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CutBank

Spring/Summer 1978

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CutBank is now indexed in The Access Index to Little Magazines, and is available on microfilm from Gaylord Bros., Inc., P.O. Box 61, Syracuse, New York 13201.

CutBank is published twice a year, in fall and spring, and is funded by the Associated Students of the University of Montana. Subscriptions: $3.50/year, $6.50/2 years. All correspondence should be sent to CutBank, c/o Department of English, University of Montana, Missoula, Montana 59812. Unsolicited manuscripts are encouraged but must include a self-addressed, stamped envelope.

Copies of back issues are still available. See back pages for further information. Numbers 1 and 3-9 are available in a set for $12.00.

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Publication of this magazine has been made possible, in part, by a grant from the Coordinating Council of Literary Magazines, for whose support the editors are grateful.
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APPROACHING THE SUMMER SOLSTICE
for Helen

1
Stars have returned
to positions we're
familiar with.
This is night
when only beams
beneath the plaster
keep the sky
from breaking in.

Today we staked tomatoes.
The run-off from the river
has been good fertilizer.
The water gets deeper
and blacker with sun.
Reflection of form:
eyes, nose, shoulder, calf
return without a ripple.

Now the neighborhood idiot
prowls the banks
for young girls.
What is brown besides
your eyes
is a home for mollusks.

2
You'll wait for birds
or even light
to wrestle my arms loose
and tell me
you've dreamt me
back to water,
a scaleless creation,
slimy, eel-like
without vertebrae,
with eyes only large enough
to see shifts in light.

3
The season’s without center;
too early for cicada
too late for tulip,
the rose still spinning
inside itself.

*

I come to ask why the heartwood
of the birch
tightens in the wind,
why on this edge of land
there is only a rubble of moss
and bent necks of weed
sucking water
from the center of rock.

I come to a point
close enough to see
the eye of a gull,
to an edge where the length
of my arms
and the span of my back
lose their measure
and the imaginary arc
between earth and sun
disappears.

4
The retina
finds the sharp rock,
the sea sends the sun
back through a choroid
and loses all current.

The pulse of heart
moves to the throat
expands to the jugular
and rises behind the eyes.

*

For a moment
even cormorants are still,
their foot scrawl
dissolving without a scratch.

I let water in,
take the sharpest shell
past the soft tissue.
I walk with a slow wind
and hear only names return—
a town, a woman
a bush that gives berries;
the sounds die three waves out.

In this air
flat rock glistens,
gulls swoop for fish
waves rise white off black;
my legs turn to weed

what I learn from the first fish
is how the fin yields
to a change of current,
how the color on the underside
reflects a tint of coral.

5
When there is wind again
land is not easy.
Flies crawl the dead crab
a weak wave cleans the last meat
from the mussel

algae change color
the first birds move
without sound

it's the inner ear that hears
the sand breathe.

6
This land is not as you said,
rocks jutting high above water
a sun turning the sea to a bed of diamonds
and one woman finding me
still on the sand,
foam sifting my flesh
back to bottom.

* 

On this beach
the sun will be overhead soon;
bring enough vegetables for the long haul.
Bring the greens
that can stand the heat,
rhubarb because it grows
in sand
carrot and potato because they know
where the earth is cool
and can find water
without light.

7
I'll wake you before
my ears have recovered
from the pressure change,
before my eyes have returned
to white
and salt has left my neck.

*

In this moment before the eye
accepts darkness
and a wind through a low shrub
leaves the skin silent

I'll tell you that scales dissolve
at dark bottom
and return with coral in the shoal
and even a stream
the width of my foot
becomes a current.
FACING THE REMAINS

I wake to tell you
the cows have returned to the roadside,
the flax is like silk
around the ankles of planters.
I dreamt the carcass of our horse
picked clean by buzzards
glistened in the late sun.
The wind was yellow
and farms on the far hill
returned to shadows.
The hills were low and vacant;
light waned to a single line
and left us shivering to our thighs.

It was not the carcass
but the absence of birds
that left you hands limp.
If there had been one crow
to accuse, one distant vulture
circling in the haze,
I could have consoled you.
As it was the two of us
stood there
in the early corn
motionless and separate
in the night air.
THE PEASANT DANCE

A Brueghel Painting

You can not see me.
I am standing behind the man
who is painting a festival
of villagers
that have rigor mortis
from lifting their feet
in the same position
and may stay rigid
for hundreds of years.

Still wondering
when they might
stop dancing, the villagers
look apprehensive
as a first kiss
the stable boy
is trying to give
his sweetheart.

Everyone is tired
of the repetitious
farmer playing
a drunken bagpipe tune,
but are polite
and do not show
their disgust.

Two drinkers quarrel
finding out they have
slept with each other's wife.
The first stretches both arms out
asking forgiveness. The second
raises one hand
blessing him. For their sin,
the wives have shrunken
to the size of dwarfs.
The women are smaller
than the table. In an hour,
they will completely disappear.
Already tired of the irises,
reading late, leaves, night no longer
brings anything but the dog walking
through the rooms. You always
think it is something out there
like the heat so bad this April so
you blame it on no spring, imagine
your pine has never scratched the window,
pavement always dry, and then there is
always: it is night that you think this way.
At 3:37 you remember those numbers
mean something, but morning’s such
a long way off you cannot
fully remember, because you only imagine
the birds, people next door who went
to sleep early and who still sleep.
Their dreams include rain in the night.
Now you blame it on fear. And that’s why
when it rains twoards morning you remember
you expected it for April, still awake,
wishing you could blame something else,
even yourself for trying to go back
into a dream. But you haven’t.
CONFIDENCE

At night when you are sleeping,
a lineman dripping with tools
he is swinging up on your roof,
behind swollen gloves like a thief to his treasure
prying out the wealth of lard, the light
that the wind blew under your shingles,
then goes running off to feast
on it as good as a goose-fat sandwich,
crouched under your neighbor’s acacia bush.
that is what the salesman sees
flaring in the blank window of his train,
a yellow pinprick off in the freight yards
of the early morning, or a wan girl flying
to her wedding on an airliner, an
oil well, a man in a raincoat, a porcupine
exploding in the drizzle far below in the woods,
the saintly light you yearn toward for years
turning the pages of a book.
never mind, there’s plenty where
that came from, a dawn coming up in an aquarium,
the warm ocean
of ambergris pressing behind the globes of your eyes,
with which like a paraphysicist full of confidence
you hold the dead watch and it starts,
one leg up before the bewildered audience,
or out for a walk bend the rods in lovers’ hearts.
CALIFORNIA

Years ago the suspicious camels headed north toward the land bridge, snarling back over their shoulders at the dawn like a shoe on fire rising out of the jungle. in China they took up farming, hefting the clumsy tools, cheered by the horses big as toy balloons that had followed them, then bored trudged on across the Gran Desierto, their thin women wearing bandannas, lips pulled back against the dust and eyed far off by the Mongols who remembered a taste like flaked fish, a soft light in the backs of their throats, but finally reached the cities of Europe as true as the pictures in art books, went into business selling flowers from stalls in the perpetual shadows of cathedrals, but were finally caught by the gendarmes because of their big eyes and leather noses, their bulimia for eating apples whole, were sent across the sea on overloaded boats, beaten each day by the French officers, where stepping ashore they were set loose to wander through the forests hunted by the painted Algonquins, until they reached the feast of the plains, and beyond them the desert, where they stopped, became palm trees, who though looking at their shadows knew they didn’t look like them spread one by one across the sand, westward to the coast, the hillside homes of California.
THERE ARE NO MASTERPIECES

in Manning, South Dakota.
Only Norwegian boys singing
in schoolyards
& this year’s Polish refugee
behind her cousin’s lace curtains
waiting for the ice cream man.
Sunday, & I follow the tracks
that yawn toward Dry Wall,
strong lines of rust
on prairies. I lay 10 pennies
on the rails; pick them,
flat & faceless, from the gravel.

The 20th week Jimmie is gone
he writes: “I am seeing the world.
My life was one long sleep. I was dying
in it.” The boy the recruiters got to
first, writes me poems
of water & Mexican whores.
I want to read them
to strangers on the street.

In Manning, South Dakota
we have one buffalo, the hills here—
black only by night. Girls follow
boys to ball games. My sister
is marrying a sailor. I will sign
this later, as always.
KADDISH FOR A DEAD CHILD

You sing this song
one more time
for wild animals stalled
in the alley, waiting,
baying at trees. Night lights
fall to their shoulders,
a tiger moans with a star
lodged in his back.

September and I wear red again.
The nights are back.
You rush in from full moons
a wolf from the fire.
We count each moon.
Like how many pears
from the tree, loaves
on the rack? Hills march
across the night,
their luminous dark pillows.

Four mornings in a row you wake
at seven. You sail the bed
through chairs and tables.
Your bear is under the bed.
Pick it up. Put it away.
Fold your days against your nights.

Gone are funeral weeds for tigers.
They kill deer at my door.
Always a fist of invitations.
Birthday parties, a hay ride.
White flowing into red,
There ought to be jungles
for people like us.
I have looked at her now
two years at lunch wearing
the pale yellow uniform.
On certain days I change
her clothes. She's better off
not knowing how it feels
to own one smart tweed.
The picture I want would shatter
space between us. It is better
to paint her at home, forget
the professors, the students
waiting in line. She is the wife
of a streetcar conductor
or a sheepherder. She covers
her head with black silk
for mass. She doesn't smile
but I would give her strong teeth
at night, shadow deep veins
for making love. She doesn't know
I exist. I sketch in the shape
of things and leave. I eat
at other counters. I compare notes.
There is no one else like her.
A man orders apple pie. His eye
is too pale to work in her face.
I search for good lines at coffee
breaks, study texture and color
like maps that direct me to the end
of day where the canvas stretches
and only the outline is sure.
Bill Haas slumped down in the dog's chair, the worn, over-stuffed chair in the far corner of my grandmother's dining room. My grandmother's obese beagle slept there at night, her hollow, whistling dog-snores echoing my grandmother's from the next room. But everyone else avoided those flea-infested cushions, everyone except Bill who would sit there on a late afternoon, cross one ankle over his knee and lug the beagle up on his lap while he talked to my grandmother who busied herself in the kitchen.

