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MUSICAL GIRLS

The most complete set of musical instruments yet discovered occupied two sides of the "music room" in the tomb of the Marquis I of the petty state of Tseng. It contained sixty-five two-tone bells, thirty-two stone chimes, zithers, pipes, a drum, and in a separate room the remains of twenty-one girls.

The Arts of China, Michael Sullivan

Each one of you was distinct
in tone and timbre. Names I forget,
or dates when you came to play,
but I am a connoisseur of eyes and hips,
pitch of sighs blown over the ear.
If I tired and lay alone,
I summoned my memories one by one
like the struck and echoing bell.
You harped shapes, slender reeds
for the wind of my lust,
forgive me for knowing each so well
I could not dream of life after death
without you. In the next room
you will sing for a while,
mourning my absence.

T. Alan Broughton

HIGHWIRE

Reminds me of the worst circus I ever saw
the Bigleoni in Saint Louis
with only a couple talents in the show
to spin dishes juggle sway on the trapeze
and dash backstage to change their names and clothes
while the mushmouth ringmaster blathers
and one thin clown squirts us and pops balloons
and my kids hatch some monster bellyaches
on cotton candy peanuts and the like
and start pulling big stage yawns
at which point it's way past time to go
when there's a fanfare and out stumbles
this pudgy little guy
in a red cape and tight tights
and a couple days' growth a whisker
looking a bit irate
like he just woke up with a porcupine
and none too pleased at the thin crowd
as he climbs to the highwire
through a brassy offkey flourish

and who knows what he's thinking
maybe about his shrunken underwear
but the spotlight wobbles up
and steadies and he's on

and the kids stop groaning a minute
as he fires up a motorcycle
that smokes and stutters badly
painted all the same red as his clothes
and I think there's nothing to this
fool running rims on a tightrope
and instead of handlebars
a twenty-five foot balance pole
and I'm tired as he is calling this a show

when he shoves off
and gets halfway out there
and the stuttering little red thing up and dies

and there he is
sixty feet off a cement floor
with a flimsy little net
he could break right through
with all this extra weight

astraddle the problem
in a skintight devil suit
onstage and no getting back
out where it's put up or shut up

at first they try to bluff it through
the band gives him a ragged buildup
and all three spotlights search him out

until we see the sweat begin to pop
as he fiddles with the gas and choke
and finally waves them off

and my palms are itching and burning
my throat bone dry
as he rises on his toes
and swings his weight down
to kickstart it
and it sulks and coughs
and the pole wows like a monster bowtie
and he wobbles and practically dives off
this teeny thing he never gave a damn about

and twice it catches twice it dies
in dead silence
even the peanut vendors still for once
then his face lets go the anger
and gets wondering and round
as he puzzles through it
and on the third try coaxes
it to hang on for a minute

and as he revs and warms it
in no hurry now
he scans us all from way up there
and so help me I can see
the scowl climb back aboard him

and burn the clutch
and ride the twenty feet or so
then slide down the rope exhausted
and stomp off not even bowing
to our feverish applause

Paul C. Hunter

SHAKER VILLAGE: RECENT PHOTOGRAPHS

Buildings cluster, spill down hill.
Wood, granite, brick, post-and-beam.
House, museum, store and barn. Bread,
brooms, shadowed paneled wood.

Of course the camera seeks
plain planed surfaces, straight
clean lines — but curved
confusion is nowhere evident.

Two wooden wash tubs, an ancient
straw and dried-flower wreath. Upright
piano shawled and silent underneath
stenciled frieze of leaves.

Neat stacks of music books recall
inspired simplicity in song. Sister Ann's
tombstone leans against a wall. Three states
and two centuries from her grave.

Sister Mildred at her desk. She writes
"What God has made alive will not
stay buried." At her side, Joyous, the canary,
caged and celibate, still sings.

Robert M. Chute

Exhibit of photographs by Jere De Waters (1988) of the New Gloucester,
Maine Colony.

Sister Ann Lee died in Watertown, NY, in 1784.

Quote is from Sister Mildred Barker (1967).

