daylight,  
before a WANTED poster  
and stare at my face  
(not bad looking, at that).  
People pass left and right,  
but no one stops.  
There is no hand on my shoulder  
- not ever.

This has been going on for months.  
I am tired of it. What  
do they want me to do?  
I keep dropping give-away clues  
on *Nightline*. I've made  
full confessions in random phone calls.  
I've even put an ad in the paper,  
reading "Come and get me." I gave  
my phone and the hours to call.  
It ran for weeks in the WANTED section.  
But my phone never rings.  
There is never a knock on my door  
at midnight.

I am getting desperate.  
I will not be ignored that way.  
I am contemplating  
walking into the station  
to give myself up. I will demand  
to see the cop in charge and say,  
"I plead guilty."  
"Guilty of what?" he'll ask.  
And I will answer, "Guilty as charged."  
"But," he'll say, "you haven't been charged, Sir."  
"Just guilty, then," I'll say.

I know what will happen. I can picture it  
clearly. He'll call in a know-nothing  
shrink who will ask a million  
irrelevant questions. They'll refuse  
to believe that my fingerprints were altered  
by plastic surgery.  
They will pull at my black mustache  
and it will come off. They'll squeeze  
the dark-brown contacts out of my eyes,

exposing my watery grey irises.  
They'll pull the padding  
out of my shoes, making me  
two inches shorter. They'll stand there  
and laugh at me, at my helpless fury.

They'll tell me to beat it  
or else. "Or else, what?" I'll ask  
hopefully. "Or else, nothing!" they'll sneer  
and their sadistic laughter will follow me  
as I stumble, abandoned, out  
into the merciless street.

### **Astigmatism**

As far as  
I can see  
the white  
blossoms  
in the white  
vase  
bloom on no stems  
suspended in  
midair  
like delicate white  
insects  
above a white  
flower

### The Man in the Blue Suit

When I boarded in Buffalo, he was already there, dapper in a blue business suit, pretending to read TIME, pretending to examine the black hairline of his moustache in a pocket mirror, while actually watching the movements in the rear of the cabin, a cruel smile curling his lips. *Where will he take us?* Trinidad? Outer Mongolia? Casablanca? Oslo? And what will be his price? The President of the United States in exchange for us? An exclusive interview with his hero, Idi Amin? Or 20,000 bullions of gold for the release of the aircraft? - I am getting impatient. What is he waiting for? Why is he biding his - our - time? Words escape my lips: *What is your game, man?* He jumps. His glittering snake's eyes seize me. A guilty smile melts his face. *Textiles*, he says. *And yours?* It is shattering. My throat is blocked. I know he's speaking the truth. Multiple blasts roar through the minefield of my brain, as the voice of the captain rasps out of the intercom, announcing our imminent arrival at Albany, N.Y.

Felix Pollak

**AT A LUNCH COUNTER IN DOWNTOWN EASTON**

Her balloon face wells under pink curlers  
as she leans across the counter  
in a waistless dress, lumpy body  
yelling, "Wait on me!"

Even after the Orange Crush and cheeseburger  
she's sullen as a hungry child.  
At supper with a thick-armed husband  
silence is a knife at her throat.

Later in bed the mattress squeaks  
under the weight of his belly.  
She sighs and is still, a dry river.  
All night the slag heaps lie naked

under the moon, and she hears the trucks  
reeling like drunks across the Easton Bridge,  
the Delaware dark below. She rises  
with the bluejay's complaint.

No one told her it would be like this,  
not at her wedding as she kneeled  
for the priest's blessing, spirit burning  
to enter the mystery of the flesh.

How could she have known  
that years of blank Sundays  
stretched before her  
cold as the anthracite hills?

**OCTOBER BIRTH***for Shelly*

Nerves desert my body in flight  
like suicidal fireflies.

All seems done  
in time-lapse photography  
so I can see the threads of light  
like pain. Let them smash  
against this bedroom. Explode  
into finality. Let them die  
like shooting stars  
but not snap back  
again and again  
to the part of my brain  
I want to hide. Let me be  
nothing but a black hole.