"Going to be a dry fall," Bill said in a loud voice. He and my grandmother were both in their seventies, both deaf.

"Mmuph," my grandmother agreed as she dumped another cup of flour in her bowl, the white dust rising up, circling her elbows. She always seemed a little irritated with Bill and only looked at him from the far corner of her eyes. She had never said so, but I knew she didn't want me too close to him, but I had always liked him. He had whittled a slingshot for me once from an old branch and if you knocked at his back door, he might give you a sip from his beer can. He had never married, never really had a steady job, having spent the last thirty years of his life caring for his invalid parents. When they died, he stayed in their house, a small white frame house across the street from ours that still had neither indoor plumbing nor hot and cold running water. Bill did odd jobs around the neighborhood now and sometimes in the fall, drove outside town and helped a farmer with the harvesting.

I brought Bill a mug of coffee from the kitchen and as I handed it to him, his rough calloused hands brushed mine for an instant.

"Thanks," he said and opened his mouth wide. He had no teeth and when he spoke, his cheeks drew into the center of his face like the folds of an old squeeze box and the syllables of his thick Prussian accent slid together and fell from his mouth with long stale puffs of breath. His face was covered with stubble and his chin sank down on his chest and touched the edge of his bib-overalls that smelled of urine and alcohol.

I sat on one of the straight-back dining room chairs next to the fireplace, my feet not touching the floor, and watched him take long, hard gulps from the coffee mug with his right hand and with his left,
finger the metal edges of a daguerreotype. He ran the metal around
the tips of his fingers and flicked away some of the black dirt from
under his thumb nail. “Charley,” he said when he looked down at the
picture. He had taken it from the mantle in the dining room where,
during the past few weeks, more and more of these pictures had begun
to appear. They were of my grandmother’s family: her father, her
mother, her eight older brothers, and one of her only sister who had
died when she was a child. Although I had known none of them, I
knew each of their names and could recite them like evening prayers.
They had all died before I was born, but each week my grandmother
drove to the edge of town, to the cemetery and we walked the rows,
reaching down to pull a weed, brush away a few leaves, or straighten
one of the stones. She said each of their names out loud as we went by
because some of the lettering on the stones was so worn by the prairie
snows and winds that it had faded back into the smooth texture of the
marble.

“Charley,” Bill repeated.

My grandmother did not respond. She wiped her hands on her
apron and opened the oven door. She lit a wooden match and ignited
the pilot. The oven kicked on with a whish.

“George,” Bill said. He was standing at the mantle now and
fingering another of the pictures, another daguerreotype, and rubbed
his thumb down into the grain of the photograph. “George here was a
wild one,” Bill laughed.

My grandmother let the oven door bang shut and stood there for a
second in front of the stove, staring at it almost in a trance. My
mother had told me once that George had been my grandmother’s
favorite brother and that she had nursed him three years before his
death.

“A wild one,” Bill said and reached into his back pocket and pulled
out a handkerchief, stained a stiff yellow. He cleared his throat and
wiped a glob of thick mucus from his mouth. “Frank,” he continued
as he picked up yet another of the pictures. “Frank,” he said and
hesitated, holding the picture up to his eyes. There were two figures in
this photograph and he looked them over closely. “Frank and John,”
he said, then took a hold of the last photograph in the row, the picture
of the only female, my grandmother’s sister, Delia. This sister had
died in infancy. Hers was the first grave in the cemetery and the
lettering on her stone had completely vanished. This photograph was
not in a frame. It was a slim piece of cardboard with the image of a
child who looked more like a woman of forty. Her hair was parted in the center and pulled back in a tight bun. Her lips were thin and stretched and she had deep-set eyes, high cheek bones and high, curved eyebrows that accentuated her round face. She wore a plain cotton dress with a stiff collar that was pulled tight around her throat and it seemed as if the collar pained her, as if she were holding her breath to fight off the pain. My grandmother never talked about this sister much, and when she did, it was to my mother or some older member of the family and I was never actually present in the room. Behind a door, I would hear my grandmother mention her name, then the conversation would shift when I entered the room.

"And this one?" Bill asked. "Who was this one?"

My grandmother was still in front of the oven. She did not answer, but for the first time that afternoon, looked up from her work.

"Well?"

"Delia," my grandmother replied.

"Delia?" Bill asked. "Delia?"

My grandmother nodded.

"Who was she? I don't remember a Delia."

My grandmother moved away from the oven now and shuffled back to the kitchen counter where she tipped her hands back into her mixing bowl.

"Delia?" Bill asked one more time, taking the picture from the mantle and holding it with both hands. He stared at it, then stepped backwards almost stumbling and laughed a muffled laugh, exhaling hard through his nose. Then, before I could move or pull away, he had his hand in my hair, jerking it back from my face, gathering it at the nape of my neck in a knot. He held me there for an instant by the ends of my hair and then shoved the picture of Delia next to my face and said, "There she is. There." And he began to laugh again, louder this time, holding me still, my head tilted back, his head forward, breathing into my face, his hand gripped firmly on my hair as if it were the handle to the oven door.
THE PIKA

for Jennifer

Jennifer, the pika knows a lot. Even without being told. He knows about eating and digging and peace. And peace is always what he's after. The peace the pika seeks is peace underground, the quiet life beneath a rock. He will even dig a hole in his cage if you come around, or squeeze himself under a stone. Though he would altogether prefer that you simply left him alone, because he knows, he already knows the best hole he digs is not good enough, the largest stone is too small when someday something somewhere comes, finally, to hunt him down.
AWAITING GAME

Sixty-five degrees and dry as dust
three days running. Nothing for it
but hunt and wait. Watch the weather map.
Watch the breaks. Each day push your luck.
Under the rimrock, watch the draws;
box elder, buck brush, yellow tamarack.
Take a stand further off the ridge. Watch
the side hills. Nothing moving. Crouch
in a twist of juniper. Mingle smell
and contour. Think pungent, down wind,
invisible. Watch the canyon. Too steep
to pack out meat. In the bottom, deadfalls
and water running. Listen. Nothing
but the lies water tells about the weather.

The fourth morning McAllister Ridge turns
red. The sun slides behind an overcast
to stay. The thermometer drops ten degrees,
and nothing moves the rest of the day
but clouds, a Steller's jay, a raven
so unhappy he gargles overhead,
hurry up hurry up hurry up!

By five o'clock it's cold enough to snow
but starts as rain instead. The slope turns mud.
You're climbing wet when things turn white.
Night is held in check by confusion.
Snow light illuminates nothing. Only
the wind is visible, slanting. Direction
is a failing memory. The road is at the top,
but the slope doesn't seem to go up.
White is darker than a moonless night.
Push your luck. It will change.
And when you find the road and walk
the blizzard home to camp, this snow may bring the elk back in. Tomorrow, cold and dry and early, you can hunt again.
ALL HE MEANT

The man sitting on the barrel's your grampa, his gun's carved, inlaid. Can be beautiful, he says. But has to kill. No thank you grampa, you say. And very seriously wonder if he's trying to teach you to shoot against your will. To loosen your fingers a little, he says. That's all I meant.
EVERY YEAR

Every year the fishing gets harder.
You want to doze in your father’s arms.
Next best thing you go to the schoolyard,
sit in a swing, watch for falling stars.
A bat swoops low, that’s that.

You hire a boat, go down river.
The moon hands over its crown.
All this time not a word.

Fish sitting together at one depth
and for half a minute you feel the glory
of not having schemed at all:

the hook you bait takes little thought.
A man wants to catch his father a better fish.
Hints of spring in the water, wind pushing
hard to that bare little island every year.
He’s fathering there.
THINKING YOU'VE MASTERED THE PROBLEM OF THE WORLD

Some foolish idea in your heart, that's all. Don't speculate, just finish your chocolate, the roast was ok, children safe in bed though the little one's worried there may be school on Lincoln's Birthday when this woman comes spinning down the hall in a dirty nightgown.

You march after her for some scolding: Glad you think the roof has fallen in, when things quiet down somewhat later we'll look through the mess, a hinge must have given way but for now there's no food, everything eaten or drunk, nothing left, not even a stick to climb down the mountain with, the black widow on the sink's dazed too, if it's death I'm not going with you, I never wear anything on my body no matter what's out there, Love. What's that you said, what's that?

She brushes me aside, finds a cot in the corner, starts counting the way they count cows at the slaughter-house. Outside, the lake's skimmed with ice, storm's subsiding. See it sweep the valley.
DESERT VISTAS

En mon Afrique intérieure,
le soleil est moribund.
Béons à la Lune, la bouche en zéro.

*

That black line is Cancer’s,
this snaky one, the Nile —
Blue and White. Here is desert:

Brush. Sun-scattered bone.
A Taureq salt caravan
glides along the fetch of dunes.
Dyed clothes have stained
their wearers indigo.

Jericho is over —
The land is returned to jerboa.
To the north, when stars blink out, Tartars will descend
to Megiddo’s plain, using
what burns for torches.

September’s last morning:
the Star of Africa ascends
in his Messerschmitt.
Hot oil sprays his cockpit —
Bailing out, Marsielle is blown
back against the tail fin,
tumbled to earth.
“Death stuffs my mouth with dirt —
Is that an answer?”

In artificial light, Louis Leakey
glues together an ancestor.
Tamanrasset: the drought continues. Raisha does it with tourists for powdered milk. Putting down the one-stringed instrument, she twines with Claude, quickens a scorpion that hides in bedclothes.

From her nights of toil, Raisha has a trinket — on her way to water as day gathers, she squats beneath a sere acacia — parted from its sac, an aurora cries: it has entered the dry spring.