Two Poems

WHAT SALTPETER MEANT

“ . . . part of a small and mineralogically
unimportant group . . . ” *Peterson's*

Something you'd step on and not notice.
A crust found in caves.
Near heat it explodes and burns.
Was used as gunpowder
in the Civil War and War of 1812.
No mention

 of its other power,
the one I thought they had made up,
the boys in the back, those ninth grade bullies,
who whispered and then laughed,
as though it existed only in their jokes,
a dust they threatened to sprinkle
on each other's lunch.

They never took home their science books.
There was nothing on earth anyone could teach them,
no rule that hadn't been made for them to break.
What they knew ran inside them, a deep red.

Maybe it was parents — the way their mothers
put down plates of food each night,
their fathers fell asleep on the couch —
as if not only prisoners but all adults
had been made to eat a substance
that turned them flat and gray.

Where the boys were was uneasiness,
as though a bee were loose in the room.
Their way of sitting still was like idling at a light,
hunched forward, ready to let out the clutch.
A cough, the rub of denim, crumpled paper —
any sound they made sent out a message.
Their boots could have kicked down the room.
I don't know why they never did.
At fifteen they were braver
than they would ever be again.

I smiled at their lawlessness,
but out in the schoolyard
when one of them asked me to
I wouldn't touch his body,
his hands smelling of metal.
He flung me away, as in a dance,
and laughed: Did I matter? Nothing did.
And walked away across the concrete,
the same boy who later stepped wrong near DaNang.
And the others, scattered now around the counties,
or still a mile from school,
their children in the classroom.
I can only guess.

This field guide

with its tables and precise tests,
its lucid inventories,
holds no trace of us.

THE TOPAZ

1. It was a simple accident.
My foot caught in a grate
as I was thinking of him,
but the bone didn't set correctly
and it had to be broken again.
I was months on crutches
and I still can't walk right.
Friends say they hardly notice,
but going down the street to mail a letter
I'm aware of something no one else is,
a small deformity.
2. I saw the damage on the X-ray,
a hairline crack
like the flaw in the topaz he gave me
a month before he left.
Sitting in the dark studying my foot,
the doctor spoke so softly
I thought his words could make me well.
In that warm room
he might have been my husband years ago,
but then the light went on
and comfort vanished,
replaced by white —
and we were just two people,
one professional, the other
shrunk to a child.
Seeing his sympathetic profile,
I knew I would confuse forever
one man with another,
draw close to strangers only.

3. What could I have done with such a gift?
A stone of cruelest blue.
I keep it in a box beside my wedding band worn thin.
Even with the lid closed I know it glows,
one cat's eye, cold and burning.
I take it out and place it on the table
beside his photograph.
No matter where I lie he isn't looking at me.
I tell myself he hasn't left.
He's missing, his plane shot down.
One day he'll walk out of the jungle,
gaunt and fluent in a foreign language,
asking for me, my name on his tongue before *water*.

Helena Minton

Eight Poems

BATS/FRAGMENTS FROM A SLIDE SHOW SCRIPT

"Bats are commonly considered pests, but in fact they are not such unfriendly creatures in that they are effective at reducing mosquito and gnat populations in the yard."

Garden Catalog Advertisement Copy
for Bat Houses

"He will ponder his own loneliness He is a moviegoer, though of course he does not go to movies."

The Moviegoer, Walker Percy

Bats make avoidance
loving. Because bats can't touch down
for long; this
is not an inadequacy.
Bats learn
to keep their own company
over chimneys at dusk,
although it's true bats
make little locating cries
of help,
which, knowing the apprehensive nature of bats,
of course
cannot be heard.

If you look at bats' cries
on spectrograph grids,
you can see the echoes bats make
as wisps
returning to the bats
the shapes
of all the objects
their voices
have touched.

They explain why bats learn
to either sleep or be
in the air
constantly touching
the vast alphabet of shapes
why love, for bats,
is an out of range fix,
a delayed reality
of some tenderness.

Bats,
though admirable,
keep themselves
far away from the momentary world ***
living neither for the dark
nor for the light. ***

Bats sleep upside down
until the night breeze
ruffles the fur of their soft ears ***
and the stars strung among branches
call to them hello hello
out of another loneliness.

