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The manuscript of Karen Snow's *Wonders* was the winner of the 1978 Walt Whitman Contest, judged by Louis Simpson and sponsored by The Academy of American Poets. It has now been published in book form by Viking Press. (\$11.95 hardbound). Ten of the fourteen poems in this autobiographical narrative were first published in *The Beloit Poetry Journal*.

SHEEP, BURIED.

Overnight, an airborne invasion.
Blizzard's shock troops have taken the low hills
and this morning's monochrome standard
unfurls stiffly across a raw landscape.

Colour has been confined to barracks.
A steel wind keens the no man's land between
snowfield and sky. A shivering of distance.

Rag-clad, like Siberian lifers,
we stump uphill to where the field's hedge
has vanished beneath a crested drift.

Here lie sheep, buried. Instinct led them to
expect shelter from the savage storm.

Like punters we must thrust six-foot canes down
through snow to touch the earth's stunned muscle.

We string out, figures on a bleak ridge.
Shove, bend, haul, straighten. Repeat. Repeat.

When you hit a ewe it's like striking
a tractor tyre. Your shout echoes long
before shovels arrive and we dig swiftly,
fox-holing in a winter's warfare, and
there she is, wool ice-starred, nose snow-slushed.

We manhandle her clear, our curses
kindling the air. A kick and she staggers
towards a scaup of field where snow lies thin.

Now we lean on shovels, the silence sharp,
a panorama brittle with frost.

The sun emerges, pallid survivor,
a prisoner led out for exercise.

Wes Magee

TWIG'S BREAK**for Mark**

he moves
through pullet flocks
culls diseased birds
wrigs the necks
 tosses
the carcasses
in a wheelbarrow
 careful
not to startle the birds
they huddle
at the hint of danger
 pile
on top of each other
smother
 unlike wild birds
who scatter like birdshot
at a twig's break.

my brother
who wrings the necks
is diseased
 the surgeons
remove organs
 pump in chemicals
shoot in rays
 a slow wringing
slow wringing
 for one who knows
the mercy of a quick snap.

I hear
the pigs squeal again
at the smell of their own blood
I smell cigar smoke
 as always
I am in Groton—a child
at the slaughterhouse
 the butcher's cigar
dangles
 he shoots the black cow
 down—a jolt
 it bleeds down the rendering
hole
 a twig's break
I take flight
I'll be overtaken
but
 I will not
 huddle.

David Gerry

SOUTH AFRICAN SONG

1. You say I am beautiful
and pay me to sit in the dust and sing.
You do not know it is my death song
I chant while your cameras spit.
I am not here.
I am eight, following mother into the bush
where I crack seeds between my teeth to know
the bitter ones, where I dig roots to find
the water that is our life, where I rub fat
into my skin until I shine under the white sun.
And when the rains come, we gather grass for
huts and are quiet together. And after a
hunt we share meat and hear how four men
tracked the wounded giraffe for five days
to bring her down with poisoned sticks.
I am married but we do not live together
for five years, and even then my heart does
not want a man chosen for me. We play under
the blankets, but I do not let him have me.
I say, "I cannot accept this man," and my
grandmother says, "He is a good man. See
how he learns trancing from the old ones,
how he wants to cure people." But I think
he is mad when I see him trancing, eyes
closed, body shaking, and those screams
coming from his belly. I am afraid of him
and of having babies. I see my cousin on
the ground with her first dead inside and
the men trancing to bring it out. They say
if you are afraid the baby will die and my
first baby died.

2. I sing of my name, N!ai, Short Face.
I sing of the hunger that's eating me.
I was a gatherer, now I take your money so
my children will not starve. Your doctors
come and write in their books about how our
people found ninety plants to eat in this
place. You give us mealie-meal, but my
belly cries for seeds and roots. My brother
is drunk again. There is no water in
this place. We do not eat meat, only
mealie-meal. You say we will go to jail
if we hunt. You say giraffes are
beautiful and rare and must be saved.
And you say I am beautiful and you give
me money for my face, Short Face. And
you take pictures of my husband trancing,
talking to his god, and you say walk this
way, look at the camera, wave. And we eat.
There is always shouting. The others say
my daughter slept with a soldier and my
husband hits her and says, "Filthy whore,
mother and daughter." It is not true,
they say this because they are jealous,
because we work. The white doctor came
to look at my grandchild. I tell him
she coughs every day since she was born.
He says it is nothing, all Bushmen cough.
My husband tranced over her, but she died.