Before you were born, at night  
my hand explored your tumbling  
form against the inside of my skin.  
Clay shaping itself in darkness  
waiting for the fire  
of its first light.

I was afraid of our stars  
that you might inherit  
the house of my mother's moon.  
Then our points would be set  
at opposite ends of an orbit  
and never touch, only follow  
each other on a circling path.

I cannot stretch enough  
for you. We give up  
the homebirth.

At the hospital now  
I hold your silky body,  
begin to know  
that letting go of plans  
will be how  
you and I can carve  
our own stars.

Susan Anderson

#### WHEN MY FATHER APPEARS

He always comes in dreams, and almost  
always in trouble—being pumped  
full of blood in a white room,  
or eating to prove he's well  
then turning away to retch.

When he emerges from an icy doorway,  
his back to me, I yell, "Daddy!"  
and we skate towards each other.  
When we touch, his face dissolves.

The time he appeared strong,  
tapping his foot to "Rocky Raccoon"  
he trapped me with his smile.

He vanishes at dawn  
before I can ask if he's cold  
and why he wants to see me  
and the day begins, a purple  
flaw spreading through my sleep.

Ellen Levine

**. . . FOR MY DAUGHTERS**

The way an ocean wave carries  
a single round pebble, lifts,  
transports it to rugged earth  
where in the curve of another hand  
it will lay, found. Just so,  
I walk around your lives, smoothing  
rough edges. Turn you over and over.  
In the night I trace your faces  
on the surface of my skin.  
Nothing, not the promise of time  
or the uninterrupted poem  
can ease the certainty of your going.

The way a brain injured woman can see a butterfly,  
know it is a butterfly, conjure fields of orange and  
yellow butterflies, day blue on night black butterflies.  
The way her mouth twists with the effort to shout:

**Butterflies**

Surround them with butterflies so they will know  
she knows a butterfly when she sees one.  
The way her mouth circles around the word.

I see daughters before me. Fingerprints on windows I  
look through.

In the nights I trace their faces with my hand  
to still the ache of nightmares, awakened.  
I watch them glide through childhood skins as I  
search my mind for the words to call them by.  
Their outlines sharpen in my house.  
I know you daughters. I know your names.  
My face twists with the effort to call you back: Go.

**Paula Rath**

**FOUR POEMS****The Bell**

*"Shadow is the means by which bodies display their form."*

*—Leonardo da Vinci*

In union's braille we touch  
beneath the glass of juniper and stars  
and the white anarchy of jasmine  
petals dropping to the brushwork ground.  
Your thigh's geometry overlaps  
with moon-blots caught in angled leaves,  
and my eye strays from lust to beauty  
as you edge your body in designs  
with stalks, grass, shadows  
taking flight in your skin space.  
Your nakedness rescues me from form,  
and in one kiss you mock  
the peril of desire that fades from us.

And peril it is, for now  
you re-enter precision,  
possessed by memory.  
Fleeing  
in my mind from flesh to volume,  
shade, and line, resisting  
every caress which lacks violence,  
you are shadow and must dwell  
there at peace with form.  
Night is a form.

**Gorilla: Meditations on a Zoologist**

Her eye is made to fit our every move,  
stride and stride, branch to branch.  
We've notice that the sky falls  
on her back, but she is unshaken,  
thorough in her ignorance of this world.  
We must conclude that she is amusing,  
her mimic and step, almost intelligent  
as she smells our whereabouts  
and discovers something with a scribble and a smile.  
The simplest of our group wish to know her,  
why she has abandoned her own  
to insist on our acceptance. I say  
nothing good will come of this, of trust,  
of being patient and civilized.  
Mutual peril makes a peace of things.  
We know she is not fit  
to slay us, alone, anthropological, a woman in the jungle.  
But soon, the past blood will encircle us,  
the ancestors that murmur our dreams to rage.  
Soon, she will lead others here and we will fall  
redeemingly, predatorially,  
into their knowledge,  
our secrets on their lips,  
our naked shadows at peace with our defeat.

**Icarus and Ariadne**

Down to my last skin,  
I angle my free head in the sun,  
marking the gravity of bones,  
flapping, palms sweating, a feather

drops, and another, down  
a failing corridor of saltwind,  
to her lying body on the beach.  
She thinks of nothing, dreams  
of nothing animals that dream of her,  
their horns charging her elaborate sleep.