“Mistress killed many lion. Gone from the yard, she walks with her dog named Dusk.”
AN INFANT'S NEW OCTOBER

The lamp is eclipsed
by her head
    a coronal
he reaches toward

his first rain
fall strikes the roof
 awakes him

inside his crib

he sees the door
open tree sun
light in branches
 out there

snapshots are taken
with the sky
 so chill
only his face
is exposed
FROM THE GYPSY

Your borders break the sky into ceilings
and this, your walled house, I enter
as a stranger enters — with eyes open,
pockets I draw my deck from,
my knowledge of your deeds, the written
words you carry as weapons:
the forest, even your face, pressed
into paper. I read aloud your secrets,
that snow tracked into newsprint
and you, surprised, would know more:
Gajo, I tell you, when I take my hands
from my pockets, I have only hands.
Do you think I can speak
what I have not seen? A wife
in the front yard, framed by a window,
a father on the mantle: these are your cards.
And always, as if life were not fire
and the future, ashes, you ask of the stars —
those first flames to burn through.

Gajo: Romany word for a non-gypsy
Scenes from Kafka's The Trial

Wood Engravings by Jim Todd
The Arrest—"At once there was a knock at the door and a man entered whom he had never seen before in the house."
Fräulein Bürstner—"Horrible," said K., but he was no longer thinking of what he was saying, for he was completely taken up in staring at Fräulein Bürstner."
First Interrogation—"Near the very edge of the platform, sat a fat little wheezing man who was talking with much merriment to a man sprawling just behind him."
First Interrogation—"They all wore these badges, so far as he could see. They were all colleagues, these ostensible parties of the Right and the Left."
The Offices—"They did not stand quite erect, their bodies remained bowed, their knees bent, they stood like street beggars."
Fräulein Bürstner's Friend—"... they scrupulously avoided all appearance of having been observing him, they talked in low voices, following his movements only with the abstracted gaze one has for people passing when one is deep in conversation."
The Whipper—"Then the shriek rose from Franz’s throat, single and inevocable, it did not seem to come from a human being but from some martyred instrument."
The Whipper—"... K. intently strove to pierce the darkness of one corner of the courtyard, where several hand-barrows were jumbled close together."
K.'s Uncle—"With his hands, which he flapped like short wings, he seemed to be deprecating all introductions or greetings, trying to show that the last thing he desired was to disturb the other gentlemen . . ."
Leni—"... she clasped his head to her, bent over him, and bit and kissed him on the neck, biting into the very hairs of his head."
Lawyer—"But instead of working he twisted in his chair, idly rearranged the things lying on his writing-table, and then, without being aware of it, let his outstretched arm rest on the table and went on sitting motionless with bowed head."
Painter—"This was an even poorer neighborhood, the houses were still darker, the street filled with sludge oozing about slowly on top of the melting snow."
Painter—"Neither her youth nor her deformity had saved her from being prematurely debauched. She did not even smile, but stared unwinkingly at K. with shrewd, bold eyes."
Painter—“Don’t be afraid to step on the bed,” he said. “Everybody who comes here does that.”
Dismissal of the Lawyer—"Leni apparently knew exactly the right way to coax the lawyer; she pointed to his hand and pouted her lips as if giving a kiss."
In the Cathedral—"But it was no congregation the priest was addressing, the words were unambiguous and inescapable, he was calling out: 'Joseph K.!'"
The End—"Without having been informed of their visit, K. was sitting also dressed in black in an armchair near the door, slowly pulling on a pair of new gloves that fitted tightly over the fingers, looking as if he were expecting guests."
The End—"... a human figure, faint and insubstantial at that distance and that height, leaned abruptly far forward and stretched both arms still farther. Who was it?"
MOTHER AND HENRY

1
There is the hillside
and the yellow grass,
the stream, almost dry,
and the dusty road,
mother and her lover Henry.

We are on an old road in California,
west of San Juan Batista, west
of the memory of stagecoaches
rolling toward Monterey. Horses
and shotguns. City slickers
in silk hats. A trail of dust
disappearing for miles and miles.

Black Bart.

Dave and me stick our feet
in the creek, eat a sandwich
and listen for hoof beats.

Mother and Henry talk
under an oak,
and hold each other's hands.

2
There is the road
through Carmel Valley
and there are the vultures.

Henry is out of the car
and flapping his arms.
There is the deer
dead in the road.

Mother lights a cigarette
and turns to us.

“They have bald heads.”

Every Sunday that summer
we went somewhere.

I remember blood
on Jesus’ face
in the Mission Carmel,

a big wave in Big Sur,
mother running up
in her pink swim suit,

sand in my teeth, on my tongue.

We are on the coast road
again, driving to Nepenthe.

There are the cliffs
and the surf’s thin line,
the ocean, blue
and breaking,

way below. I
am terrified.
VAMPIRE

She starts loving herself.
It's a Catholic nightmare.
Hair sprouting on her palms
like clover. Her husband,
embarrassed at the family gatherings,
giggles into his wine, explains
This is some curse.
She takes to hats like never before,
red ones with one razor sharp feather
blown back. At dusk as he stirs the cabbage
he hears a hiss escape from her throat.
The cat disappears.
She moves to the basement.
This loving of herself doesn't show up
in mirrors. Everyone calls this dangerous.
But she trusts it, melting locks from doors,
passing unnoticed through crowded supermarkets,
a whiff of jasmine.

Incredulous at the growth of her teeth,
her dentist works overtime, first with
sandpaper, then with a small saw.
All the x-rays come back milky. If her husband
had persisted longer,
she may have come to some Christian sense,
gone to the sea shore in dark glasses,
buttoned her blouse.
He always knew she had it in her.
A man of Slavic origins, he seems to grow
shorter. His pant cuffs drag the ground.
His shoulderblades swell into a hump
that refuses to be hidden in clothing.
He begins bringing her small animals.

As for the vampire, she remembers nothing
of the innocent life. Can evil know itself?
Her eyes open in the smallest of satin rooms.  
Who could admit loneliness under these conditions?  
She had health, good looks, brains,  
and a dense little rock of a man  
who dies nightly beneath her lips  
like a bad song on the trumpet.  
There is one point just in the region  
of her heart large enough for a hatpin.  
A single place that shudders  
(a small bell of a sound)  
just before she gives herself over  
to her own moon.
HOWLING MAN AND HIS YOUNG

from an Eskimo sculpture

I
Howling Man no longer roams
frozen fields, at night
no longer measures mouth
against black expanse
for Howling Man no longer has
mouth, teeth, snout. His young
bulge from his cheeks
wet, stiff-lipped, green like clay
or fresh grass; they sleep
curled amid she-wolves and lap dogs
serpents crackling in the fire.

II
A man of quiet concerns,
I go through the day my hands
behind my back, fill the spaces
left by others.
My young are still inside
lodged between my legs.
Sometimes I hold them in my hands
feel their flesh wrinkle
the grating of hairs
the shuffling of bodies.

III
Nights, a new moon rolls
in my sleep, yellow galleons
course through my chest
black hairs
stroke the liquid night
like upturned legs.
There is a breathing
inside my breathing
a listening beneath my listening;
I awake and hear a howl
rising to my green tongue:
the voice of my young
shattering the night
the voice of my young
like blank bullets

at a black mirror.
WE MEN WEEP

with our eyes closed, our women gone
to bed, a single light on,
every door closed. For us
it remains the same,
tired face, tired hands, same words
in the throat: "regret" "confusion"
"I'm fine" "life is good." We weep
like the birch willow,
awed at ourselves, our strange mixture,
our ability to die without roots
one day to the next.
WHEN THE HILLS BECAME WEST VIRGINIA

When the wind first walked off
And whistled south,
Grass was hearsay;
Sun, the sudden rumor
Of season told in tongues
The sky interpreted
As a lasting impediment,
A totem of speech.

When night stood in the ground
Like a relic,
A secret keepsake
From the horizon’s tomb,
A story was born
Of reeds and pinesmell,
Vast spans of carnivorous green.

From one early winter to next,
A fortune in light
Wound through these hills
Like a fresh scar.
Tablets of air
Went unread.
Silence improved
Its raw reserves.

Around ice and sacred backwaters,
Among the long talks
Of trees, lectures
From rockfall, furious
Landslide omen,
Signals of other life rose
In smoke, in a hush,
Somewhere beyond this
Spilling thickness.
Birds here married
Mid-air, wings in tilt,
Under the blessing
Hands of sunshine.
Beneath oak's splitting
Bark and crook,
A braid of insects
Wormed in honor
Of nothing so beautiful,
Nothing absolute . . .

And a deer's head, dead asleep,
Educated earth
To its infinite dreaming,
Guiding small eyes upward
In terrible delight.

Then all the stones unturned
Imagined themselves
Set in graves of mortar,
Saw nameless animals
Freeze in sight
Of new tracks.
And all stones
Spoke righteously
Of infection,
An abscess of space,
The distance narrowing
Between stone's
Word and unheard voices . . .

And in that tense congestion,
When scents of fear
Finally lifted
In witness of cliffs,
When trails below
Burned up through evergreen
Like fuses,
The hearsay grass was crushed
Into wagon ruts, wind
Tested gingham,
Woke to the screech
Of sawmills,
Gave homespun promise
To those equipping
The dark with log fires,
Work songs, the rules
These hills would always ignore.
CAITLIN'S POEM

for my daughter

Lifting now to voices,
shifting shapes, tendrils
of air, you join

an essay of people.
You join, and renew again,
old women from Dingle,

Kerry, washboard America—
your provincial mothers
wrapped like skirts,

bundled under earth,
each fertilizing a time.
Some begged for drink,

laughter, for a kindness,
all reciting poetics
of kitchen, street, church.

They direct you somehow,
their ancient ways sweeping
through new blood—

your soft, sweet edges,
your first body
wrinkled like a peach stone.

There is this haystack
of eyes, daughter,
the menace of affection

told in visits,
gravy kisses, gifts
of silver and wood block.