[Asterisks mark places where an electronic tone would sound
to indicate a slide must be changed.]

SPECTROGRAPH*

"It is like a grandmother. It is ancient.
It is a busybody."

from a poem by Tanya, age 10

It smells like pepper
and graphite.

It smells like birds in a wooden box.
It contains birds on wires.

Inside it are black and white photographs
of the Himalayas.

Inside it is a mass.
It smells like cigars.

Its needle sweeps back and forth
like boulevard treetops before rain.

It wants to ring like clocks.
It wants to touch a bell.

It has a bee in it.

Under lights
it confesses.

What does it confess?
Blue trees returning to silence.

What does it confess?
Some fireflies which tune their lights
over roses.

What does it confess?
Opposites of lies.

What does it tell us?
Whales' apologies
the tubas play.

* A spectrograph is an instrument (first built in 1882) which disperses sound waves into a spectrum which is then photographed or mapped. It creates charts of sounds we can and cannot hear (such as those a bat or dolphin would make.)

SEA ANEMONE

Late at night when my brother watches,
the video ocean documentaries,
he fixes the color dials
until the sea anemone,
gelatinous and polyped,
is the green of scorpions
the moon has touched, is a 007
Russian border ice green.
In my brother's black apartment
there is the emanating screen,
there is the anemone
with its promise of raptures—
tensile, erotic and fluid
with sleep.
And there are, one by one,
the anemone's tiny silver victims,
which, drugged and aroused,
drifting out of meaning,
give over their bodies.
It is then my brother (his mind
heavy, 100 proof)
goes with them
into sleep,
into the Thorazine calm
and order of the sea.

“Fig. 20. *Emotional reactions to separation measured by electronic apparatus.* The doctors measure muscle tension of a dog after it has been placed alone in a strange room. Most dogs show emotional distress in such situations, some breeds outwardly and some only in their internal reactions.”

John Paul Scott, *Animal Behavior*

BARKLESS DOG'S EMOTIONAL REACTION TO ABANDONMENT MEASURED BY APPARATUS

It is a 1953 photograph
of a laboratory and
through an observation window there
is a room a net of wires
and probes and a barkless dog
standing perfectly still.

The dog's eyes are
terribly sad looking but that's
not the proof.

You want to say

*Hey, guy, your allelomimetic
behavior is just fine let me unplug
everything this and this.*

But between you and the dog
is the experimenter
who sits at a master panel
of knobs I guess
turning up abandonment
and barking and biting
despair besides

the dog has already been in there
abandoned for years, all the years
it took years to say to you
simply by its stillness
(and as I said the sadness in its eyes)
all that you will never
allow yourself to say.

Fig. 21. *Lasbley jumping apparatus*. There are two openings in the board in front of the mouse. At first its platform is pushed close so that it can walk through and get food. Then the platform is moved back so that the mouse has to jump.

MOUSE DISCRIMINATING BETWEEN TWO CARDS

In order to determine whether or not mice can read, a mouse has been placed on a tall platform six inches before a board wall in which there are two doors: One of the doors is a false door, and one is real. (Each is marked either x or o.) If the mouse picks the correct door and leaps through it, the mouse reaches an opposite platform on which a capsule marked in large letters "FOOD" has been placed. If the mouse leaps to the wrong or trompe d'oeil door, it smashes its face on the "door" and then falls to the ground.

It is interesting that the illustrator of this experiment has intended to prepare for the reader an overview, so that the reader might see all that the mouse cannot. Indeed, there is the mouse on its platform, conscientious and poised to leap, the board wall with the two doors, each with its marked flap, and the platform on the other side on which a capsule marked "FOOD" has been placed.

But, despite the seemingly omniscient perspective of the reader, the reader studying this illustration becomes aware on some unconscious level that he himself is not able to determine which of the doors is the false door. And that he must solve the same problem which confronts the mouse. It is precisely at this moment of subconscious understanding that the reader becomes somehow concerned about the mouse's predicament. The reader feels a vague, perhaps inexplicable anxiety — and wants to know whether or not the mouse will smash its face on the wall. Will the mouse reach the capsule marked FOOD? Will the mouse like its FOOD? What kind of FOOD is in the capsule, anyway? Mashed potatoes? Peas?