3. "Our Bushmen recruits are invaluable because of their tracking ability; however, they are not as sophisticated as our other units and require more training to be aggressive in combat. One advantage is that they believe the white man has great intelligence and knows what is best for their welfare. We provide them with jobs in the military and pay them for the poison they used to use for hunting."

4. I sing of the death that sits
on my back like the tattered moon.
I sing of the death the soldiers will bring.
I see my husband in a strange green hat
waving from the back of a truck.
I know he hears my song for the last time.
I say, "Go well."

Gail Thomas

TWO POEMS

Confession

1. My tongue rolls inside my mouth on Saturday.
All morning while I bake bread I cannot speak.
I form in my mind the words in English
for the sins I have only known here.

I take a long time pinning my hat
make the words to the mirror
the lips moving the right way. No one
will see them move when I speak these words.

On the way I pull the veil over my face
the air moves out of my mouth
the words become themselves, what I mean them
to be, on the other side of the net.

When I reach the churchyard I am ready.
Father Slepecky's dog moves along the fence with me.
The dog does not bark
born that way on purpose.

Inside I kiss the icon and kneel.

2. Dear Father, forgive me
 for not baking bread for funeral
 for breaking my fast last Friday
 for slapping my smallest child.

Forgive me no flowers on my husband's grave
 for telling old Mrs. Kotchko she is fat
 for shooing neighbor children from my yard
 for saving milk from the big ones.

Forgive me Lord, for blame and wishing
 forgive me wanting to go to school
 forgive me not wanting to send another son to war.

Forgive me for coffee and wine
 forgive me for oranges
 forgive me for two pair of shoes.

3. A velvet drape on the confessional dark dark blue.
 Inside a small shelf to sit on stuck to the wall
 no room to bend my back. The priest is moving
 papers on his side, in the grate I see his cloth
 I see his shoes someone has shined.

The priest speaks Russian in Father Slepecky's voice
 but I never call him Father Slepecky, never ask
 for Hanya his wife. I never see his hands but I know
 he pats his knees when I say good things.

He asks have I done penance, have I cared well for my
 children
 have I honored my dead. He asks have I sinned sins I
 know
 will I be forgiven for sins I do not know. The priest asks
 if there is peace now in my world, and to all this I
 answer yes.

He forgives me my list of sins and I leave holding a new
 mass card

the boy outside gives me to honor the new dead this
week
Chiranko's boy run over by the train and an old woman
dead in her yard pulling the last tomato plants.

Driving to Work

Six of you cram into Hopko's Mustang every Tuesday
into Hrishin's Nova Thursday, into Bevsky's Duster
Wednesday. Monday you ride a Pontiac
and Friday you drive the Olds, room
for all and lunch pails, three stacked in back
sleeping the hour drive 5:45 for the 7 a.m. shift
sleeping stacked that way the hour drive home at 3,
and everyday you go the same route through Chunk
the edge of Dutch country on down the Lehigh River
through the gap until you reach the city on the other side
and see the smoke rise from your stacks, see the orange
light
riding up the towers of your stacks, and everyday you look
behind
at 3:15 to see the smoke a little darker where you have
stacked the coals.

Bim Angst

HOMAGE TO EMMYLOU HARRIS

Te parecerías al mundo en tu actitud de entrega.

1. The Basement

With my blind date
who set her hair, in the cafe
downstairs beneath The Loft, a theatre,
we heard the feet when it emptied,
in a cafe where the waitress
let her breasts wobble like loblolly
and had hair under her arms
and volunteered at the co-op, in the cafe
where a waitress carried apricot juice
and yogurt with bean sprouts, carob, nature sauce
and Christ knows what other feely-groovy-
have-your-baby-at-home
food on trays, in the cafe where candleflames
were dim in their nets
of red wax
my upper lip twitched
while beneath the table first the fingernails
then palm of a long hand
inched from my bare knee
to the shorts on my thigh
and crotch until I, like the con man
who with trash fire, epileptic fit, or heart attack
diverts the crowd while his partner
dips in for pocketbook and wallet,
spilled lemonade on her lap.

But I don't think on purpose.