Kate, beware and rejoice in the same breath, but don't hold it too long.

Wear us like a raincoat, my love, then shed us in a flush of sunlight.

We'll call it love, call it order, our hearts. Consider mechanics,

law, a life in medicine, the everlasting fix of your mother's fine face.

Baby, woman—it snows. We are ignorant of snow, its perfect lurking promise. No matter. We're snow beings, ice dolls, figures of mind,

ripe for sunstroke. Far off, wild as lightning and marshgrass,

you will own all your own blind possibilities. No brooding ever helps sell fatherly strategies—save little things, like you, or a blessing
of weeds, wind that tunes us like pianos, a legacy of blood's wine and vinegar. It's this, babe: a haul of high waters, with or without oars.
THE ADVANCEMENT OF LEARNING

For the uses of life. (Francis Bacon)

When the history teacher arrived, the father was inconsolable. Old Reston could not resign himself to his daughter’s death. Three days ago a tourist had found her body floating in the harbor. Now the funeral party had just made its way from the cemetery through a fog so thick even those who knew the way were in danger of going off into the deep sea grass. The son-in-law’s house was crowded with relatives, friends and neighbors, talking and eating. Out of delicacy or hunger no one seemed to heed the old man’s grief.

“Three days he’s been this way, Evan — no food, no sleep,” his wife said to the teacher. Her eyes were deep with exhaustion, and the black dress made her waxen. “He’ll never get over it. Alfred, here’s Evan.”

The old man clenched Evan’s hand and nodded. Though Evan had gone to school with Alma, he had gone off to the City to earn his degrees and only this fall, after seven years, had come back to teach history in the high school. The sight of him finally drove old Reston to speak: “Alma was the child of our old age. We were both over forty. All we ever wanted was to make a child who’d make children.” His eyes quivered. “Why, Alma? Why?”

“Alfred, please, dear. It hurts them too.” Her hand soothed his cheek. “Come —” He followed with distracted docility outside into the fog.

“Hey, Teach!” It was little Ace Barnes.

“Ace, sit or I’ll slam you,” Mrs. Barnes whispered, but the boy slid behind Evan, clutching his legs for protection. “Have a bite, Evan,” she said.

In the dining room, table and sideboard were richly set out — and in the kitchen, table and counters — an orgy of food.

Evan found Alma’s husband to offer condolences, not sure Benton, who was several years older, would remember him. “I’ve been away, Benton, since about the time you and Alma married.”

“I haven’t been home much either. Machinists go where the jobs are, and when Republic closed, I couldn’t give up all we had here. I figured I’d make a killing in Detroit, come home, pay everything off—” Benton couldn’t keep himself still; his eyebrows rose and fell
nervously as if he were straining to see. "My parents left me this house — it costs — and we owed so much, so Alma got a job in the fish factory and stayed. I don't know how I'll keep two places going now. You never married, Evan?"

"No." Evan never mentioned Elena to anyone. She was his. She was the secret in him, dead but alive. To anyone else she would be a mere word, a woman's name.

"Well, it's easier to live that way," Benton said.

"I've a back apartment with the Rhodes family. I've no relatives left."

"Then why'd you ever come back to this town?"

"The other was finished." Elena's family had taken the body to Southampton, and in the City he'd felt under stone, they were all under stone, millions. He wanted air and sand and space and green again. "You have to begin again when you get your degrees."

"And he's doing a grand job too." Reverend Bullen drew Evan down beside him. Benton and Alma were his only Methodists, so Reverend Bullen was an island here, for most of the guests, friends of old Reston, were indiscriminately from other denominations, Catholic, or Jewish. "I see you've still got your strange class in imaginative thinking going, Evan."

"And they're still giving me problems with it."

Bullen laughed: He himself had objected to some of Evan's fantasy, as he called it, especially when the class petitioned to leave the local beaches natural and untouched, with "natural" Adamic drawings by the students in the march. Worse: On Saturdays Evan had a special class for children. They had gone to milk cows at Strauss's farm. Alice Gates, with her dress open, tried to nurse a sick cat she'd found. Alice said, "She talks, She's thanking me." And Evan said, "Of course, if you listen." Bullen had asked the principal why Evan didn't stick to facts, and the principal said, "Evan's church is his classroom." But it was Evan who smoothed it over; he'd heard Bullen: "What am I for then?" And he knew Bullen felt trapped between generations.

Old Tom, the oldest man there, said, "What do you think?" The town's making me buy a tag for my pushcart. Said it's as much a vehicle as a bike and I make money carrying things, don't I?" His fingers, burned in a fire at sea, were as fixed as motionless claws. "In eighty years I never took a red cent from the government, I built my own house, pay my taxes regular, but if they keep at it, the government'll have to pay my taxes and my keep to boot. Tell me if
that makes sense.”

“Sure don’t,” Ed Hilton sat thin and very straight without talking to anybody in particular. At sixty-five he had divorced his wife and rented a room from her so both could draw full security. The “affair” was a town joke. “We get the money, but it’s killing Manda,” he said. “She won’t show herself outside — says we tried to do right all our lives, now something’s making it a sin.” He was ashamed the minute he said it.

“Can’t we tell us what to do? We’re the government,” Mr. Barnes said.

“Used to be,” Ed Hilton said.

“Don’t knock it. My checks come regular as God.” Ralph Fenton, shipshape as anybody, collected; you couldn’t get him to keep a job.

“Shoo—oot! It’s a miracle to fill out them papers and something at the other end hears you and sends you money every month. Gives you faith to go on.” Walt Evert had claimed disability; everybody knew Dr. Fordyce got his cut.

“Them machines! Tell ‘m what’s your problem and just sit and wait. Can’t beat science. Evan’ll tell you that.”

“He’s history,” Ellen Last said. “That ain’t science.”

Evan smiled. “Science is a way of thinking,” he said, “and that’s what makes history. When you lose sight of things and run down, the machines do too.”

“Like the body,” old Tom said.

“Machines’re sure good to me,” Walt Evert said.

But, looking around, Evan thought history was really only this instant with all the generations from old Tom to little Ace Barnes in rooms like this all over the world and each one had to learn everything for himself, and he felt nothing he said in his classes made sense till they felt it on their own — even the force of an idea had to be lived — and everything was more haphazard and constant than history could predict. And where was all this passion in them going?

He reached out and drew Ace Barnes onto his lap. The child was flushed and warm, and the warmth went through Evan.

“Evan’s right,” Reverend Bullen said. “God gave us a mind to use and we have to work at it continually.” One thing about Bullen: his parish he’d never stopped visiting day or night.

“Hear that, Edgar?” Myra Banks said to her son — twenty-two and on unemployment. “You got to use your mind.”

“I work it twenty-six weeks and collect twenty-two!”
"Now just s'pose everybody thought that way? Where'd this country be?"
"Where it is." Ed Hilton's old unflinching gaze was as blank as the fogged window.
"Time was," old Tom said, "young 'ns took care of old folks after a while. But what do you say to kids when their own fathers're supported by the old folks? Everything's backwards. How's a man know what to get ready for? When you're ready, it's not there anymore."
"That's change. You have to adjust, Tom," Walter Evert said.
Old Tom didn't answer.
"And time was," Ed Hilton said, "people lived together in a house and knew who they were." Next door to him lived a hive of young, sleeping around; the faces changed by the day.
"Maybe something new is coming into being," Evan said.
"Young people don't remember our times, Ed," Reverend Bullen said, "but we're working to get them on the right way."
"Who'd know the right way if he seen it?"
The door opened and the thickening veil of cigarette smoke stirred and swirled: Old Reston came in from the garden. The truth was he longed for talk about Alma.
"It'd take a miracle to set us straight," Ed added.
"A miracle?" The word struck old Reston. "You've no idea how little Alma was. A miracle her head was. At my wife's age, what it cost to have Alma. I was petrified. 'You hurt, Esther?' I said. She laughed — laughed, yes, in all that pain. 'Why should I hurt?' she said. That head — I can still feel Alma's tiny head."
Esther too smiled, as if the miracle lay there. And Reston would have kept on, but in the front hall, as if in one part, old Ada Grigg and the Kruzinskis arrived together. No one could say which caused the momentary silence, whether the presence of that rich old lady, who lived virtually entombed at Grigg Heights, or of the Kruzinski boys and Wanda, with their father, old Teodor, scrubbed so his pocked skin and alcoholic red face shone, his white shirt and black suit and tie making him unrecognizably stiff and somewhat apprehensive.
"This house!" Ada Grigg said, and with her exclamation, half joy, half nostalgia, most of the others ceased talking and looked around to see what it was her eyes saw; for the first time the walls seemed to
spread, open to them — the high windows, the chandeliers, the long staircase, all the space beyond, though it couldn't hold a candle to Grigg Heights. "How long it's been. Do you know this house is eighteenth century — one of the few left — before my great-grandfather's time, and in that ell — built when the grandchildren, Benton's grandfather and great uncles, grew too many — Benton was born . . ." Names rose from her mouth and stood there, her head a town memory, and she spoke mellifluously, with dignity, and the sound fell pleasantly over them, a voice which they had no real recollection of but which had some claim on them.

But, Evan thought, you don't know it if it is not in you.

And when at last she recognized Benton, she said, "It can't be . . . Why, only yesterday —" And something clouded her face over, then vanished. "Time. You were —"

And just then the Episcopal chimes struck the late afternoon hymn, making a still instant, as if a stranger had entered the room.

"Like dot day you were little t'ing," Teodor Kruzinski's mouth, thick with English, said to Benton. "Come many people here. Come from everywhere. All town come. Cars here, there. Eat. Drink. Such day!" His laugh showed his rotting teeth.

"Yes! Your christening, Benton! It *was* an occasion. I believe it was the last one like it in town. Do you remember, Reverend —" But she broke off with a gracious laugh at her forgetfulness, for her minister, an Episcopalian, had died years before.

"My old man's always talking the big times this house had before Benton's pa blew his money," Wanda said.