THE MAN AFRAID: A FABLE

The man afraid of stars was never one
to barbecue chicken on his patio
because he was so afraid of the stars!
Once his father took him to see
a Rocky Mountain National Forest
United States Observatory
and through a marvelous copper telescope
high above a sea of pines,
he observed the pink complexions of the stars.
Surely they were filled
with many terrible enemies.
He was never quite the same after that.

He wore magnificent helmets camouflaged
with burstings of leaf;
to protect his eyes from the activities
of the stars he wore scientific lenses.
He bought a map titled
in gold letters 'The Universe,'
and knew the stars so well —
in fact, he fell in love with them,
for they were very beautiful, if deadly.

In order to protect his house from noise
and blades of stars and other things,
he ordered from a catalog an iron roof
made in Pittsburgh, one which he could attach
to the little cottage he had built.

The day the roof arrived, the truck and crane,
he could hardly wait to get down to business!
He found his ladder, his hammer, his level,
his crowbar, his fishing pole (but that
was an accident), his drill and his glasses.
One by one, his neighbors gathered
on the lawn to watch him through the day,
but not through the night, as he steadily worked.
And when he had finished, he was proud of his roof,
but sure was glad when the job was done!

The Man's new roof was a heavy roof.
In fact, it was so very heavy his tiny house
could not hold it up for very long.
One night when the man afraid of stars
was sleeping soundly in his bed,
the roof fell in and killed him flat.
His last thought was that the big star,
the one star too big for his iron roof,
had fallen on him at last.
He'd often wondered if that star
wasn't out there somewhere.
He'd never known for sure but now he knew.

MANTA RAYS

(for JLP)

In the first documentaries we watched
on our first black and white t.v., it was
the slow flight
of mantas we most loved.

Tireless but deadly,
crossing not air
but seas, laden green,
and at a depth
we dared

not touch, not
even with the mind.

What they feed on is *some kind of lightning*.
Where they sleep is *where they move*
in a netherworld.

There was always the bottom
which the blue light did
not touch,
their skin not
ready for light; salt
was what they liked and as I said
the absence of sunlight.

(Stanza continued)

But what we seemed to know best
was the way they appeared
always alone
never in pairs like the dolphins
or whales that openly loved, not
like them at all.

The mantas were only this
moving for all eternity
away from
anything
they might really
touch.

They moved forever, forever
with a sense of
how much ground
there was to cover
and no one there
to measure it
to say *stop*
o.k. you can stop now.

THE HAT YOUR FATHER WORE

To put it on is to forgive him
nearly everything, bad taste,
his dying before you got there
if not the death itself.

You were over Mystic, adding yourself
to a Dewar's Profile: OCCUPATION: as usual,

not thinking of him, but like him
because of that, and also suspended

somehow or ascending. Now you enter
his green bedroom as one enters

a green chapel, try on his gloves —
they are deep and fragrant wells —

until you carry a big drink
into the yard of his house

to stand in the remembered shape
of the tall cedar, above its roots

which remain deep and intact, frozen
in place like photographed lightning.

You feel the cool depth of the rain
as a falling away of self or summer.

What you think of first is the doctor
you read about who says he came back

once from the dead, to say that dying
was like lifting off a ski jump
instantly blinded, except that the snow
is the light he meant
and what you consider is, well,
an effusion or warmth that is spoken of.
For your father, dying could not
have been so much like ski jumping
as much as having a vague sense
of some difference as when one crosses
a county line when most of what one knows
is two towns in one county
and where the humming tones of tires
on the roads will, with the surface, change,
causing even the body to change key.
There might be a shift in tone —
but with some added finality
from the minnow traps your father built,
because their wide trick openings narrow
so completely that the minnows
which pass through them cannot find
a way back, as some part of you
now cannot find its way back
to the present moment. Or some part of you
now cannot find the past.
And so you close your eyes — tight.
Because hats, skiing, minnows and gin
fit together, yet do not.
Because you are getting old. Suddenly
there are no lights, but hills' vague shapes.

