

1994

Folk tales

Victoria Rostovich
The University of Montana

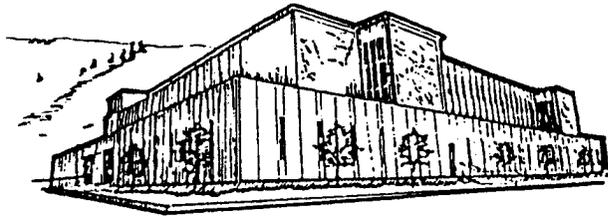
Let us know how access to this document benefits you.

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.umt.edu/etd>

Recommended Citation

Rostovich, Victoria, "Folk tales" (1994). *Graduate Student Theses, Dissertations, & Professional Papers*. 2380.
<https://scholarworks.umt.edu/etd/2380>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School at ScholarWorks at University of Montana. It has been accepted for inclusion in Graduate Student Theses, Dissertations, & Professional Papers by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks at University of Montana. For more information, please contact scholarworks@mso.umt.edu.



Maureen and Mike MANSFIELD LIBRARY

The University of
Montana

Permission is granted by the author to reproduce this material in its entirety, provided that this material is used for scholarly purposes and is properly cited in published works and reports.

*** Please check "Yes" or "No" and provide signature***

Yes, I grant permission
No, I do not grant permission

Author's Signature Victoria Bostovich

Date: 5-3-94

Any copying for commercial purposes or financial gain may be undertaken.

FOLK TALES

by

Victoria Rostovich

B.A., West Chester University, 1988

Presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

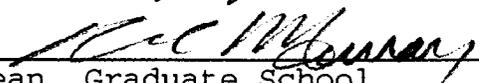
Master of Fine Arts

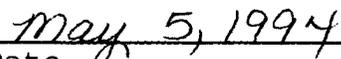
University of Montana

1994

Approved by


Chairman, Board of Examiners


Dean, Graduate School


Date

UMI Number: EP35605

All rights reserved

INFORMATION TO ALL USERS

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.



UMI EP35605

Published by ProQuest LLC (2012). Copyright in the Dissertation held by the Author.

Microform Edition © ProQuest LLC.

All rights reserved. This work is protected against unauthorized copying under Title 17, United States Code



ProQuest LLC.
789 East Eisenhower Parkway
P.O. Box 1346
Ann Arbor, MI 48106 - 1346

Table of Contents

Folk Tales	1
I. FOLK LORE	
In the Nerve Center	3
Fortress	4
Festival of the Dead	5
I Fall Down So Much Tonight and	6
Job Interview at the Blue	
Butterfly Bottomless Lounge	7
Circus Nights	8
The Courtship Is Over	9
Philadelphia Blotter, 12/23/93	10
Showdown	11
Romance in the New World	12
Premonition	15
II. FOLK MAGIC	
Drums	17
III. FOLK MEDICINE	
Desert Imitation	26
The Most Recent Migration	27
Killing Time	28
Filmstrip I: Woman In Love	29
Filmstrip II: Woman In Love	30
Standing in the Bathroom (mirror)	31
Wash Duty	32
Condom	33
My Erotic Double	34
Lake Huron	35
Dar es Salaam	36
IV. FOLK SONGS	
All's Well That Ends Well	38

"I dream of a hard and brutal mysticism."

Edward Abbey

Folk Tales

I. A Love Story

He stood just outside the door, watching her equilibrium run low.

The moon is hanging and that's a good omen. The stars have fallen on them hundreds of times. The hot shadow from the tea cup, grays and grazes the carpet which he hadn't stood on for awhile. How long had it been since he'd stooped while passing through her doorframe? So long since he last heard the drum roll of her fingers on his backbone. The moment when he should press his hand over her mouth soon became evident to both. It's rare that openings ever present themselves as anything but the first bees of April. Something must happen soon. His hand must eventually detach itself and make a gesture. Run the index finger from her bottom lip to the center of her breastbone. Who can stay still? Who's moving?

II. Resources

It has been hotter since we plastered the front yard, so hot the old ones on the stumps ask for more water than usual. The flower gardens are losing their lustrous red; the greens are fading to pastels. Three men and I sat on a bench, beneath a tree, during the storms. I only want the melody of their questions, weaving with the thunder, repeated daily in my head. They wanted to drink then and there. They asked permission to catch the downpour in their mouths. I gave them my slender head-tuck and declined reply. After all, they were free to choose.