"Benton they had lain in the master bedroom in a crib with white ruffles, and he wore the longest white gown trimmed with hand-done blue cutwork, and Reverend Warfield came and spent the day ministers were really part of the family in those days — and Mrs. Kruzinski — you remember, Mr. Kruzinski — worked all night long to make all the fancy sandwiches and cakes, and Minna, Benton's grandmother, directed everything — tables on the lawn, three violinists . . . and how everyone dressed, you can't imagine . . ."

What an avalanche of memories! "And —"

"My Alma was baptized with seven others on Easter Sunday," Reston said.

"On the same day I was," Evan said. He had dreamed of Elena's baby, dreamed they had torn it out of her the instant before she'd died and held it up to him red and palpitating and then hidden it from him;
he had spent the whole dream frantically searching for it; when he woke, when he found out he'd awakened, he was shouting, "Let me in, let me in," because he wanted to go back into the dream and find his baby. He shut his eyes, willed himself back, but he didn't get there. The baby was still in her.

"Alma screamed for dear life when the minister wet her head," Mrs. Reston smiled wistfully.

"My kids — I saved them up — all five together, just to get rid of the whole business at once, and he doused them in the river Jordan," Rhetta Cole said, "splash, splash — under went their heads — five times, and that was it."

"What good? Mine change their names like they change clothes," Laura Bevins said. "You figure it."

"Mine have a time getting clothes. Lazy! You wouldn't believe it. Work's a disease to them." Abandoned years before, Willa Meier was on welfare. "Now my oldest's on welfare too. Can't keep a job, that one. I tell him, 'When you're old, you won't draw a thing.' He says, 'That's why I'm drawing it now.' He could care less!"

"It don't amount to a thing when you do get it," Ed Hilton said.

"If everybody cared for work, it might," Evan said. Elena had never worked a day in her life; until he'd met her, he did not know what endlessly rich really meant — 'rich rich' she used to discriminate.

"Might not too. Look at the ones don't work — they get along best."

"No — not!" old Kruzinski said. "We paid gov'ment nodding, so get nodding. Fools maybe. Once, go two weeks out on fishing boats, get four-five hundred dollar, spend — yeah, we like drink — but all years pay nodding to gov'ment. But I got boys. Boys don't let poppa starve — like Poland, family all in one house, boys pay food, taxes — not, teacher?"

"A good family's fine, but some aren't so good, and sometimes sons die first." But seeing old Reston's eyes fall painfully on him, the words rose to shame him, and he said, "We have to protect everybody."


Evan laughed. "We have to protect the fish then."

"Protect fish!"

Over Evan's shoulder Benton said, "One thing you can say for
Kruzinski: He may have no morals whatsoever but he works and depends on nobody despite what he says.”

Evan knew how the worst of the Poles still lived on Easy Street, sleeping too many to a room, on straw, chickens and pigs and ducks wandering into the house, weekend orgies of drink and gambling and whoring, nights ended with fights in the street among brothers and neighbors and police. Kruzinski was so promiscuous there were doubts about him with his daughters.

Now Kruzinski bent close to Ada Grigg, smiling. Something of an old world charm, a courtliness alien to town, began to bloom in him. She smiled, seated between old Tom and Kruzinski, like an alliance of years. “Always when not fishing, your fodder and your husband give old Teddy work. Never t’ink I sit with you like this.” His mouth opened wide, laughed raucously; his arm went to the sofa back. In his pocket a pint bottle glinted. She smiled again, but at his breath and closeness she drew back ever so slightly; in her eyes centuries of Puritan dignity sealed him off. “Well, Benton ...” She rose, kissed him, whispering, “. . . can’t tell you . . . sad . . .” and nodded to them all. “No, don’t you bother, Evan. I had the taxi wait.” And her prehistoric skin smiled again, and she went, slow, a cautious creature slipping back into the fog.

Wanda whispered, “You, Poppa! Ain’t you ashamed with that bottle!” and to the brothers, “All three of ya! Not decent one single day. I s’pose it’ll be three days of bottles and Emil’s accordion and God knows what. Ain’t you got no respect?”

“Aw, Wanda.”

“Don’t Aw, Wanda me!”

But Wanda knew funerals always made Kruzinski think Momma and the dead sons and one daughter, though on two wives he’d sired fourteen, most still scattered over Long Island.

Kruzinski appealed to old Tom: “Good day forget, eh, Tom?” Tom had had his share of loss: sons in the wars, one drowned at sea, most of his family gone — only his grandsons left. And Tom understood Kruzinski: the old Pole drank from lust, not to forget, but it was Reston he watched and to Evan he said, “When one child’s all, and that’s gone, there’s nothing to go on.”

But they all were glad when Maude Allen said, “Never saw such rich food.”

Her daughter, who never new when Maude Allen was lucid or gone, said, “You’ll be sick, Ma — please.”
Lydia Dalton said, "My great-grandson — sweet thing — brings me home what he don't eat at school," but aware of Reston's eyes on her, her own gaze fled to her skirt and dug, immobile.

"Whyn't you tell me?" Will Meier said. "I'm forever giving my free food away."

"Great-grandson," Reston mumbled. "These big houses — once you had to fill them with children because so many didn't live." He and his wife would go back to their small house with the carpentry shop out back.

"Benton," Evan said, "you'll be moving back to town?"

"I'm going where the money is."

"And this house?"

"That's why. Property's sky high. I can't let it go."

"Can't let go! Can't let go!" Reston braced up to him. "This house. It's a person? It can't die? You won't let it! But let this house kill her —"

"Alfred!" his wife cried.

"—working, yes, always trying to pay bills when she wanted —" He raised his fists, raised them not at Benton, but at air — at the ceilings, the staircase, the empty rooms, at something high —

"Alfred—" She pressed his arms down, but he shrugged.

"—just to stay home and have babies — that's so much to ask? — but had to keep this house—"

"Evan," she whispered. "Come, Alfred —" She took one arm, insisted, Evan the other, and guided him through the kitchen, but that sight made him worse: "—and die for this," striking the refrigerator, "crazy people — what kills, yes — and washing machine, dishwasher, electric this, electric that, and two cars, and why don't you get rid of things choking my girl? and who's here when she's alone, dying, to love and help her, help, and life, only life, life—" He could hardly stand, but his wife and Evan held him.

Evan was silent, but teeming. Reston might have been talking about Elena: She'd wanted a baby, but with a difference — she wanted no change in the world, "There's a thing in me — I go where it goes. I can't stick to your way, Evan, close to work and quiet. I can't channel drives. What drives? You see what you get into with me. I want you but don't, want a baby but don't, though you're good good good — in bed and out." He had persuaded her No pills. "Once you start letting the thing grow in you, you'll want it, it will be another you, cure everything — give it a chance! — you won't want that other
world you’re from.” She said, “Baby, you don’t know what you’re contending with. Just once go to Southamptom with me, will you — please?” Sure, he’d go —

Outside, Mrs. Reston said, “Now sit with me, Alfred.” He sat, holding her hand, but he murmured, “Like she’s under a heap of machines, like all of us; there’ll be no more room, Esther, just miles of dead machines piled up the way we used to pile boxes on the Common for the Fourth of July bonfire, and someday they’ll fill the ocean with machines, miles, miles—” He began to sob. “I want to hate Benton, but it’s not Benton, it’s some sickness we made in the world and it’s turning back on us, and when you think of all the children—”

“We’ll work our way out of it, Mr. Reston,” Evan said.

“So schoolteachers have the answers at last?” His tone bit, but Evan understood — he was used to that.

“There are people who work at where things are going. It doesn’t seem to be true, but some alone, silently, and some in groups — in all fields. You have to have faith in them. If I didn’t believe that, I’d sit and wait for some miracle to come through this fog.”

“How’d we teach them something owes them life?” Esther Reston said. Pain sounded, muffled in her throat. “We have to give to life— Once you knew what part of town poor and sick were, but now it’s every street and class, only it’s not poor, it’s a great sickness. How did we teach them to believe it’s pleasure life owes them, not work? They sit and wait for gifts from some great central office up-island. What kind of heaven’s that? What’s happening to our town, Evan?”

He didn’t answer. He stared into the fog: glows white as angels, and darks — peonies; over, the darks of maples; a vague beyond. He listened, and he felt — as more and more frequently he did feel — that he was in an endless room from which he could hear an incredibly large machine and many independent little ones, and now and then he heard a silence which made him realize something had been sounding all the time: something had stopped. The silences were becoming more frequent. Something was breaking down.

“Alma never had time to touch her own flowers,” Reston said.

“Shhhh,” she said.

“It’s better for him to talk about Alma, Ms. Reston,” Evan said.

In the street children’s voices were calling to each other. A can rattled over the pavement: kick the can in the fog. A tussle set up. He smiled.

“Cut that out, you kids!” a woman’s voice cried. “You’ll get hit by a
“Up you!” a boy cried.
“I’ll get you for that!” she cried. Laughs cut through, feet ran, stillness settled, all but for the voices, talks and laughs, through the open windows nearby. Far, a dog barked; farther, a dog answered, setting up a volley in the distance.

“Evan, why didn’t you stay in the City?” Reston said.
He wanted to tell them: Because of Elena. It might even in some way console them, but he couldn’t. “Because there’s a place for me here. All my life I’ve known these people.”

“It must be wonderful in the City — so many people. You could maybe forget.”

Had all the old man’s possibilities ended with his daughter?
“You don’t forget anywhere, Mr. Reston.” He saw Elena in the hospital, doped to the gills, her mind blown, and pregnant. Days he’d waited in the corridor, futile. They’d taken her body to Southampton, but something in him had to go to a cemetery. He went to the Brooklyn cemetery: Stone filled his eyes, a miniature city of stone, endless stone.