And on highway 2 — far away from town —
your father stops his car so that you and he
can look up into a sky of falling stars.
And even though some cars are catching up,
he cuts the ignition, then the headlights
which fade softly in a dispensation,
causing your sadness to disperse
like dust at night upon the gravel roads,
floating and sinking in ghostly shapes.
Would you believe it?

The light years which must pass
before you could know this tiny rain
is because somewhere a terrifying
blustering sun has blown up.

Jane Poston

✱

Bells know this, they have so much room
till nothing is forgotten —from far away
the clear sound, weightless

filled with darkness —the dead
are at home there, their ears
are their mouths and a song sometimes sweet

sometimes my fist battering a great stone
—it's the song
stored under walls, recalls

as sometimes a nod, the slightest change
and covers the heart with ice
—you had clear eyes

—even your gentleness hasn't changed
struck by hammers this song
finds you easily —from so far off

our tears long ago lost their blood
go on weeping and the death
that lasts forever —we listen for sound

as if rain will come with the sound
mornings made, evenings made and once
we tried to fly by singing, sang
and bells were taking it all down.

Two Poems

OPENING THE LOCKS

In 1968, Dr. Ian Stevenson suggested that the old and the dying send him combination locks to be opened after their deaths through friends communicating with their spirits.

Immediately, Dr. Stevenson had takers,
New locks carefully boxed, laid in cotton
And tissue beside the names of the living
Who'd be willing to listen for spirits
They'd known to send the combinations,
And last week my father opened a safe
In his garage, repeating left 40, right 30,
Left 20, right 10, twice to zero and open,
A simple countdown to bonds and deeds
And a collection of coins. He had me
Write it down; he wasn't joking about
The lapse he thought I'd have, and neither
Was Stevenson when he directed the aging
To memorize their six numbers, giving them
Mnemonics for the dead: IN EDEN HEAVEN
NO HELL LIVING ANGELS. There's no sense
Forgetting, he said, no point in shouting
The wrong digits across time and space,
And some of us, at least, are teaching
Ourselves memory tricks, resurrection
Sentences like WE GO ON and WE LIVE
To make sure the locks we leave are opened.
One hundred twenty-five thousand to one
Are the odds, I've been told, in the paradise
Lottery. This week the odds are worse
To win 12 million dollars in Pennsylvania's
Jackpot, yet the lines to buy tickets
Curve through the mall, nothing, I think,
Like waiting to touch the mourning locks,
Attentive to the dead and the signals
They might be sending. And lately,

(Stanza continued)

Some of the survivors have gathered
To listen, hearing *four* or *forty*
Or far away traffic, twirling their dials
And tugging each Sargent and Greenleaf
Like a knot, like a sword in stone,
Cursing like the unchosen when they lose
The pick six of the afterlife. And there
Are times when all of us hear combinations
As we dress or dream, when the numbers
Seem to be chanted along waves of light,
The sequence simple as the mathematics
Of the nursery, the addition and subtraction
Of eat and sleep. Listen, listen, listen,
We tell ourselves, and expect, suddenly,
To hear tumblers, have something solved
In our lives; and then, driven, press
Our ears to the future, listening again
To hear a second voice, verification,
The start of all locks sliding free
As if each one is touched by eternity.

THE HOLLOW EARTH

I'm working a book of claims where records
Warm zero's boredom, where chapters debate
The first man to the pole, testing the tales
Of Peary, Cook, Byrd, and Schmidt, so many
Pages of lament for disputed truth,
So much grief for the returning from ice.
From war, I add; from belief, sitting on
A wall built to keep the Susquehanna
From occasionally killing. I love
The lines near its top: the first place crest
Of Agnes, the record for this decade,
The one to commemorate "thirty-six."
Behind me, there's an "Agnes if" red stripe

(Stanza continued)

