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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