What mattered was the Sweeney half
of Something & Sweeney;

she looked at me. And I looked back
into her voice which rose above the spoons
clicking out the rhythm
on her lap and above Something
and his guitar, and I looked into the mouth
that like a burst-heart spilled the words that didn't matter
into me, then smiled.
And she smiled back. At me.
I was sitting next to her sister.
You weren't there, Emmylou, I looked for you.
But you were in that mouth
related to the mouth I put my tongue in.
I tried to get close to you.

2. *Your Voice*

I'm alone when I think this.
It seems to me a girl's voice
with a pain in it, it seems
to be like a face that with mathematical precision
shapes the lips and brightens
the eye-light
while under the skin
like fat gone mad into atherosclerosis
a layer of sadness hardens.
You seem to be naive and girlish
but then your voice
turns over and folds on its own tones
and burns into me like a thick, dark kiss
with a tongue in it,
burns into the part of me which is human
and therefore sentimental
and frail, and lustful, and I am stunned
into believing that the black beetle
bored into a single end-kernel of cob-corn

is what matters,
it is the imperfection, the worm in the apple,
the bad lyrics, your chisel-nose
and teeth which buck out
enough to notice as though reaching,
I tell myself, to tear clean a kiss;
the faults are what make your song art.
Because art is painful.

3. *A Dream*

Somewhere behind me
in a summer camp with archery and a lake
a boy with a crewcut is turning
on his cot and the gray
army blanket that itches
turns with him; the day's gloom
like sheets, in layers, peels away.

And like an echo with no principal
in the mist above the water
into which sleepers fall
the voice says: *It's ok,*
Everything's all right now,
and everything's all right, he sleeps.

It's mommy. Her voice seems muffled
and deep through his one ear
cupped on the cotton shift which sticks,
as he presses it, to her belly.
It is the tone that matters.
And this arrives not thinned
or dirtied by air,
it comes from inside her where
something that has no voice underwater
kicks.

He puts his ear where the foot thumps.
There, mommy says, Listen! Can you feel it?

And he can feel the bump
on his ear followed by the hum
which is her voice spreading out to pleat the silence
inside him like ripples that roll
after a stone plunks.

4. *Your Voice*

In early-morning moonglow,
alone, over the fence of Middlebay Golfcourse
she and I, barefoot, climbed,
and we lay on the hump
of green with our pants ankled like gyves
and her breasts aglow too and slowly,
toward me, dipping down.
They were white and bronze, there was a line,
and the white glowed. Then we rolled
over and came out of ourselves
into each other, like a trade,
she dug her fingernails into
then down my back
and like a slow horn in the fog moaned *Ooooo*
O my God.

Her voice was broken like a groan and sad.
Like your voice.
And with her breath
still fresh in my ear I thought
I felt the long *O* nudging outward into *voz*,
into a hole I was lost in,
into a sad note
that like a smoke ring puffs from a trumpet,
then *Ah tu voz*,
then *Ah tu voz lenta y triste.*

And Emmylou when I
pulled out of her
and rolled onto my back while a cloud
unmuffled the moon
I knew a new song and it had to do with passion.

And I knew on the nights we returned
and she sang into me
the same pain
that before long we would hear the hiss
of hose water, then *rik-shoo rik-shoo*,
water would arc up
above us and, in the sandtrap, plop,
and we would hop off pulling up our pants
like silly-assed picnickers
leaving the mark in their burlap sacks,
I want to win,
I want to take home the cup.

Frank Graziano

A POEM OBLIQUELY ABOUT BRUEGEL'S *ICARUS*

When expecting his first child,
a man finds it too easy to ignore
all suffering, to ignore the blue jays
fighting in one corner of the garden
in favor of two quiet wrens, who, searching
for food, fly from nowhere and alight
without fear on the face of a sunflower,
which they might have mistaken for the sun
itself. He cannot explain why this is so,
nor why, yesterday, he took such joy
in pulling a white onion from the earth
by its slender umbilical cord, nor why
at breakfast the strawberries in his bowl
became, in form and function, several
tender ovaries, a vision for which
he was grateful. But this he knows: this
morning he rose, ate, said goodbye to his wife.
Outside, he paused, stood ankle-deep in
the leaves he forgot to rake (the tattered remains
of bigger wings) and faced the morning sky,
for the first time, as its equal.