Near the roof of a house, and I'm reading
That photographs from space have shown shadows
Near the poles, entrances, if you believe
The Hollow Earth Society, to huge
Holes to heaven missed by every pole dash.
Someone named Symmes made a map, asked Congress
To fund him north. He wanted to carry
Our flag down the tunnel, claim Inner Earth
For the U.S.; and Hitler, I learn next,
Believed in Symmes, stuck in a submarine
Under the South Pole ice according to
One more high water marker of the crazed.
He's directing this year's atrocities;
He's governing the South Hole while his sins
Rise like propellants, thinning the ozone.
Look, Tarzan found his way inside. He walked
Into Pellucidar before Hitler
Arrived to organize those cave men, strap
Weapons to those dinosaurs and turn one
More children's book to allegory like
Any secret place where we dream ourselves
Dark with death that cannot touch us. We dig
Our holes to China; we enter gold mines;
We lower ourselves into caves and work
The black labyrinth to the inside world.
Great Expectations, Columbine Crawl — now,
In Wyoming, there are cavers reaching
Records for depth, sliding against the snatch
Of velcro rock, slithering through a crack
Called The Grim Crawl of Death, willing to creep
One more cruel corridor to paradise.
Passage to India, Northwest Passage —
All of these myths we long for from inside
The ghost-land of our basements, of wide pipes
We can walk the water with, expecting
The road to Shamballah or an entrance
Guarded by a flaming sword, plunging toward
That land lit always by a central sun.

LETHE

- 1 To go back is to have forgotten
the names of the flowers,
though not their shapes and colors.
The hothouse words, spoken,
fall loose, unattached to any
blossom. *Impatiens* is just
impatience; embarrassment
is what I call the miniature
purple daisies that fold up at night,
even here, on my kitchen table.

- 2 And when the words come back they seem
all wrong, perverted, geranium
rhyming with cranium, or sounding
like Uranus. I bought one, coral
pink, having forgotten all of them
weren't red. Then your face surfaced
again, as if to rhyme, finally, with your name —
old garden tool, lost for a decade.
The tears surprised me, blurring the colors
somebody clipped and set in water.

Two Poems

EULA AND APRIL

The woman named for praise
and her dog for rainy weather
take their weary looks from the sky
clouding over a crumbling town.

They cross the tracks every day,
stepping over holes in the road
where rainwater collects a shallow
measure of their unhappiness.

They belong to the buildings
they walk between. Like wood
that swells and rubs the jamb
or green shades pulled against the weak
light they travel in their tracks.
She talks to the dog: clouds and rain,
the afternoon empty — her syllables
fatigue in the wet wool of her coat,
“I don’t know, no, I don’t think so. No.”

DRAFT ANIMALS

Wet snowflakes fall all day, staging
a burlesque in the leaves
that have held on too long
and flap a last dance in the flurry.
A man drives a dirt road
while his mother lies waiting
in Intensive Care, watching the window
as oxygen pushes aside
the wet litter in her lungs.
The room's white light exaggerates
her condition, pulls her skin
and pushes her arms in a weak contest.
In her mind she breaks
through the window.

He closes the distance between them,
coming through the storm that can't
empty the sky of ash. She
has lost four children in the past.
He shifts down into the ruts
miles away, the radio clearing
his head, to deliver order from abstraction
like blood that brings more than color
to the surface of her skin.

She wants an explanation
that will keep her alive.
A lie, a sublimation
of the knuckled facts to mean
she'll neither age nor die.
She wants to be told she cannot
be skimmed from the landscape
like a vanishing squall, that she
is rooted in eternity.

Beyond the window she walks
down the road into a dream
that fills like an open grave
catching melt water. Her brother's hand
breaks the surface, passing on
a written message that dissolves.
Decades of silence and a deep
loathing will last on between them
like the high polish of inheritance
securely wrapped and hidden from the light.

Her son shifts around the corner,
the radio briefing him on investments
he can't understand, the abstraction
of new paper money meeting the white-noise
of snow through the birch leaves. He fills
in the distance from pulp standing
as trees in a storm to solid gold.
Worth is the word he is looking for,
his mother's life in context
that includes all the deaths and
boy-proof dishes, Bakelite
outlasting four sons.
It should include the gallons
of clorox that solved her problems
and mysterious letters, the black power
of an unknown woman who tracks her down
with threats and wishes, old news
clippings of her children's births.
He will tell his mother to remember
who she is.