“The City’s a terrible place,” he said. “Everybody dreams of it, but it’s terrible.” Yet nights he dreamed of it still. “There’s so much of everything there that you can’t sort it out.” Sex, dope, stealing, murder, unemployment, but mostly fear, endless varieties of fear. “After a while you don’t see things, you take them for granted, and you don’t feel anything either. You wonder what we are that we have to fear each other so much. You want to get back to feeling. You want to make a new city. And where does a man go to begin, but home? The city’s like walking deeper into a sewer, deeper and down.” Pregnant. It was his fault. Bring nothing into this world, Elena had screamed, nothing, though she wanted to be tied to this world, tied, she did — but not. Nothing, she kept crying, nothing. Sometimes, staring at the empty sky over the Sound, he heard Elena’s voice fill the sky, Nothing.

“But why?” Reston said. It startled Evan.
“Why?”
“Why’d she do that?”
“She? Ahhh.” Reston meant Alma.
“Not a trace of anything,” Reston said. “The door not even locked. She must have just cleaned the house — it smelled so sweet, and everything in place. ‘Alma?’ I called her. Nothing. I went through
every room. Not a sign. Money — she could’ve asked me. I’m a carpenter. I can still do work.” He sobbed. “Twenty-seven and no babies.”

“Shhhh, Alfred.” But there was a choke in her. They held each other, close as one figure, dark in the fog, which made strange amoeboid shapes now, something invisible moving it, a warm rising motion creating gaps, thickening it, thinning. It made you doubt the hard ground.

Somewhere beyond — across the bay, past Shelter Island and Sag Harbor — lay Southampton. “Come into my world,” Elena’d said. So he had gone— She had wanted to cure him of her, had she? He hadn’t believed what went on in the set, on yachts. Only the skipper stayed sober. “He’s paid to be sober but not chaste.” Elena saw to that. “The only worth’s the trip. When you come down, you’re back in this, and I’d rather be dead than stay in this every minute.” “Once you’re pregnant you’ll want this,” he’d said. “You’re wrong, and if I get pregnant I’ll go over, I’ll have the courage then — the great leap, out. I want out.” But she’d stopped the pills.

He saw her in the fog, always like that, beckoning. He never understood what it was she couldn’t bear. Now he would never know.

“Evan, tell Benton we’ve gone, will you? Come, Alfred.”

“Can’t I take you?”

“We know the way blindfolded, thanks.”

“Alma never went far,” Reston said. “We can see this house from ours. Listen—” Through the fog came the melancholy strain of an accordion.

“That’s Emil.” You could tell a ceremony: The old German bachelor in the house across the way, who dug graves, grieved in song.

Evan listened to the Restons’ steps. He stood for a moment in the garden, looking toward the sound of the accordion, but he saw only the veiled deeps and, close, the host of vague white forms in the dark web of stems. He touched a dark peony, damp, and carried the sweet bitter scent to his mouth. The he went toward the shaft of light from the kitchen windows.

Inside the women tidied up as people left, cleaning plates, packing food, washing ashtrays. And the crowd was thinning, perhaps from old Reston’s outburst or satiation or the long wear of the service, the ride to the cemetery, the ceremony there.

Children were picking at the table, stuffing their mouths and
pockets.

"Better swallow one before you eat the other." Evan patted the Edwards boy on the head. The hair was hot and sweaty. "Kick the can?" he whispered and winked. The boy blushed.

"Only good feed I ever get's at buryings," the Barnes' grandmother said.

"You take some home," Benton said. "Lida, make up a plate for Mrs. Barnes."

Reverend Bullen said, "I trust we'll see you before you go back to Detroit, Benton." He held Benton's hand too long — his brows twitched.

"Not go back Detroit?" Kruzinski said. With so many gone he had his bottle in his hand now.

"As soon as I can arrange things. They're expecting me back," Benton said.

"You Harveys strong, got guts," Kruzinski said. "Will you close up the house?" the minister said.

"For a while. Alma's people'll look after it for me."

"Hooo — not be long and you got one odder wife."

"Shut your mouth, poppa," Wanda said. "Boys, get poppa outa here 'fore I get on my high horse."

Benton said, "He's okay — aren't you, Mr. Kruzinski."

"Say what comes. Don't mean nodding bad, Benton."

"Of course not." Kruzinski grasped Benton's hand and stared. His mouth opened but his eyes quivered, perplexed, and seemed to go numb. He dropped the hand, shook his head, and left. They heard him stumble on the porch step. "Goddamn!"

"Shut your dirty mouth," Wanda said.

They heard the kids playing in the street again. Evan noticed the Edwards boy was gone.

"I'll see my lawyer in the morning, and I'll need to see you, Reverend Bullen. I don't trust the mail," Benton said. There were the costs.

"All in good time. Well—" The minister nodded and left.

"And you don't think of going back to the City again, Evan?" Benton said.

"Not if I ever stop to think first. It was too painful getting away from it."

"You never do that. You'd be a fool to think it any different here."

"Sometimes you have to start where the ground's familiar," Evan
said.

"Not without cash," Benton said. "Everything breaks down without that."

"If you let it." It was old Tom. "Good to see you again, Benton. I'm sorry it was in such sad circumstances." He held out his crippled hand.

Outside you could hear the familiar wheels of his pushcart. The sound was unmistakable.

Now, with the quiet, there was an actual sense of peace in the house, a quiet order with things being set in place, the tumult of voices diminished; and space opened up around them.

"You," Evan said to three of the boys," "I'll see tomorrow."

Lida Hill pointed to hers. "He'll be there, you can just bet."

"I'll count on it," Evan said.

When he shook hands with Benton, he wanted to say something — about what it cost, the worth: And it occurred to him that somehow it was the loss of Elena and the baby he would never see that had driven him back here and he wanted to believe it had a part in all this that was happening, but he knew nothing, he could say nothing.

He went outside. Now the air made the odors of tobacco and food and people stale in the clean salt damp, and he felt the presence of space though he could not see. He imagined how clear the air would be when the fog burned off in the morning and you wouldn't have to stumble so.

He halted — to listen: from across the way, joining Emil's accordion, Kruzinski's deep bass, low now and not raucous, sang in Polish, and Wanda's voice blended into it. And the man's voice and the woman's rose in an old and sad and beautiful song, and they seemed to be struggling to say something about life which they did not understand but felt.

He went down the steps into the street. The fog was still dense, but a warm breeze kept breaking it here and there. All down the street the sound kept on: It told him where he was, though further on he slipped and nearly fell on a small object. He stooped for it — a little wooden locomotive with a missing wheel. He put it in his jacket pocket. Tomorrow he would give it to Tom. All year long the old man collected broken toys and repaired them for kids who would have nothing at Christmas.
OUTCAST

The wall has entered: I must love the wall.
Roethke

I found your face in mine. Once
you kissed me in public (or did not)
dreamed me (or did not)
and I was. In your one slipping of love
the day, the night you wanted me
I scarcely saw.

So much is needed: that lie
masquerades a dire principle. Lonely,
all are afraid. Home
crouches before them, lion or dog
and still they climb.

You do not willingly go, yet I
am shamed. I think you go
toward me in some other life, some country
where scars are beautiful. Here
we save ourselves for graves, withholding

love. The day that word was wrong
my mouth turned blue. I turn back
the mountain. None
gives truly to another. The long
hill, skull and rose.
CALLED SLEEPING

I am called out. The leaves are letting go.
A man steps up for his hanging and the dead woman cannot forget the day she let him in,
the cloud of maples, burning.
Some may never turn this way again. Some are naked already.

The falling is everywhere, so gradual even the trees have forgotten the pewter gaze of sky, unflinching through miles of snow.

It is Sunday in October. The maples accept me, losing their leaves the way the mothers who lost themselves at birth lose again at dying. Once you left me at the foot of a mountain to bring up a day’s water. Immortality of gesture is all I have, the particular straws of your being.
Do the eyes dream? Memory, you ask me less and less of my life. This age collects like autumn, even the small-boned plum and lilac. Through the haze, the brilliant skin of the birches.
CROSSING THE LAKE

1
In clear light of summer, I gather in
armloads of soft purple, white.
I dream a river, the cloud around my body
a lake of ash. To see you clear of death
is not enough, the bridal wreaths
endlessly braiding, the lover-swing
gaping. The forgotten kiss, forgotten.
All the purple cut from the trellis.
Flowers drop their petals and night
slides its bolt clean into our bones.
The door opens in, out, and we are alone.

I see you as a young man saying goodbye
to your brothers. A hand moves the blood's
full weight, open, waving. You planted your feet
like corn, your right arm swinging high.

2
Old women, their freckled hands, exotic shellfish
in the sea of evening. When storms move down
the Gallatin, they perch like crows,
shuffling their ancient cards. They never forget
the chair not empty, when war brought
its glory wreath and all the boys were men.
You are there, under the dripping birch, wrapped
in a kaleidoscope of leaves. A day of dedication,
the bandage hidden. Beside the Nazarene Church
I make your bed, press the soft white robe
against your mouth.
3
Memorial Day. A storm threatens the parade and out back, Mother takes pictures. Then we are moving. You, the sailor, buoyed up by a cloud of flags. You told me secrets. Aunt Olive served potatoes in a flowered bowl hand-painted by a German. The way we carry blood, slow. The invisible shock of snow. The fall through a century, a steady ghost, the even touch that never melts the tongue.

I believe I belonged in the car when it crashed, the white line frozen in my mind, your words a river I still drown in. You are always on the wrong side. Now a lake. Now a letter mailed across an ocean. I lose you again, the sea exploding in your brain, the alphabet gone mute as shrapnel.

4
Father, I was the unfaithful one. The long grass sweetened for your mowing. I played only hymns when you were dying, the motion of my hands like birds on their lake of keys. We lie humming in the deep. Now walking on water. The sleep in the belly of the whale. Shells of our former selves hug the shore, breath and lap of lake water, slow river, the subtle slap of midday bath. Listen. We are crossing the lake.
CALLING THE HORSE

You will want to think, in the long day, of its jaw-works, of the intricate motions of crop and chew; of the grid of blood in the pricked ear swivelling like radar; of the iridescent skin.