Carl Stach

RETIREMENT

1974

It's Rapunzel, in reverse:
Having failed, at thirty, to rescue me
from reclusiveness,
he's returned, at fifty, to share my cell,
and I am frantic.

Bereft a year of my last son,
(ensconced in college),
mending myself with homemade meditation,
I rose like a periscope out of my loss:
I began writing poetry—

and Malcolm began rushing home to lunch,
bemused nuzzling smitten
a grizzly sniffing honey in my pores.
Agoraphobia flipped sunny-side-up
was that aromatic.

"It's time for my hobbies, too!" he declared.
"I'm quitting the rat race!"

And he retired.

He shadows me throughout the house,
this nag unbridled from bureaucracy.
"Sweets? Where's that woodcarving kit?
Guess what? I'm going to make you a dulcimer—"

His natter needles my nimbus.

"I can't find the bandaides—"

From whine to wheedle,
 from wheedle to whine,
 his prattle has punctured my tryst.

“Hey! Are you forgetting lunch?”

—which I translate: *It's my turn
 to be your only child.*

And I dare not deny him.
 Does not his twenty-five-year sentence
 to office
 equal my twenty-five year sentence
 to household?

Spreading his sandwich, deferring to his
 dulcimer, my most extravagant fantasy is that

I'm the live-in maid,
 with a room of my own
 under the eaves
 and once a week sometimes twice
 a day off.

1975

His hobbies have lapsed.

Horizontal in the lounge chair
 with PLAYBOY and PENTHOUSE
 old Humbert is humping his harem.

In the kitchen, I produce
 a waffle chunky as a pot holder . . .
 a revised waffle flimsy as a crocheted doily.

Noonsy wine turns Grouchy Gourmet
 into Ole King Cole.
 Bartok Hindemith Schoenberg Wagner
 thunder through the house.

All that zings through my lightning
rod to sting the blank page is:
Emily Dickinson, you were lucky.

Like a boy who's ruptured his wind-up toy,
Malcolm attempts the rubber-band repair:
"Honey? How about a walk in the woods?"

Among locust and honeysuckle,
where I used to flit like a hummingbird,
I seem out of my element.
My wings go into swimmer's cramp,
and he has to drive me home.

By evening, I'm so wooden he must labor
like a woodpecker for entrance.

To the tune of his snoring,
the poems turn to a lump in my throat.

1976

"*I want to change!*" he said.

And he's trying.

All morning he's simpered like a jeweler
over his itty bitty seedlings;
silly, I suppose, as I was once over
my babies' new teeth.

"Come see this *semper vivum!*" he calls.

These warts all over the coffee table
and end tables the book shelves
the window sills are as harrowing to me
as my tots' fingerpainting were to him;
and dusting around the clutter, I'm dour.

"Careful! That's my best kalanchoe!"

He misses the secretaries, I suppose,
 especially the bouncy one,
 blandishments bubbling out of her pink face.

If the choice were mine
 —as it is not has never been—
 But if I *had* to house plants,
 I'd choose, at most,
one.

A tree or vine
 my king my queen my alter ego
 a palm, maybe, or a fatsia
 or a philodendron or bougainvillea,
 with none of these schwas to distract from it.
 ONE

a plant that kisses the sky light.

“You didn't notice this cactus! It's budding!”

His babble blooms like acne all over
 my reverie.

I want to be *recognized*.
 That's the meaning of my reclusiveness:
 I'll not leave this house
 until I'm published.

1977

“Divorce—” he concludes, controlling
 the compilation in the wok, “— is too
 expensive.”

“I know.” I wait for the fragrance—
 ginger garlic sesame —to rise like
 a flag of truce. “I'd have to be
 institutionalized, like a zombie.”

“Pampered like a *prima donna*, you mean.”

Both. Thirty years ago, my smile a
raceme of flowerettes, fooled him;
fooled me. The slender stem was shimmed
up with scholarships, the root stunted.
Transplanted to his suburbia, I cringed,
like touched mimosa.

—*I'm your penalty for leaving The
Catholic Church.* I've bleated it so often
it's braided into the doormat embroidered
on the linens.

“What the hell.” He scoops an orb of rice,
like warm snow, into my bowl. We've spared
two normal persons.”