Down to my last core  
I plunge, plumage furled  
to measure's magical amen.

### **The Iceberg**

Mid-morning and out to sea, torn  
from the ribcage of the continent,  
silencing defeatists and the speculative,  
ticking over the melting ice-bomb.  
We hear our minds eroding toward the thump  
of water sharpening the sweating ice.  
How did this happen? Not one penguin  
among us heard the aborting crack, the shift  
in weight, the abandon of native temperature,  
the northward push into invaded latitudes,  
the magnetic losses, the heave of tide.  
Another slab of ice has carcassed into the sea  
crying through our killer air  
before vanishing into tide and foam.  
Above us the newly menacing sun  
becomes a parody of golden gulls.  
They hover close and then descend  
wagering on our war-vast dead.  
They nod as we close our eyes,  
map the constellations of our lids,  
and drop, serene, into the warm water.

**Ricardo Pau-Llosa**

## SYMPATHY

I drag this big bed to the window  
which takes years probably  
as the garden spills, as birds darken

the tree outside  
slips into her farthest ring, heave  
of new bark, water, wood air.

I think she listens, so  
near the window pressing  
her strange light. I sing

*O ragged quilt over the whole world*  
meaning to say: such is my simple grief  
this great dim street

glistening with boys.  
How their mothers thin them down  
calling them home,

quiet baseballs, a few  
blue stones. What secrets  
in a boy, pitching the last gladness

high into evening: curve  
cut, I hear it fallen  
at the window, crying to be let in.

**SHOOTING BASKETS IN A DARK GYMNASIUM**

In this dark  
dream of cave  
space-cold  
presses on  
you the way  
night attacks a candle.

Here the ball  
thumps like a heart.

Behind your eyes  
another eye  
opens. Somewhere  
a finger points  
as floor, ball,  
and you revolve.  
You go by touch.

You lift  
and push the ball away.

You wait.  
Without the ball  
you are all ears.

**Carl Lindner**

## TWO POEMS

## Allowance

A shape haunted the periphery of my vision  
while we drove a back road in Michigan,  
and my view of you was blurred  
by our argument about divorce.  
I asked you to sit closer.

Far too often, cumulus clouds  
shuttered the sun, leaving my mind  
with a series of memorable pictures  
where we were stopped forever  
in attitudes not unlike love.

Then I was ahead of myself, alone,  
settled with blackbirds in the cattails,  
and saw our car increasing  
like a storm mustering its hail.  
I kept still and watched the car arrive,

straining to see through the leaves  
that rose and scattered  
like disturbed birds, while the car  
(by being less and less here) disappeared.  
I don't think I saw myself;

but as I climbed back to the road  
I did see a mobile puddle of shadow  
(from bird? cloud? plane?)  
and fell through it, finding myself  
suddenly, firmly, in the car again.

This is what the world allows us:  
We can sometimes prowl outside ourselves.

but are always returned to the place  
where only argument brings us closer —  
to each moving frame of our still lives.

### Waking

It was a painful waking:  
I'd dreamt a woman's face  
and held it between my hands;  
I waited for the kiss,

but then some rascal bird  
called from the waking world;  
the delicate scaffold of dream  
fell silently away,

suspending me in the day:  
I clung to a gargoyle's  
worn, impossible face  
on a gothic building.

But even that collapsed  
(the half-life of half-dreams  
being short),  
and fully awake I found

those hands, *my hands*,  
bordering my own face,  
feeling, oddly, both the stubble  
and a little bloodless —

not that they had been deceived  
about their place,  
but at the awful honesty  
of their embrace.