And it will sense this, and come. From past the fern, past coal, back in the world of mammals' first clumsy lumber, something not quite right, a something the size of a dog, will try to stretch toward your calling, will feel the three toes fuse to hoof.

You will want to think of the spray of tail; of lips independent of any laws in the cosmos, save Survive and Nuzzle; of tongue so large, so bloodstuffed, it's a living beast with its own biology; think of the flanks, of the sex like a bell in the flanks' cathedral shadow; think what fin is to an angelfish, and the mane, the mane, will billow, crest and snap.

And it will know this, and cross the isthmus to your own two-legged stand on North America, here where your wantings extend past your skin, where they reach like a halter — it will feel itself, in all of its poundage, filling its own flesh and almost being a horse.

You will think of the sweet, rank, specialized stink-and-perfume odor of horse.
And it will be called, and come,  
and be a horse for itself,  
and be your horse.
NO WORDS

There are no words for
the thimble keeping time
against my thumb like a tiny heart
or the sad Italian tune
my father played as a boy or
grandma weeping with her rosary
in the dark house

the prayer burrows deep
the round crater between thumb and
forefinger the black keys ever rising
above the white no words for
the oldest tree

or this daughter fanning her face
with the pages of a paperback
tapping her foot to a song with no words
to equal all the words she's hung on
for the sake of emotion: that old bird
with a thimble for a head

all the words my mother saved for years
each in a black bead
breaking into my veins
through the tips of my fingers
no words for all the words
in my father's eyes the hospital bed
or the darkness of my room
the V of birds caught in
mama's throat like a fork
or the sad horns of soul
a tree simply heavy with rain
daddy wanting to buy an organ
mama wanting to sing something
Some nights it takes
an hour to remove one sock
and my spine is a long scar
from walking all day
in the wrong direction.
For miles I followed the back
of a woman, the side of a small house
in the distance where her grandmother
was chanting for the growth of an herb,
that fragrant mustiness.

When the ocean fanned out
behind some pines, curling
its lips at me, I turned around.
On the way back the fields
were coaxed into submission.
Even the children were working
but still sang the day’s schoolroom lesson:
“You deserve what happens to you.”

Now the other sock is off.
Some nights I examine
my testicles, and recognize
the existence of two worlds,
beside themselves
and speechless.
AEONS OF WISHES

the pear and the plum leaves remind me of children
scratching hundreds of matches flared red
against a sky as gray as asbestos

my mother comes back to life as when she
brought her own mother back
not screaming cancer at her intestines but calm
and giving me cookies a substitute grandma the one
resurrection my Christian mom could give
her "Wild Indian" son who was four
and bored by all the lovey talk and strangers' names
and finally stole some kitchen matches which
hit with a rock cracked like pistol shots

Dad drunk and shooting at ghosts again
myself my mother's "little man"
begging him to behave

he grew quiet then
quieter still
too quiet now for his kid
thirty some years of naughtiness gone
into wish
for understanding

a pear and a plum
one mine and one belonging to
the grandmother next door
two Independence Days
ago we lit her Mexican fireworks
hidden for years from the city's safety laws
and liberated the sky of Monroe
Street Madison Jefferson and
Friendly the best president of all my three
year old daughter who chanted "whoopie
I'm a Cherokee" voted for him
she's five this fall
her birthday on Halloween
the pear and the plum
leaves birthday candle flames
starring asbestos sky

a week ago
aeons of wishes
12 years away and you go back to it—
that proud and middling heart
pragmatic as rock
sieved through steel and stadiums,
the windflower way of a people
taken hold where they land forever.

You were thinking of crocheted quilts,
the doilies sewn around bottle caps,
and not the mill grist sinking
to your grandfather’s insides
or choking up the river’s craw.

Like a sudden gust that nudges
the tired-hard tongues of shoes
left on a porch, you go among
relatives, their very minds
drifting absently like dust
taken off high above the earth—
the incidental mote sifting down
to land on an iced tea or
pint of rye hidden in the garage.

A sliver of sunlight through the awning
brushes the hands of aunts who touch
about your cheeks with fingers
cold as dough and who whisper
of apricots, ripe persimmon moons.

At the table where your mother sat
pouring canned milk in coffee,
you count the coupons into piles
which discount your grandmother’s
Postum, margarine, and salts—
the repeating list repeating years.
Up early on a drive to Akron or Warren. You see them line up in a grey dawn to take their places, stone-faced, under the grinding wheel; or filing off swing-shift blank from the blast furnace, take the concrete turnpike home where someone irons or washes-out the soiled cotton-twill, bakes Perohis for the Christening or Engagement.

Each thing you've ever seen you see one more time, and you write that you marry lucky from this place or die out the back door, and no life like this . . .
When Sky Lets Go
Madeline DeFrees
George Braziller, Inc.
New York
$6.95 hardbound, $3.95 paper

In a year that one must already consider remarkable in terms of new books, Madeline DeFrees' *When Sky Lets Go* stands out like a beacon. At once various and complex, its light is strong, unwavering. Under such light, the things of experience change in subtle metamorphosis, become charged with the imagination which seizes them as they are, enlightens them, and render them to us marvelous and whole. Hence, a poem like "Still Life with Lumbosacral Support" (more than a poem about back trouble), which even in its title begins to suggest something of the extraordinary intelligence and imagination of its maker:

STILL LIFE WITH LUMBOSACRAL SUPPORT

My monkeybar and traction geared me for this stretch.
If I could write *Corsage with Corset*
in a hand that didn't shake,
raise the body in these words, and, growing wild
unearth a shock of fireweed,
I could take the simple cure prescribed, endure
the nervous system. This wide-mouthed
tumbler from a better year
spills thistles on my black decor.
I know that proud spine. Pain
moves it. Extends the possible, slow exercise
that brings me to my knees. I believe
things I drop will be picked up on time.
Hairpin turns, knitting
needles, the lumbar strain receding.
Between steel tracks a complex
cord articulates dependence. I come to terms.
Sisters of Charity welcome me home.
Their bills have backbone. I call my friendly
witchdoctor to counteract
the breakdown. Trussed for the difficult routine
I limp to bed, a laggard
disc of moon
abject sensations, high on codeine and coffee.

Night contracts its thin
reflexive arc. The switchboard signals
every shade of risk. I step out,
cautious, into total dark.

In a book as rich as this one is, there are many things to be impressed by. Among them, DeFrees’ deft touch, her absolutely right mix of humor, of intelligence and belief, and of endurance. The elegies (“Moving in Time” and “Self Service Island: An Elegy from Landsend”) are a case in point. They are not only laments for the dead, they are celebrations, however colored by grief and doubt, celebrations of the life lost and the life that continues.

“Moving in Time” takes for its occasion the death of two nuns, drowned after their car veered into a river. It begins in an ironic, almost journalistic tone: “Even dead you were a good swimmer. They dragged/ the river four days to bring your body in.” But then it moves, at the end of section 1, closer to the rage and questioning which that early tone was meant to control:

What is He
trying to tell us? The question, formal, in the only rhetoric we know. They’ve buried what you left.
I scream across the party line, mad mourner
in an intermittent wake, waves rocking me down deep.

By the poem’s end, the speaker has found herself fully involved, the death raged against, in some ways merged with, and finally moved beyond:

What if I’m half afraid of shifting edges?
The violent river bed in sleep still moving?
Where I drive a road will open—air or water—
past women grieving on the bank. My craft alive
beyond dull cylinders, full as the slow
plum of its own dark drift.

When Sky Lets Go is woven of numerous threads, but they trace
their origins to two main sources: Madeline DeFrees' life now, and
her life then. Before, she was Sister Mary Gilbert, now she is
Madeline DeFrees. Two names, yet the poems are unmistakably by
one woman. And it is clear in these poems that the move out of the
convent, however difficult it must have been, has been a personally
positive one:

It will not serve—today or any day
on the green banks of forever—
that up in the succulent garden,
tall and tended, the gold-
eyed glorious ones
bear kingly witness.

No. I will stay outside
in the doomsday weather,
the round of ruin that knows me
and brought me here. Courting
the wide lost lakes
and the wind's reverses. With the brim-
stone leaves struck down
by a sigh or a silence.

I shall go on falling in a subterranean
autumn plunge through the echoing
space with the petaled legions.
Everything falls from grace:
stars, empires, sparrows.
I move in the swordlight play
of that downward journey.

(from "Everything Starts with the Fall")

In a recent interview, Madeline DeFrees says, speaking of her time in
the convent, "I have a lot of time to make up for"; yet one senses she
has used that time to good effect, senses it in the compelling intensity
of involvement and attention which has made these poems.
Some books seem colorless, almost voiceless; not this one. And
some books, the rare ones, beg to be lived with, to be savored at the
careful pace which the poems themselves suggest—that is the kind of book Madeline DeFrees has written.

Lex Runciman

In A Dusty Light
John Haines
The Graywolf Press
P.O. Box 142
Port Townsend, WA 98368
$5, paper

It is frequently noted that poetry begins in silence. It is altogether too frequently noted, especially in Schools of Writing, that the silences between words and between lines in a poem become "luminous." In the poetry of John Haines, however, the silences are indeed luminous. If there is a mantle of "inhumanism" to be passed from the poetry of Robinson Jeffers, it must go to Haines. In his best poetry, there is not so much people, as evidence of people. His poetry chronicles geography, inner as well as outer.

HOMESTEAD

1.
It is nearly thirty years
since I came over Richardson Hill
to pitch a bundle of boards
in the dark, light my fire
and stir with a spoon
old beans in a blackened pot.

The land gave up its meaning slowly, . . .

The "I" of Haines's poetry is never intrusive. His poetry appears to be heard at a volume slightly below the murmur, and it is never himself to which he calls attention, but to the details of living, the ash, the spark, the small steady flame at the center of being. His poetry is a gentle prodding, reminding us of the balance of natural things, the futility of avarice, that "the land will not forgive us" our plundering.
The past returns in the lightning
of horses’ manes, iron shoes
in the idleness of men who circle
the night with their sliding ropes.