He's changed. I'm amazed.
This agile, bearded man has climbed out of
that fat frog.
Fuchsia, begonia, lobelia cascade from the ceiling.
Dulcimers dangle like feeding fishes.
“Credit *t'ai chi*,” is all he'll comment.
I do not change.
I cannot change.
My skinny shoulders are still shawled in rooms
he finds warm;
my brain, like some northern rhizome,
keeps pushing up its bruise-colored metaphors.

“Life's full of mistakes. . .” pours the wine
ladles tofu sole leaks all freckled with herb sauce
over my rice “If we can't forgive ourselves,
it's not worth living.”

I eat and drink and eat
astonished at my greed.

1978

A room of my own
my tiny tower my blue heaven
a continent removed from the suburban static

From my south window, sails blooming like lotus
in the harbor
from the west window, a hillside cadenced
with heather and granite
to the east, our meadow calicoed with daisies
and clover
to the north, the forest marking the edge of
Eden

In my lap, my notebook plump for harvest

From the kitchen below, the percussion
of cooking

It's as if Clifford Chatterly had risen
from his wheelchair
and turned into Mellors
and strode through the cobwebs
to rehabilitate Miss Haversham.

The aroma of supper ascends like an anthem.

I confess it:
I could not adjust to him.
He had to adjust to me.
Both of us, to my Muse.

Karen Snow

POEM FOR MY GENERATION

People like us,
They said, were off, who jumped out
Windows, saw Christ
Shining in a dime, or death,
Like a great nakedness, veiled
In the fall leaves. And more
Than once, when the room fell apart
Into music, timeless, beyond
All keeping, I began to believe
They were right.

Things change.
Coming down to earth, we settle
For less, the grind of jobs, cars,
Lovers. Tonight, as the stars sift what they can
Through the dark, I stand
In a doorway—and wonder
What became of us, who at the edge
Of our senses, crawled back through halos,
Weeping, into God . . .

But no one knows.
We live. And if we're lucky,
The past leaves us, worn down,
Like this moon, to a smile.
Tomorrow, when it drops
To zero, fool that I am,
I'll be out,

Clearing
Paths, gathering

Wood, bowed
Like the trees,
And singing,
Almost
In tune.

Jon Lang

CRAZY WOMAN PUTTING ON LIPSTICK

She works against the lure of the line,
obeys the pull of gravity.
She misses the mark, goes over the edge,
the sill of her lips.
She carves a world, a sliver of moon,
explores the shimmering underside,
finds nooks, finds bumps, the scars of love—
then treasures, rubies drenched in gloss,
stored in the corners of a purse
like satin, like riches for her man,
her man who stands in trousers big as trees,
her man who never speaks, who holds her dumb,
who smears her mouth with rough kisses,
her man who proudly wears the smudge of her life.

John Hodgen

TWO POEMS**The Second Story Window**

Father sighs down the horse from the stars.
Soon, you and I will slipper across the tarpaper
and into his darkness,
he will be rubbing his muzzle against the glass,
leaving a white exhaust on the panes.

Father is as old as his breath,
as the one book of his father's he still opens
and we lean over
like a window we are afraid of falling from.

In our father's stories
we are forever grazing the rump of a winged horse,
grabbing his tail.

Each night I shake you back awake.
Listen, there is the horse at the window.
It is your turn to ride between the wings,
for me to hold onto you.

Branch Sounds

We tried branches for their sounds,
didn't want swords, but the winds they made,
couldn't put the names to trees
anymore than birds might
but could talk breezes on the limbs.

You climbed high for a whistling one,
put it under your arm, and on the earth brought it down,
a whip you said,
though you had no use for hurt,
only for the long breath before.

I smote victims to decide what sound
I had picked off a tree —
larch's — a slow, soft lash
of air I stepped into and still felt its slight flurry;
a rustle of crushed fires in spruce boughs.

We loved our own flamboyances,
the faint smoke,
the insubstantial we made flicker across our cheeks,
dueled the gasps
our sabres cut in the thick summer heat —

You, a hot dry wind, I a gentle confusion of gusts;
your impatience with the air,
my small collection of sighs from a cedar branch.
We wanted to make our skin plead,
stop just short of hurting each other.

Christopher Bursk

TWO POEMS**The Dream of the Moth**

Only when your eyes
grow accustomed to the dark
do you begin to notice
the two yellow lights
hovering at arm's length
over the hills of your bed.