**THE FIDDLER'S BITCH**

You are the fiddler's bitch,  
jumping for scraps,  
spinning the tarantella,  
balanced by desperate, spotted ears  
and the feathery plume of your tail.  
He plays and you dance till your bones crack.  
It has never been different between a man  
and a woman. All night you try to speak  
of something more than potatoes  
or the same kitchen faucet. But he jerks  
on your collar, *roll over it's a crowd pleaser*,  
and the purely drunk prayer of his fiddle  
turns back the rug. He passes the hat  
and you are his pocket of change,  
something left over, his old penny.  
When you falter, his boot falls on your foot  
with a sweet pain. If you sleep,  
his transient heart pounds on your door  
and each night you dance for his dark hands  
stroking the fur at your neck.  
When the heat comes on you like bees,  
you crawl to his feet. *This is what you need*,  
he says, and it is. Then he bathes your wounds,  
kisses your hand in the rain,  
unbuttons your dress  
and leaves you before you can bear it.

Susan North

**FOR HARRIET QUIMBY, AVIATRIX:  
JULY 1, 1912**

Harriet, she of the dark eyes and prim name,  
strolled in her black leather across the tamped wastelot  
to the contraption the farmboys gawked at  
which she liked to call an aeroplane

and chatted briefly about the weather  
which had shown no sign at all of breaking,  
the thick morning air heavy enough to walk on  
and even a breeze blown in specially from the Azores

not the slightest relief to the men, bank-clerks  
judging by their stiff suits, who made jokes  
about skirts in a high wind, while Harriet  
tied her scarf like bunting around her neck

and managed a quick but arresting smile  
for the guy taking pictures for the *Advertiser*  
before strapping herself in and pointing in her usual  
direct way straight toward the harbor,

rising eventually into real, unexpected air,  
high enough that the gentlemen's cigars went out  
unnoticed in their hands; and then while the crowd  
was still wondering what it must look like from up there

she twitched in mid-loop like a shot hawk, went wing-over,  
fell, irreconcilably upside-down, and hit,  
tumbling like a crumpled map toward the breakwater,  
all with a great noise, of lament and snapping wood.

**John Hildebidle**

### THREE POEMS

#### 20th Century Amazon Poem

I am a woman sowing spring  
into this frozen age of other ways  
tending upward-pushing secrets  
centuries of fingers of grain  
coming out into light  
oh woman, this is a love poem  
to such golden seeds as you  
recreating ancient seasons  
in the wild field of this room  
where you are the touch, taste, and rhythm  
of summer wheat swaying  
as your hands catch my hair  
and we are gathered  
into the harvest

#### Counterpoints

This is the glitter cave  
All ice hangings and mounds  
of snow dazzle. I allow  
no walking here. There is a rock  
at the entrance: No magic word.  
Here the mind is cold, clear symbols  
with no translation. Even I  
am a stranger in this place  
of my indifference.

I know extremes: this enclosure  
counterpoints the heat I give you.  
Lover, two steps from your fire —  
that quickly the cave shuts me in,  
my hand rubbing the wrong side  
of that smooth stone.

**Lake Walk at New Year's**

All things are possible —

The life your hands, your soft mouth  
breathe into me, is gentle, is real.  
My first sounds: those of a woman  
responding to woman. All night  
we heal each other, make miracles.

Later we leave Chicago  
to go to a cabin at the edge of the year.  
The party lulls: a few of us enter the woods, snow  
and silence. Once you stop and hold me,  
as your voice holds me when you tell me  
I will be your lover. The night is a frozen expanse  
of mist, sightlessness; all things are softened into gray.  
Hand in hand we begin the walk across Wonder Lake  
walking on water.

**Leigh Perez-Diotima**

- WORDS FOR** 1841 Ruskin's *King of the Golden*  
**JOHN RUSKIN** *River* written for her;  
 1848 marriage to Ruskin;  
 1853 she sits as model for Millais;  
 1854 annulment of marriage;  
 1855 marriage to Millais  
 1858 Ruskin tutors Rose La Touche;  
 (Euphemia Gray Ruskin Millais, 1863)