For our lives to go someplace wet, I have to drive a truck made from gold, at least gold-plated on the surfaces. The old ones who own the truck are in possession of custard powder, and, at times, concentrated fish sauce, to flavor their main staple-- grains. I need to get some water to them soon, before they get bored with hunger, before they get angry and plant land mines in the riverbed. Spite is action but not solution. But, they are free to choose. I didn't go down for it too well when I lost time carrying water with those who abandoned me, out of spite, and left me wandering. I told them if I got lost one more time, and if I lost my occupation, I would become a pagan, a rebel, a guerrilla. I told them only the children deserve the water, and I could take away the water, the grain and flower seeds, especially the children. I told them, of course, they were free to choose in this, and all matters. Resolution seems probable.

I. FOLK LORE

In the Nerve Center(1)

When they locked us up in this cage
hopscotch was one way to deal.
Sucking on ice chips.
Soaks in the black puddle by the curb.

Ocelots pace the perimeter.
Quantity: Eight.
Usually they leave us alone.
Except for the ninth, invisible
to all but me. A seer,
eminent in Thailand, once announced,
"Today, (2), is propitious for legal reform."
Jazzy words coming from a person executed
before horse latitudes(3) levelled oceans.

Nations are disappearing.
Africa. Greece. Laos.
Go anywhere while you still can.
Enter the word gangplank into your lexicon.
Jump while they're sleeping.
There's plenty to worry about.
The I Ching predicts your return.

- (1) nerve center -- a source of leadership, control, or energy
- (2) please fill in appropriate date
- (3) horse latitudes -- either of two belts or regions in the neighborhoods of 30 degrees North and 30 degrees South latitude characterized by high pressure, calms, and light baffling winds

Fortress

I asked the rocks to get me
down the fire escape. No
metaphor will help me out.
Just rocks with large quartz eyes full
of love and sad plans for my rescue.
They take their time with things.
I asked the rocks to fall on me, just a few.

Patrick went to Mexico and left
the plane ticket beneath
the green box of chess pieces.
My work keeps me busy and safe.
Dry clay sticks to my jeans.
Who keeps telling me to go to Guanajuato?
Who is so jealous of me?

A woman has nine or ten
holes in her body. I never
thought of order. A lost bird
might fly in and wake me
with its crying. I hang
the sign: Please do not disturb.
I close the windows each night.

I asked the rocks to be my bride,
the bottle rack to be my children.
We play poker with rubber chips.
I always win big. Just lucky, I guess.
We kill time in one big bed.
We are happy with popcorn.
We don't care about others.

Festival of the Dead

To put a sea lion under a microscope
you must first slice off some of its cells.

How will I reach the border without being noticed?
How will I run fast enough in my barefeet?

Ah! At last, the parade of the parrot.
May I use your camera? Flash. Blink.

We deny death as though we could
think it dead by not thinking about it.

Someone dressed in black is waving.
Is he trying to tell me something?

Serious lessons are at stake here:
capture, captivity, capitulation.

Good sons don't punch out windows
just because they're angry.

Slice away some more cells.
I have a glass box soul.

I Fall Down So Much Tonight and

cartwheel in conjunction with canine echoes.
Getting back, the bread's on the burner.
My body basks in bones it loves.
The skull. The femur. Spiders scurry
on the fallen porch. My feet trip me.
I stutter and heave. When my ugly hands
piston the body, the pain of bites
from those stupid spiders, the sting of pain,
the teeth on legs, the taste of their eggs.
Not a drop of draft in the darkness left.
The kegball is curt and too dry to quench.
Home is just here, through the hanging door.
The bread smells bad. Burnt and smoked.
I wonder where I went wrong. I wonder too much.
Canines? Loving bones? Can dogs love me back?
Where I land, where I am, I will always fit in.

Job Interview at the Blue Butterfly Bottomless Lounge

Rum for the men who want. For me a soak
in anise steam. I hoist my body from the pool,
drip dry, flake out. "Get in uniform,"

my boss insists. His head is oviform,
wrinkled, sprouting knuckles of tough skin.
I put on bangles and a fur smock. I say, "Yes, Sir."

I'm supposed to care; the technology
here is tops for dames to have brutal impact.
Plus the money suits me. I study faces:

Some runny with neon circuits of fat.
Some shiny as baked chicken, juice blazing
from pores and dry eye sockets. Some dead

weight for the concierge to haul out back.
I serve smoked mussels, eel fillets,
salad, soup, and bread of course.

I make a ballad out of the dessert menu,
butterscotch pudding a last aria.
I'm topnotch. Employee of the month.