And then you realize
they are your own fingertips
glowing where they lifted the moth
by its wings
that afternoon
in the field by the house.

Trying to rub one another clean
the fingertips themselves
seem in flight over the dark blankets
though the light has gone deep into the skin
and will not be brushed away.

Later, in your dream,
the two spots of light have become
the two lit windows of a house
standing in a black field—
a house which draws you
irresistibly toward it.

And when your legs
will not carry you there fast enough
your thumb and finger

break from your hand
and flutter away
leaving you behind, collapsed
and gasping in the wet grass.

You can see them in the distance now
a dark shape butting against
the glass of the windows
but inside the house someone
turns out the light and
closes the door behind him and soon

you feel two enormous fingerprints
or pressure moving across your back,
pinching your shoulder-blades together,
and it's then you know
this is your last dream, the one
you will never fly away from.

Fear of the Telephone

When, after all those years of being afraid,
you suddenly realize that those telephones
endlessly ringing
are only the sound effects
in this, the soft, weird movie of your life,
you can finally relax and begin to enjoy it.

Now,
when the telephone goes off like a cliché,
each ring a clean white row of teeth,
you rush to it smiling
even if you're dripping with bath water
or out of breath from love.

It may be one of those "funny"
calls you always hang up on, like
the job offer from New York too good to be true
or, at four in the morning,
the frightened, childlike voice at your ear
of a woman you don't know
who confesses her love for you
and then pulls the trigger.

Ha! What a good story, you say,
though your ear is still ringing.
You are really beginning
to appreciate this.

You become polite to wrong numbers
even if they've called before
and when your friends come
whispering their worst fears to you
through the black wire
you agree with them, "yes," you conclude,
"suicide would seem your best bet."

And when your brother calls,
in desperate trouble
bleeding in a highway phone booth,
you tell him to stay put,
that you won't waste a minute, then
slowly you take off your clothes
settle into a steaming hot bath
and later drift off to sleep
in the television's soothing light.

Later, hours past midnight,
when the bells start again
and, ringing death,
draw you from your bed in the dark
you seem shaken by the news;
you make your voice tremble
then, slowly
you lay the black bone back in its cradle
and have a good hard laugh! You say:

Ah, telephone,
old ventriloquist,
you've learned so many
of the voices I love.

How far away you make them seem!
You could almost make me believe
this wire in my hand truly stretches
those thousands of miles
to within an inch of their lips.

Such good stories you tell.
By now, I could almost love you,
your cold black muzzle
pressed against my ear
about to whisper.

Anthony Sobin

WATCHING THE BOYS COME HOME

“Woman: the Passive and Anonymous whom God had created to be not only the recipient and receptacle of the seed of his body but of his spirit too, which is truth or as near truth as he dare approach.”

Light in August

the first time was in the full breast of June.
he came to my room
laid his head at my bedpost
and his hand reached out.
there was a finger gone.

I looked, and he said

“A small wound,
nothing.”

I welcomed him
catching his other
whole hand.

In July
he came more slowly.
heat hung like firewebs

from the clouds.

His halfshadow moved at the door

Entering, I saw half his lip
curdled, as if

from kissing Satan's forehead.

he said,

“a small explosion
misguided spark

I remember
little pain.”

I opened my mouth,
cooled with it the swollen edge of
that shrunken hole.

In the haggling breath of August
dry air frayed the ends of flowers,
and I heard him one evening knock at the door
with one arm,
the other one blown from his body.
inside his now half-embrace I asked him,
he said,

“key mission
imperative to maintain
troop formation”

I moved slightly
easily
out from his lessening body.

The swell of September's lap
cluttered with rotting pears
dead forms moving
into each other
into the ground.

I saw him from my window
his body
caved like a blown tire on the road.

I called to him
he moved
sidled up the walk halfway
called.

“a piece of shrapnel from shoulder to groin.
they called it
a medal's worth
they called it
unprecedented bravery.
nothing in there now

but tubes
the doctors call it efficient

I am coming to agree.

but, I wonder
would you keep it for me?
this,
they installed a tiny pump for it
easy to carry
now,
but I'd like to keep it somewhere
quiet—"

I was gone by then to the cellar
the earth walls leaning
with shelves of preservations
sitting in rows
dark like the pupils of eyes.
palms against the moist floor
my body
pressing down to become
another stratum of earth,
I said again that this is the last one
that we can bear
the last one
before the walls fold
sad arms
the last, in the lasting
burden of the world
that come in handfuls like
the last handful of soil on casket top
as
the earth's mouth
closes.