God, the stench, the sweetness soaked in this  
 rough pad; it's cotton? Yes, I'm pressing  
 down, press *down*, the seventh child is  
 like the first in coming, *press*. As he'd  
 spell those tales again of slim white-shouldered  
 sails to fill the River as it ebbed,  
 his hand would glide along my arm, as if it  
 were the Golden River, I a fall  
 of sweet white water, trilling in the Alpine  
 lie of land and crumpled hills; give *more*,  
 the pad again. John knew Simpson himself,  
 the doctor, yes, who first gave chloroform  
 in birthing, did you know? John sent me  
 to him, not for healing, but for talk  
 of what might yet be wrong, as if the fault  
 were mine. When I was twelve, it's then John spoke  
 the story, stretched to take me "far above  
 all these, fainter than the morning cloud,  
 but purer and changeless, sleeping, in blue sky,  
 the utmost peaks of snow." Mother thought it  
 most uncouth I'd blush at supper, even  
 to my hands uncovered, at the syllable  
 of his name: John. *Now*, push, the rough pad,  
 now! Could she have felt the flush around  
 my heart, she'd blush herself, now dead.  
 Simpson vowed me not unnatural, though virgin  
 demonstrably, natural as now I'm birthing  
 one more time—yes, more. John's full voice

urged me, twelve years old, the features of his family: "RRRuskin," he'd jest to father, "Who could find a smoother way to speak of 'rough-skin.' Such are names, and rough am I, dear Phemie." Six years married, yet no marriage night we had. His true reason, villainous as all the rest . . . was he'd imagined women different to what he saw I was, the fault—I *push*—was not my fault, that evening 10th of April; *King of the Golden River* held me smooth as the curves of my cheeks in his hands; he'd say, "All of you, Phemie, is so firm turned clean as the white madonna curve of your brow, as the texture of your arms in my rough hands," I'd have said him Nay, but he spoke so fine as pen moves creamy paper. Give *more*, the blotter's sweet—such Lethe in rough cotton comes! He'd style me "sweet flowers growing on the rocks, bright green moss with pale pink starry flowers, and soft bellied gentians, more blue than the sky, and pure white transparent lilies" — I'm bearing *now*—"and butterflies darted so the sky sent down pure light." I would have said him Nay, said I was bristle rough in places even statues hide, as those we—married—saw in Venice with the plump skin of a child on sculpture, paintings, even amatory sketches sold outright in cathedrals. My master, John Millais, father of this new one, bearing down as a great hard stool would pass me, *push*; my John could limn the facts and show them bright as Raphael could touch. No, I was not a conscious child at twelve. My sisters died as children—six, five, three—his love that thirteenth summer was as if their perfection, stilled, had passed to me: my thirteenth summer, caught in his stories, how conscious *could* I be of what his press

of raptures (I mean Ruskin's only) urged;  
 of what he might expect of me that evening  
 in my nineteenth April, that tenth day of it,  
 I'd be mossed and wet as now, where  
 he had thought the straight lips of a child,  
 or statue, or the lie of painted lawn. Oh, he  
 was *most* unnatural and pardoned only now  
 as he is mad, for Miss La Touche, not me; her rose  
 at ten is smooth as parted petals, rosy,  
 that I'm sure. More chloroform, yes, Simpson  
 so prescribed; you midwives *must obey!*  
 Simpson vowed that mine was not the fault:  
 that *labia minora* may protrude, may set me walk  
 in a heavy pout of women, not be strange!  
 John wants the petals, fold on fold, but not  
 the honey of a woman's will. The rough  
 skein of your cloth again, I breathe; bear *down*,  
 should he make Rose immortal in a gemmed  
 and balanced phrase, will I be still remembered  
 but by children after death? The seventh's heavy  
 in my waist, another meaty child to bear  
 the name of John Millais. Will they remember me  
 at all? I do recall my image in his hands  
 that cupped me as a story, how the river runs  
 the children die. Cold it is, as the child within  
 me draws my life. Give, chloroform, *relief*—  
 No book could lend, no legend grant the life  
 my painter strokes me to; no life, mad Ruskin,  
 in black rocks; they clot your Golden River.  
 When this baby's birthed, mad John, I'm scraped  
 clean as Carpaccio's dollie. She's one more  
 Rose you'll never shed. Two doctors, friends  
 of your fine Simpson, certified me still intact  
 the week of our annulment; John, I open *now*;  
 and I am stalled forever in your story: King  
 of the Golden River, chloroform and cotton  
 on my mouth, this child is born without you.