Her fear of gathered drapes closing around
her bed comes in waves, swamping her
like a sheer film of dryness
that hits the white sheets
and her claustrophobic floating
carries her between galaxies

(Stanza continued)

in her idea of death. Driving in her direction
her son hits the Bilevel button and
late winter surrounds him
like a shower of stars.

When he makes the turn by the boulder
painted with a GOD acrostic he stops.
Two white horses tower over the car
and span the road, back to back. He sits
and the image doesn't waver or fade.
The rush of air slows inside the car —
his mother is out of danger or
beyond hope, and the horses don't move.
The snow shags their eyelids, their silence
whitens the storm. His mother tells him,
her voice stronger when he arrives late,
that time slowed down in its flow
to the point where spirits congeal
in muscled form. The draft animals
turned broadside into the road,
is what he remembers, but he sees how,
in profile with one eye apiece,
they could have stood between
both worlds. But his mother
has her mind made up, says no,
they were there, but just spirits waiting
for winter to end, equal to nothing.

Audrey Bohanan

Three Poems by Kisang

WHAT BLIGHT

平生에 밋을 님을 글러 무삼 病들손가
 時時로 相思心은 지기항는 타시로다
 두어라 알들헌 이 心情을 님이 어이

What blight is this eating into my desire
 for a man, for whose vows I pledged my life?
 There are times when thinking on my
 thinking of him lets me read the signs.

Not a word to him. Who am I
 to show him what hides in his desire?

Mae-wha

IRON, WE WERE TOLD

鐵(철)을 鐵이라거든 무쇠 錫鐵(석철)만 여겼더니
 다시 보니 正鐵(정철)일시 的實(적실)하다
 마침내 골플무 있더니 녹여 볼까 하노라

Iron, we were told; iron had arrived again.
 Sure, I remembered brittle pig iron,
 but your close, cold surface told me iron
 again that was hammered and annealed.

This time I will use a furnace of earth, bellows
 of such breath you will not withstand the fire.

Jin-ock

LET MY CASSIA BOAT

綠楊紅蓼邊 (녹양 홍료변)에 桂舟(계주)를 느저 매고
 日暮江山(일모 강산)에 건널 이 하도 할샤
 어즈버 順風(순풍)을 만나거든 혼자 건너 가리라

Let my cassia boat be tied:
 this bank has green willows and red grass,
 and this is the time of the sun leaving
 the mountain and river the many push to cross.

When a wind comes that I would be part of,
 then I shall take my boat across.

Kae-ju

Translated by Constantine Contogenis and Wolhee Choe

These are translations of sixteenth-century Korean poetry in the *sijo* form, written by *kisang* (Korean geisha) who maintained a tradition of love poetry written exclusively by women. The *kisang* were a sub-group of the *kinryo*, the only class of women allowed an education during most of Korea's history. This entire group of educated women were considered social outcasts. A number of *kisang* attained an almost unique Korean blend of emotional freedom, ironic perspective, and mastery of poetic technique (especially of the *sijo* — one of the most popular and sophisticated of Korean poetic forms, and one that has been written by both sexes).

MOTHER AND SON

- i You keep a picture
in your wallet.
I am three and scrawny.
You are holding me by the armpits
stretched in front of you
like a prized tuna.
Someone once told you
that black and white couples
were not good for anything
but making pretty babies.
- ii Sunday early
you and I sit in the living room
together.
Rectangles of newspaper
collage the floor.
The morning sun winks
into the room and for a moment
my eye registers your body
the sudden light
and the pale ankles
crossed on the green carpet.

- iii I still like to stir your coffee. It
is the color
of my hand.
I divide the steam
with my fingers, the heat
is so familiar against my face,
original,
between us,
the breath.