Deborah Akers

THE PRIZED HORSE

1. On the back of your right hand, a map of Bohemia.
On the back of your left hand, a family tree of veins,
faint blue rivers tracing into the foothills
of the Urals, villages with names
no one can remember the reason for.

Left behind: fat young pigs, laying hens,
the prized horse. The milk is no sweeter here,
the black bread still hard as Russia. Death &
caution were grains of sand on the tip of your tongue.

As a child you knew God spoke your name
and all the candles in the church blew out:
a bear wind from over the steppe.
When you must move on to the next place,
God's grace, you said.

And a little money.

2. They move graceless as stone
through the midnight shift at Ford. In their teeth,
gold, silver; a life's savings. This is time and a half,
good times, nobody is going home,
nobody is leaving his machine. Women sleep
in the parking lot in stationwagons
smelling of potatoes, lard, dough.

On break, the men smoke and talk
on the roof. The displaced light of the moon
has come a hundred years to join them. If you asked,
they would give it back, they would say
the lands beyond the sea, the uncalculated
soil, the hand's discontent.

John Glowney

SEPTEMBER 19, 1819: JOHN KEATS

It was in the same month that the consumption woke and
began to spread through the chambers of his lungs,
that he made his purest song.

It was early fall, and a light that had lain all summer in the
coolness under the earth was on the stubble fields,
and the bent branches of the apple trees, and the bright
dusky apples, the wild flowers tangled in the drying
grass, the tassels and pods cargoed with seed,
and the blown hair of the thresher sitting on the granary
floor.

He saw inner visions of the hazelnuts, the oil gathering, the
meat swelling and sweetening in the tiny cave of the
shell,

and gourds yellow and dark green ripening in the garden,
and vines woven on the eaves of cottages
that would be hung with ice in the winter night, the fires
within banked into the cold and the silence scraped
by sleepers' coughs.

He had a vision of ripeness to the core.

As he gazed at the last oozings at the cider press, there was
a voice in the slow seep from the pulp crushed
against soaked wood, and this once he was only its
perfect scribe.

He heard the dazed bees, and saw the full comb and felt the
clammy wax in the brimming comb of his mind.

Sometimes when a man is going to die young he is given a
glimpse of something that should take seventy or
eighty years to come —

a worn glow on all things that needs the rubbing of many
slow spins of the seasons, the snow and heat, the
winds, the flow of the blood in the dark.

But the young person—not knowing he is dying—is given a
grace from inside his body, perhaps only for a day,
because he is walking so near death,
to feel no panic,
to see with astonishingly clear eyes cells, and kernels,
hillsides, the river, and the red sun,
to sense the soles of his feet walking across the ground,
to smell the straw, the musk of the barn, the heavy fruit, an
apple opened with a pen-knife and eaten in the
orchard shade,
to hear the huge weaving and subsiding of the earth's life.
As evening came on, the crickets chirred in the hedges—
birds whistled in the shadowy branches—gnats
hummed hovering over the still water—
and he came in and sat down at the table and wrote a poem,
the stubble fields touched with the reddish light of the
sunset.

Howard Nelson

UNDER STORY

The guide knelt down.
This creeping jenny's voice
he said is faint.

Not like forest canopy,
crowns of oaks with open
lines to the sun.

Late that night I heard
a jenny's whisper:

Let me tell you an under
story, she is saying,
chill your roothairs,

help you live with pieces
of sun. I said I'm here,
I'm listening.

*

Back in the wildlife refuge
our guide's botanical eye
goes farther.

Drinking uncut milkweed,
wondering where some regal
daisy's left him.

Dreaming back at home,
I watch her syllables form
like gold ore,

far-off language calling
the way a mother calls from the past:
words, not only words.

*

Later the guide's
rambling, guessing the trees
are a green sky

or an ocean roof to a skunk
cabbage. Currents move the leaves
of *peregrina veronica*—

she won't keep still.
He calls birches a passing flotilla,
shucking seed and mulch.

Ivy groundlings root
for an angel of maple to change
in the fall to fire.

And back in my own house's darkness
a painted trillium beckons.
She tells me without

speaking, You're my Zeus:
rain!