I'm each night's flavor. One thin man knows this
and wants to favor my windpipe with,
what else, kisses. That's fine by me.

The foreplay is enough to get me hot,
one of the better perks. You want a job
here? Fill out this form. Lose some weight.

Circus Nights

For this dim carnival
the clown needs more
strychnine. It's hell
working for the big czar.
The clown whines and pulls
at straws crunching soft
in his hair and clothes.
He lights a cigarette,
some cheap old brand,
and licks tobacco
flakes off his hand.

He hates this job so much
he wants to kill them all.

He unscrews the jar lid
and whiffs on it and watches
Polly dance. He sees a fly
skitting, only needing a swat
to die. One more cartwheel
later, he needs to leave the barn.
The clown loses consciousness.
Polly whispers something
to herself and tugs at
her skirt as she watches
his hands break his fall.

The Courtship Is Over

Dahlia's the flower of Tulsa-- their home.
He cries, "I don't wanna be hearing this talk."
She's high on Darvon and can't shut her yap.
She cooks lentil soup, at a loss for what to do.
It turns out thick as sludge and spiced just right.

Fine. The next morning these facts are forgotten.
At the door, a buttery brush of lips. His body
gets in the carpool each day except in April.
A venison salad fills her up around three.
She looks at photos of men with good haircuts.

What about the mouse who lives beneath the cupboard?
He's nervous that the man won't return until dark.
He's scared of the umbrella the woman uses
when she dances to techno-rap-jingles.
He hopes for a crumble of soy to fall his way.

Late that night, the man comes home with eight fur coats.
One for each day of the week. A spare for leap year.
She sweats and spreads them like drapes over windows.
The mouse drools and can't wait to gnaw chunks of fox hair.
He'll stuff his nest and look for his own ladylove.

The man and woman put on party hats and blow horns.
They march around and yell out facts about chickens.
Like, "A chicken needs a manicure once a month."
They fall in a heap. The mouse darts to open ground.
They fall on him with sharp nails and teeth and sighs.

Philadelphia Blotter, 12/23/93

A woman in her early forties was apprehended for shoplifting in Woolworth's after store security found a package of plastic Bic lighters in her purse. This is the woman's third shoplifting offense. The store manager has decided to press charges.

Police responded to a complaint about an allegedly intoxicated, middle-aged man kneeling beneath the caller's window and singing "O Sole Mio." When police arrived, the man was found there, kneeling. However, the complainant chose not to press charges.

Every morning of the past week, the residents at 721 Garden Avenue have found a glass jar on their front porch. The jars contain a pink, gluey substance. The jars and their contents have been sent to the lab for further testing.

Three twelve year old boys were discovered in the living room of Elaine and Fred O'Hare. The boys had broken into the O'Hare home because they thought the O'Hares were on vacation. Elaine said the boys were eating cupcakes. Fred said they were also watching MTV. Fred and Elaine are childless. If they decide to press charges, the case will go to juvenile court.

A teen age male was taken to St. George's Hospital after an incident with two police officers. The officers report that he ran up to them and was shouting, "Help! Help! My face is on fire!" The officers assert that his face was not on fire; however, he insisted he be taken to a hospital. Upon arrival, it was discovered that the four fingers of his right hand had been recently severed and he clutched these fingers in his left hand. They were reattached through surgery and the boy is presently in stable condition. Investigation of this incident will continue.

Showdown

We misconduct the business of blood.
Eyes look ahead to the elevator going down.
It carries pig parts for the attorney.

We grease my sliding glass door with fat.
Two lines of frozen wash fall. The neighbor
has raked our leaves into such a neat pile.

Shall we spend the evening? Together?
Staying up all night? Without the screaming?
Will you smell my dress, tangled with crud?

Pass certain fragrances my way.
Keep messing with me, dirty boy.
Hours fly by like crows.

Before the train squeals by again,
just listen to what my heavy chest
announces: This all started out

in the name of a good god. With
words like wow and yes and love.
We shook hands. Remember?

I didn't hand you the pistol
in a dream this time.
You can't see it, but blood

is leaking out of a hole
in my stomach. A hole so small
you could fit your finger in it.

Romance in the New World

I. Dancers

A solitary jet
so pale
it almost blends in
with the white sky.

A man in a blue and white
striped bathing suit
stands in a daisy field.
Head tilted back.
Eyes open and facing
down the sun. Hands
folded under his bearded chin.
He won't admit he wishes
he were on that plane.
He recalls a similar sky,
and then four bare feet
stumbling and gangling
in sweet clover and violets.