W. Michael Greene

CROW SHOUTS AT THE GAME FROM THE SIDELINES

rubbing in the score—Cah! Cah! Cah! —
like a tireless coach striding up and down; winning
is life, period. This awkward effigy is stuffed
full of filthy rags, grubs, screaming nestlings, blood
runny eggs, beetle's mashed purple fingernail carapace,
the drooling gumminess of spilled icecream, mouse gobbets.
Crow is nature's busy signal — Cah! Cah! Cah! —
when the first groggy householders are trying to get
through to the birds on hold singing on the telephone lines.
He's the American tourist of the bird world,
brash, overdressed in black tie at 6 a.m., elbowing
his way up to the head table, calling everybody he meets
by the same gauche nickname, leaving his calling card
on windshields, a grandstanding Bronx rooster crowing
Cah! Cah! Cah! to a fellow Yank swank in shiny evening
clothes swaggering in after guiding his private aircraft
to a bumpy landing at curbside.

Marty Walsh

Two Poems

SUMMER JOBS

for JFM

He dreamed, all those summers while he
Inventoried toothpaste, rang up
Cash, stacked canned tuna,
Misted lettuce, of a job

Underwater, diving for abalone,
Slipping fluid and soundless
Through veering banks of fish
Into the dark canyons of weight where,

Under ledges, hid moray eels,
Octopi, and the closed shell lips
That, pried open, revealed
Mother-of-pearl the color of morning

And the muscle like a tongue that,
Pounded thin, would cover a plate,
More costly than steak — as today
He dreams, while stacking books,

Ordering memory chips,
Studying children's language loss,
Of slipping into that dark flow
Of thought where, hidden in some crevice,

Might flash the brief luster,
The taste unlike any other,
Of a catch that, delicately cooked,
Could startle a tongue into speech.

HAYSTACKS AT SUNSET

after Monet

For the child who all day watches
The window of light on the dark wall,
Patches of shadow and color starting up
Wherever she looks; for the one
At the window who traces the drops
That fatten, strike, and repeat their tracks;
For the one who fingers for hours
Her mother's hair, stroking over and over
Its wiry silk — it must be the way it is for us
Lost in the edges of orange and purple,
Blue, red, streaks falling and changing
In the long moment before we discover
Stubble of straw in the field
Or eyes in the other's face.

R.S. Chapman

Two Poems

WHAT IT MEANS

I take the spool of black thread and
the package of needles, after the late news,
and mend the armpit hole in your T shirt.
I'd rather be reading, taking a bath,
I'd rather be doing anything else.
Yet I'm holding your stench —
the shirt you've worn
outside, all day, under the car hood —
the sweat-thick cotton gumming my fingers.
The animal smell of your body
quicken some dark inner current —
your scent as vital, as known to me
as the heated smell of my own crotch.
And what it means is
I sew for a man, for the first time.
I darn at midnight, alone
with the taut dry hiss of the thread
as I pull tiny stitches tight.
It means I worry if the seams are too thick
they'll chafe you or perhaps they'll unravel.
It means I go back — basting, reinforcing.
I tie the knot four times if I have to.
I bite off the thread so close
I can taste the salt.
I take you to my lips. I breathe.

BREASTS

By summer camp they already hung heavy.
I could hold Marlboro packs, no hands.
I didn't know about sex appeal
or the allure of cleavage —
just that my bunkmates
were prancing through Color War
sleek as ponies
while I chugged through dance
and volleyball practice
armored in training bras.
Strapped in, strapped down,
I carried the weight
of my breasts close to my body,
like secrets.

Secrets run in the family.
My grandmother's starched
Victorian blouses
hid one size B cup
filled with a diaper.
She told us
she'd been hit by a baseball,
but I knew better.
I stared at her low, modest chest.
As she pinned sheets on the line,
darned socks, fried okra,
I tried to guess
which breast had died.

But now as the nurse lifts me
one at a time
to a steel X-ray plate
and my neck is stretched
like a woman in the stocks,
as the air and my flesh
and the cold white room
merge in a metal scream,

(Stanza continued)

I rage with love
for my languid breasts —
how they swing and slap,
heavy beneath T shirts,
how they sweat on a hot day
like gently chilled goblets —
for the rose-brown nipples
softer than birds' wings
that pucker into tiny ancient faces
with cold and desire.

Rynn Williams