*

Now the guide's chuckling.
No one wants a swamp naturally.

But this one's dry in August.
Thousands of blue-eyed berries
gaze for a while—
then blink in the dust.

At three a.m. in my own place
I'm dozing poorly,
trying to surface—

a black-eyed susan pulls
me down and under
states it: Call me a witch:

I'll wind your sheet with my own
gold and chocolate.

Barely audible music—
a song a boy remembers
that helped him once to face
the whole of sleep.

*

The guide's found a cremation.
All this understory's gone,
and still a bird's

trying to tend
what looks like an oven.
She crawls inside as if to die,

and nests instead.
Raising sorry cheeps in a week:
in a month they'll have to fly
from the ground up.

That night I'm trying to follow
a sweet cicely's hints:
Keep your own knowledge—

a ram composed of suns,
mountains lit like tapers.

Keep my knowledge too—
your friends are a leave's veins,
caterpillar prey.

Buried in living graves,
they amble back with strange under-
stories. Imagine

going down a hungry
bug's belly and emerging
wingtip.

THE FIVE

They spoke the most silent words. They were looking at the
olive trees on the hills opposite;
lower down were the vineyards, the bell tower, the
demolished houses.

They sought to share justly their glances, their words. One
of them

still held the rod of the ancient diviner. Another
had the composure of death. Ever so often he moved
a few pebbles on the earth with the edge of his shoe. The
third said

“Whatever is passed over in silence, sunk deep in time, also
finds a way

to exist in some other, truer reality—
docile, seemingly, but inexhaustible, nevertheless.” The
fourth kept silent. The fifth said,

“What’s the use of excavations and discoveries? The gains
are brief,

both for the merchant and the ship owner. Even briefer are
those for the hero.” And suddenly

he clapped his hands as if applauding someone,
chased away the small bird, watched it disappear behind
the rocks,

then bent down, leant his beard on his naked knees,
and smiled, alone. The other four buried in the earth
the large red fish with its golden fins.

Athens, 7-16-75

Yannis Ritsos

*Translated from the modern Greek by
Kimon Friar and Kostas Myrsiades*

A DREAM OF TWO ZEROS

Our two Japanese gardeners
looking older than I by years
but probably the same age since I
too am a relic of World War II
were working in their off-hours
and unknown to us in the big shed
by the flat field behind the house
they somehow had turned into an air strip
with crisp mowed grass all around
a spare-branched plum tree at one end
whose fallen blossoms trailed
eastward marking the wind

Anyway on Sundays and at night
they busied themselves for years
assembling two old Zeros from spare parts
that came from God knows where
until at last they had two planes
crouched under the canopy of bird netting
squat powerful hunkered
quietly over their low wings

At the same time we became aware
of all this The Authorities
moved in and the two gardeners
ran for their planes tattered
flying suits and helmet straps
flapping then the slower one
Lt. Matsumi turned back to block
pursuit and we tried to help him

The other one whom we never even knew
by name got away circling the field
once and wagging his wings
setting out due west dead reckoning
for Tokyo which everyone thought strange
since he only had fuel for two hours

Lt. Matsumi was captured and when
I sleep now I try to find him but
The Authorities keep moving him
from dream to dream while I claim that
being in my dream first he had
diplomatic immunity or asylum anyway

Robert M. Chute

**A SCARED KID WITH A KNIFE
THREATENS AN OLD MAN**

Put away that knife fella
you picked the wrong customer
I was a butcher for fifty years
dismembered animals for a living
could slip a blade through your joints
drop all four limbs in a pile
without nicking a bone
ruin your love life
skin you in about a minute
strip a tendon from your leg
to bundle the pieces together

Here
you're holding it wrong
let me show you how to use it
it's a dark alley
no one will hear.

David P. Brunet

CRIBBAGE WITH MY FATHER

“Fifteen-two and a pair is . . .”

“Four. And go,”
my father said, stabbing
my pegs in the walnut board.

I was much
too slow for him: im-
patiently he leap-
frogged points for both of us,

choosing my books,
picking my suits;
he made small maps to guide me
to the butcher shop.

We played for pennies, skunk
paid double, double-skunk paid
God knows what,
I can't ask my father that.

In the beginning,
he never let me pay. We played,
he said, “for blood.” Later,
I never let him win.

Donald Lawder