The woman with red hair
jumps from the plane.
Cream parachute
trailing her.
A small black pistol
in her left hand.
A red plastic rattle
in her right.
She falls in a glide
full of arabesques.
He pulls her up,
takes her in his arms,
and begins the box waltz.
Spinning circles.

They leap and lunge.
They're getting sloppy.
They are heading
for a fall. Bodies
don't fall as fast
as you might think.
Bodies lurch of course.
Arms and legs always
swipe at air. Still,
they keep dancing
as long as they can.

II. One Night

She can't sleep
with these fifty mph gusts
clinking the metal clamp
against the flagpole
and squeaking past
the window's pane of glass
and floating up the hall.

The wind grabs
aluminum cans
from the gutter
and tears off
branches that
strike brick walls.
Papers and litter
whirl around.

She hears the baby's
cries and goes.

She gets up,
dresses warmly,
and wanders streets.
The wind crams her ears
with its nonstop growl.
She's afraid
of falling wires.

She watches scientists
on t.v. say birds
are descended
from the dinosaurs.
She doesn't even
believe in dinosaurs
but lifts
her heavy body
and spreads her arms.

She makes her way
through the house.
The baby sleeps
on and on.

The trees fill out
or shrink in accord
with the wind.

III. Freaks

An incident is
about to happen.
They get ready.
Smoking. Sweating.
Breathing. Bathing.
When he buckles
on those guns
she coughs loud
to clue him in.
They have a billion
things to do. They
are ready to go
back to the house.

Pink fuzzy blooms
languish in the window box.
His scuffed work boots
air out on the ledge.
Jigsaw puzzle pieces
are on the table.
The puzzle is whole
and ready for shellack.
The dishes are washed
and dried and stacked.
The laundry is low
enough to be ignored.

She gets the shotgun from the closet,
breaks it down, and cleans it.

Bees hum at the screens.
She picks some rosemary
and basil and chives
to flavor the bread.

Today the baby has
a cold and she must
put the dropper
up the baby's nose
to suck out the mucous.
She hates the baby's cough.
It worries her.

She misses the long flat
land of the orchards
and the thud of apples
falling to the ground.

Premonition

I can not manage another night of this.
Who took the baby from me? Who lit
the stove? I'll boil some water.
I'll watch the pot. I promise.
Why should I care since summer's gone away?
Each night's a scarf of black around the sky.

I don't hear her come in.
She fingers the white fringe of the lampshade,
her hand's shadow creasing her round cheeks.
She has nothing to say.
She walks to the corn patch
to get a few ears for dinner,
to pitch pebbles at the crows.

I sing in a soft voice to the baby.
Whose children sit on the floor,
sorting through baskets of yellow apples?
They look like her, long faces.
To count them all in some new way.

I watch the gas flames. Dill and basil
creep green into green. She pulls
at a loose string in her sweater
and stares out the window at the fields.

II. FOLK MAGIC

Drums

I.

I pick a different one each night.
I swing my tits in small circles,
shimmy my hips into faces. I'm good.
Each day I practice my moves
with the house drummer. He's good too.
The man next to me now, he might be
someone's father. After all, no man is God.
The man next to me now scares me. But why?

II.

Someone took me to the opera when I was young.
It was a story mostly about God.
This did not seem unusual.
I remember mostly the timpani rolls.
This still seems perfectly okay.

III.

To make a frame drum, she shapes wood into a circle. To yield a sturdier sound, she chooses to do this by cutting and sanding eighteen equal pieces, attaching them with pegs. She sizes wet deerhide around the wood and uses some spare strips to lash the circle of hide to the circle of wood. She hangs it from a branch. She sits against the tree. She has been told God gave her knowledge and skills. She has suspicions about this, which she usually keeps to herself.

IV.

The pounding of drums
by many gods all at once,
not running horses.

V.

The first time sex was best with him
was on the basement carpet, in front
of his drumset. I heard him say
godvickygod when I was coming.
The next best sex was on tour
in Corsica in a dressing room.
I always wanted to see Italy.

VI.

Headbangers are so named due to their ability to swing their heads back and forth in rhythm with the drumbeat of the songs they hear. Plainly, they are also able to eat, have jobs, and pay taxes. Research predicts they may even be able to skin rattlesnakes and pray. They are happy to hear such news. They offer rattlesnakes to God. They await further research.

VII.