Everything we have known for so long,
a house at ease, a calm street
to walk on, and a sunset
in which the fire means us no harm . . .

Rolling back from the blocked summit
like an uncoupled train
with no hand on the brake,
gathering speed in the dark
on the mountain grade.

*In a Dusty Light* also demonstrates Haines’s ability to extend his
range beyond the poetry of *Winter News, The Stone Harp,* and
*Leaves And Ashes.* In two poems-in-sequence, The Homestead, and
News From the Glacier, he sustains a poetic and explores it, mines it.

. . . We are awake
in our own desolate time—
clotheslines whipping the air
with sleeves and pockets,
little fists of plastic bags
beating the stony ground.

There are no tricks in these poems, no flashes of lyrical brilliance,
no parade of wit nor self-proclaimed intelligence. Just fine notes from
an active life of constant meditation, direct statement of disciplined
observation. As he says in *Alive in the World:*

. . .
afternoon disappears into evening,
full of ghosts, torn spirits
in the wind, crying to be seen . . .

Trees of the earth underfoot,
what all of us walk on,
shatter and pass through,
going blindly into our houses.

This is not the kind of poetry adored by critics and professors. It is
not emminently teachable. It requires no vast body of footnotes. It is
real poetry, the music of a living language doing the job of mending
the spirit, of teaching by enchanting.

Sam Hamill

Fire in the Bushes
Patrick Todd
Clearwater
P.O. Box 8594
Missoula, Montana 59801
$3.50, paper

If every poem is of necessity a recollection, then Todd’s technique
goes a long way toward shortening that gap between what is seen and
its notation. This is not to suggest that he opposes himself to memory;
rather, he seems more interested in the crystallization of it within an
instant, in realizing in the poem the meeting point of a thousand
crossed lines:

COUNTRY WEDDING

All nervous in country lace the bride
rode down the mountain with her father . . .
wagon reins springing easy in the early sun
Fifty mums banked the church walls white
Thick cream candles
The groom sat mute for the stiff picture
Both hands closed big as hammers

Women owned this time round the holy cake
The old fathers . . . faces puffed red
from years of whiskey and the blazing wheat
waited out weddings like a funeral
Even the sleepy minister hated circles
of screaming kids and spotted
a yellow toy he’d love to crush

Gone the bride in white lace
whose wedding moon lit up a long lazy s
of geese over McGuinnigan’s pond
Now the farmers' sons grow mean in town
a boy beat a hole in a boxcar
with a hundred pound furnace iron
Gone . . . twenty horses steaming in the barn

Partly because of the mental shorthand going on, the poems read like waking visions. Partly because they compress disparate elements into a moment where their meanings cohere, these visions have a redemptive quality about them. The baggage of memory finds release. Where the spontaneity of this process is most in doubt, the poems seem less successful, less acts of arrival. But when this process is working, it does so in a whirlwind of associations that seem present all at once, as here, in the last section of "Furnace Tenders":

Hook up your coat anywhere
in the zinc leach . . .
The next morning it hangs in shreds
Thirty years in the roasters
and dry rasping
breaks in the lungs
Some get milk leg
The skin bags paste white and men sit out
half their shifts on the benches
One guy . . . ten kids . . .
endless payments
and pictures of Christ
all over his house . . . pushes the bar
into the face of a routine
orange blast and forgets
Forgets he grabbed the guard loop
and his hand's exposed
Caught between
the bar and a steel beam
the bones mash like a bag of peanuts
Morley dies and the guy without
a hand gets his soft job

Homelessness runs through many, if not most, of these poems. On countless freights headed anywhere, in a soup line or at a midnight mission in some large city, Todd presents the human and the saintly aspects of what would be called elsewhere "the failed lives." Not surprisingly, it is through this that he becomes better acquainted—simultaneously—with what has failed in him, and what survives. And it is through this clarified sense of self that the poems' speaker is enabled to speak and observe more confidently, surer of his
direction. Perhaps it is this that figures more in the redemptive quality the poems convey. A rootlessness become rooted, the images of a life given form and reference. Here is the last poem in the collection:

SAINT FRANCIS

At dusk mile long clouds
stream orange above the sun going down
Purple drifts over the mountains
far as the sea
After all is said and done . . .
all passion for wives
and lovers gone
. . . no one . . . not even a room this time
Only this walk along the road
. . . yellow trees . . . sky . . .
the bright cold grass
Tonight under giant ponderosa

Slow blue flames rise
from blackberries
and the whole bush flares up blazing white
On the climb like this to La Verna
a hundred birds
swarmed Saint Francis
The next morning Leo peeked
around the secret hut

to see his brother soar
high as the trees
High in the Sistine Chapel
fury of brushes lifted God and creation
on the ceiling In the basement
Michelangelo chiseled
ripples of silk in marble
There's no holy word for compulsion
to be alone In the far woods
only this steady light gleaming
in oil of the burro's eye
The joy of this collection is that it allows. At a time when the meaning of nearly everything is threatened, Wallace has undertaken, often in elaborate and playful ways, to recover that which gives life to a thing. The vehicle is the praise; the approach, always simple and imaginative:

the vines with their
green hair
sing to the fall air
tomatoes, tomatoes.

or:

You lift your white hands
to your eyes, waxen, honeyed,
pale lilies, mums, the dead man's
flowers, a thousand bees buzzing
in your wrists.

Imagistically, anything is possible. Yet it is the solid base created by diction, an unassuming tone, that convinces a reader that everything has been told correctly, that everything in these poems is in its proper place. In the last stanza of “Restoring the Moon,” Wallace describes a situation which could be taken metaphorically to be his stance throughout the book:

You land on the moon.
It is not what it seems. Just rocks and dust.
Still, they are counting on you.
You reach in your pockets. Luckily, you've brought
your plums, stones, kisses, and hooks
with you. You take them out. You get to work.

With the fewest of tools, a world is built again. And we can count on Wallace to give us a world where things are alive, and where their meaning matters.
Private Gallery
Melinda Mueller
The Seal Press
Seattle, Washington
$3.00, paper

Here, too, the poems are celebrations, yet Mueller seems less interested in the world for its own sake than in an inner life nurtured and rectified by that world being correctly observed:

The landscape's cargo is stone, thatch, a castle keep,
lean trees twisted like cable, the deep sediment of legend.

The wind my bones have dreamt of rises. Westward,
the Cliffs of Moher are a tall prow. Miles inland, I hoist sail.

That these poems often respond to, or are triggered by, a particular thing—be it a place, a painting, a quotation—suggests the poet's obsession with relationship. Wherever she finds herself, she finds occasion for self-inventory:

Beneath me, the ground surrenders. The only remedies are seasonal, as a forest is cured of its leaves each fall. Already the whispers of betrayal are rising. I see how resolute forgiveness has to be.

In the best of these poems there is a serious attempt to see clearly, both inside and out. Never mere confessions, the poems concern themselves with truthfully announcing, always quietly, what seems to be the case. What we glean as readers are example, visits with clarity. And, as so often happens with words that strike deeply, we become acquainted with the awesomeness of things. Here is the last section of the title poem:

ILLUSTRATION FROM A FAIRY TALE

The woman who knew the story's real ending was the Wicked Stepmother, which is how she earned the title Wicked.
Seeing her approach the priest leapt
for the hedge, the king rubbed the stones
of his parapet until his palms were raw.
Only the tinker and the woman peddling needles,
who lived by the road and not by the story,
tipped their caps or nodded. She has come
from her circular room, the dried roots,
the brews of tansy and St. John’s wort.
The apples she carries are poisonous
because she has placed them in her basket
upside down. One for each of us.

Rick Robbins

BOOKS RECEIVED

Cleared for Landing, Ann Darr, poems, Dryad Press, $3.95.
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The Eggplant and Other Absurdities, Duane Ackerson, poems, Confluence Press.
50 Contemporary Poets: The Creative Process, Alberta T. Turner, ed., anthology,
Longman Press, $12.50, hardback.
Fire in the Bushes, Patrick Todd, poems, Clearwater, $3.50.
A Full Heart, Edward Field, poems, Horizon Press, $7.95, hardback.
Gillnets, Samuel Green, poems, Cold Mountain Press, no price listed.
Highland Station, Roland Tharp, poems, Poetry Texas Chapbooks, no price listed.
Installing the Bees, Ronald Wallace, poems, Chowder Chapbooks, $2.00.
Laughing Past History, Rhoda Gelfond, poems, Copper Beech Press, $3.50.
Looking Up, Christopher Buckley, poem, Greenhouse Review Press, no price listed.
The Man Who Shook Hands, Diane Wakoski, poems, Doubleday, $3.95.
The Night Traveler, Mary Oliver, poems, Bits Press, no price, letter-pressed.
On the Road to Sleeping Child Hotsprings, Roger Dunsmore, poems, Pulp Press,
$3.00.

The Romantic Abstract of the Mythical Agon, Harrison Fisher, poems, Window
Press, $1.75.
Songs for a Hometown Boy, Mark Vinz, poems, Solo Press, no price listed.
Three, Richard Dokey, stories, Fiction Texas, no price listed.
Topographies, Margaret Condon, poems, Lame Johnny Press, $2.50.

MAGAZINES RECEIVED

The Agni Review (No. 8), David Ghitelman and Askold Melnychuk, eds., P.O. Box
663, Cranford, NJ 07016. $1.50 each.
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<td>George Drury Smith, ed., 1639 W. Washington Blvd., Venice, CA 90291</td>
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<td>Bits (No. 7)</td>
<td>Dennis Dooley et al, Dept. of English, Case Western University, Cleveland, OH 44106</td>
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<td>Gordon Preston et al, eds., P.O. Box 4104, Modesto, CA 95352</td>
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<td>Three Rivers Poetry Journal (Nos. 10 &amp; 11/12)</td>
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