A. McA. Miller

**FISHING LESSON**

Grandfather is shouting at me,  
"The oars, use those oars!"  
But I cannot manage the boat.  
It twists drunkenly away,  
and grandfather cannot reach his fish.  
Upon the beach, my mother and sisters watch.  
Their arms are folded against the cold,  
their hair tossed like the tops of firs.  
Are their mouths open?  
Are they calling to me?  
Through some gift of the waves,  
the boat turns itself without my help.  
Grandfather brings in the fish,  
and it flops—a paddle gone crazy—  
on the bottom of the boat.  
In its glassy eye I can see how  
it is starved for even half an inch of water.  
"That's going to be six pounds easy,"  
he says. "Put him on the stringer."  
But the fish wriggles its last gasp  
and slips from my fingers, free.  
"I hope you remember this," he says.  
"Hold them across the gills.  
Those fins are sharp as razors."  
Yes, grandfather, I remember.  
On days when I am searching for some asylum  
of memory, I remember.  
The fishhook catches the meat of my thumb,  
and in the northwest corner of the lake,  
thunderheads, awakening,  
begin to take over the sky.

Lawrence Watson

**MOVING BY TOUCH**

*these were the beginnings: small, hot room,  
woodstove, tin kettle catching heat, beads  
of moisture inside the shaking panes, floor  
of laid planks, uneven. outside a crust of old  
snow. her coming bloodied the quilt her mama made  
with bits of what's left.*

gretchen watches her hands, thinking how the years  
backbend out of shape, overlap.  
she expects to shake, has for years,  
is always surprised to see her steady hands.  
she wishes wheat, corn, something useful  
would sprout from her furrows.

her tall grandfather was a preacher with a circuit.  
once he took her along.  
they went by deep rows where sweating farmers  
made the crops grow.  
gretchen hears the horse's tail snatch at flies.  
she is proud on the big sweaty rump, holding  
to his coattails, careful not to slide  
each time the hooves come down. she wonders  
about the face of the man she will marry.

he was blond, that man, and she had no choice.  
she did what was told by him  
and by her mama, and she did not once regret.  
his arms bitten out of rock, legs like the back  
of a running pony, face pretty as a girl's.

eight children lived, one born dead, two taken  
later. gretchen's husband came back one night  
a month, sometimes less, from logging.  
he wanted a good meal, to sleep in a soft bed  
inside her arms. he had a way of nipping  
with his teeth wherever he kissed.

he sleeps now hugging swollen earth.  
the body never found, he couldn't be  
given proper burial. gretchen still sends  
wooden crosses downriver, thinking  
they will draw to his remains.

gretchen keeps thinking she has lost  
something important—a key, book, she isn't sure.  
she examines the backs of objects wherever she goes.  
she looks into milking buckets, burrows  
her fingers between the old cow's udders,  
noticing it is soft as rabbit's fur.

she finds hatpins, old letters from a friend,  
the stub of a chewed pencil. these are not  
what she wants, she does not know what it is  
she wants.

gretchen doesn't mind the dimming  
in her eyes or that her ears have closed  
against the world's din. she moves  
mostly by touch, and sense. except  
for what she lost but cannot name  
gretchen misses nothing.  
what is here and what used to be  
swirl and mix. there is little separation.

*gretchen watches her hands, thinking how  
the years backbend out of shape, overlap.  
she expects to shake, has for years,  
is always surprised to see her steady hands.*

her hands are soft as the cow's udder,  
body loosening like white hair  
after hairpins are pulled. gretchen  
likes to think of all her flesh  
softening toward death, and  
the swollen earth, and the years  
backbending out of shape.

**SEATTLE**

rhododendron  
is a tree here.  
stand like a leaf.  
back yards plummet  
to Italy  
and domestic  
waters reflect  
Swiss precision  
in blue Cascades.  
cedars drop nine  
o'clock sunlight  
Pacific time.  
dim outlandish  
isles rise. facets  
of the Watcher  
appear, moon-mapped.  
stand like coastal  
longitude. fall  
into the Sound  
that is silent.  
desire comes here  
like night ferries  
gold in wet black;  
art is brusque as  
Olympic grass.

Susannah Robbins