I have photos of each of them playing
the large brown conga. She squints
at her hands, pulling away or ready to strike.
He is staring at the wall in front of him,
looking elsewhere, or for God.

VIII.

I clap because you clap.
We have this understanding
about how things fit together.
We can make two bodies a talking drum.
You clap because I clap. We're sure
the God we're not sure of wants us
to do more than just multiply.
Our bodies have told us so.

III. FOLK MEDICINE

Desert Imitation

This riverbed is dry but my flesh irrigates
itself through canals hidden beneath my skin.
I learn the slippery rules of my body
through every move it makes,
pressing, face-down, against rock slab.
Cool. Smooth. Flat. I follow
my feet following the hard-pack
sand down to the water. I drink
water before it slips from my hands.

The body in sand. The body prone.
Particles of sand permeate the margins
of the body. Skin sloughing and sifting
into a body of sand. To sketch is to create
the margins of the form, but not necessarily
to fill in the form. Skin becomes sketchy.
The body becomes fluid and moves
toward the water without permission
from the mind. The body begins
to change shape. The body stiffens

at the water's edge as someone attempts
to mount it, to frame it in
a precise manner, thus, to maintain
a sure, fixed shape. The body has a mind
of its own which pays no heed
to concepts contrary to its survival.

The body? Let's avoid clarity.
Let's ignore the body.
Let's blurrier the lines
of the body by refining
the workings of the mind.

Assume the words are the mind's
detritus which become the coals
which will help us create a fire.
Fire keeps our bones warm.
Smoldering coals. Warm bones.
Deep sleep until the chill sets in.
Night. Silence. Cold.
Did my body store no light today?

The Most Recent Migration

The brain will try to coerce me
unless I busy the hands
with kneading and shaping the dough,

or the skin of some man. Waiting

for the loaf to rise, I watch
angels billow from small pores,
shake out their wings, and fly

rings around my head. Praying

does me no good. They winter
in my warm thick hair. I move
to a desert, shave my head,

and wave goodbye to angels, just

black sparrows now, winging
northward in search of a good
suburb, kind people who don't mind

sowing lawns with stale bread. For

a long time, I am in love
with the even spread of sand.
I kiss the lizard before eating it.

I learn to sleep by day and let

the smell of cool air wake me.
I pack the ears with sand and pretend
all is well. The wind's tongue gets in.

And the still feet move the body along.

Killing Time

I toss clothes into large machines
and hit buttons. My wedding
is in an hour. I write my vows.

My mother gives me her newborn.
It was a difficult birth.
She must rest awhile.

My voice is good enough to sing
to myself. The baby doesn't
count. It's not mine really.

My husband-to-be calls.
He'll be late. Again.
He's good to let me know.

A pebble in his shoe. A quart
of corn whiskey. A broken
head-lamp. Something like that.

A plug of tobacco, a game of pool
with Mother, strings of saliva
down the baby's chin. I can wait
him out. I will. I promise.

Filmstrip I: Woman In Love

Today. Oh what fucking day is it?
After last night, I might be in love
with HIM, who said I was in no category.
I tend to think of Schopenhauer
and his laws of something or other.
I told HIM, "You're a death rocker
but I don't care what speed
you travel. My orbit's ready."

We flirt a lot.
He eats my pretzels.
I eat his problems.
Hey, I care.
He says I'm nice, and good for him.
But he always leaves for a time
beneath the bridge, for shadows of birds.
He says he's no good then.
I only ask for him now and then.

I am myself though.
And I writhe when he's around.
Even now, just thinking,
I'm dilating. Can I handle this?
I'll spend the afternoon
tacking postcards on the wall.

Filmstrip II: Woman In Love

After coffee she ushers last night's
to the exit and pleases him with one kiss.
His breath is a whiff of peanuts
or grandmother. Perhaps love.

Someone mails out James Dean postcards
and calls it love. She tacks them
by the bed for future reference.
For her finger buried.
For her thumb rotating.
For the drums she hears.

She raps some Billie Holiday in the shower:
OH MY MAN I LOVE HIM SO.
I DON'T KNOW WHY
AND I GUESS I'LL NEVER KNOW.
It's gotten so it means nothing.

No work today so off to the park
and skater boys with long hair,
skinny torsos, and long wooden-spoon legs.
Love you long time, she mouths.
She could get busted for that.
Good thing skater boys are asexual.
She knows. She read it in SEVENTEEN.

Sometimes she does things right.
Like tonight. Pick up a chicken,
some garlic bread, and Chartreuse.
Call up her old friend, the judge.
Or just sit at home with cop show
re-runs. Who calls anything love?

Standing in the Bathroom (mirror)

Death is the mirror of beauty. The mirror
is free, erotically, to be. (you) See
me as I see myself. Bite me. (crane your
face over my right shoulder) Not too hard.
Your hips slack. (against mine) Lazy bone
to bone. The shower awaits. (shower with
me) Who? (you) Who? (me) Point your
finger at yourself. (mon amour) Wait.
Take off my dress. (no tugging) Step
into the stall. Don't start without me.

Wash Duty

I. That boy from the gas station comes in

I had your welfare in mind. I designed it all for you. The machines run themselves. They stretch out their strings to each other. They want to help. Just follow the lights, in sequence. You'll get used to it. Even the noises will sound like drums. It's easy and I'm grateful. Believe me, I'm grateful. I want to help too. I can cut hair in a straight line. I will color inside the lines of your body and hide you in my crawl hole when cops knock. Only the machines will know.

II. Our secrets

The giraffe is eighteen inches tall. He's a nice pet. He always uses his box and he eats very little. He talks back, but not in a smart way. His name is Alesso. He needs me. I need you to drain my too full breasts. I need to fatten you up when icicles hang by the wall.

I spent years in Switzerland. I kept alive a small cactus. I fed it with dried blood from ground marrow. I used ESPOMA brand. The nitrogen allows the soil to breathe. The cells breathe so clearly. Most people don't understand the value of nitrogen. They think soap and water are enough. Safe under sheets, they let their hands tramp across skin full of waste. We will sweat forty minutes each day. At least. I'm making you an offer. We'll be so clean, inside and out. My uniform stays fresh and so will yours. I'll wash them the best way, the right way. Chopchop, Daddy-O.

Men fold laundry with such quick hands.
I've taken to wearing lipstick. Peach.

Condom

I must pile up the daisies.
A pile so big, brother and sister
might lie down above the soil.
They manage to burrow into the daisies.
The condom is a tight fit for him.
Nevertheless, it stretches.
Nonetheless, they insist.
She holds the condom,
at the base of his penis,
as she peels herself off him.
He takes it off. And throws it away.
Brother and sister should not reproduce.
People risk something when they exchange
fluids through certain membranes.

Fish. There's an adage known to fishermen:
Don't touch the most external, membranous layer
of certain fish. But I'm not sure which kind.

The girl with the glass eyeball
thinks she's different and hopes
someone will see a fire in her eye.
Someday she will housesit for a friend
and sleep naked with the dogs.
Her eyeball buried in golden fur.

If someone's a good person, the daisies
provide a covering and a texture
that makes everything just sexier.
But it's not always so. Take the daisies away.
Use fire and try to remain content with cinder.
We're all piling up daisies here.
Try going without fire.

My Erotic Double

I ruined his gold chain and crucifix.
And then I felt his hands. And then I
fell asleep kneeling on the mirror.
Someone warned me not to. But who?

And then I felt his hands. And then I
trusted him? A novice forgets.
Someone warned me not to. But who?
I eat shellfish each night. Is that why I

trusted him? A novice forgets.
My twin is sore from a terrible fall.
I eat shellfish each night. Is that why
only a hot bath could solve my many crises?

My twin is sore from a terrible fall.
He wrapped me in red gauze and said
only a bath could solve my many crises.
Puppets are hiding in the cistern.

He wrapped me in red gauze and said
only I could make me well again. Only I?
Puppets are hiding in the cistern.
A chorus of servants who want to warn me

only I could make me well again. Only I?
My twin is compiling a list of suspects.
A chorus of servants who want to warn me.
I urged her not to interfere, but she came and

my twin is compiling a list of suspects.
I ruined his gold chain and crucifix.
I urged her not to interfere, but she came and
fell asleep kneeling on the mirror.

Lake Huron

I'm with the man with the black guitar
next to blue water dipping
into sun-white sky. He and I
are staying awhile. My skin
is tan as a sweet potato skin.
My body's shaping into a seal's body.
I have the electric can opener
for the tins of smoked salmon.

Wind's out of the northwest
at three miles per hour.
A few fast games of dominoes.
We sit in wicker chairs
and sip fizzy water with lime.
An afternoon cruise in the Volvo
to pick up a cheap electric heater
and cinnamon rolls in a brown bag.

The kerosene lantern gives off
just enough light. His lip gloss
glows. He serves poached eggs
and loops a simple necklace
of two minnows on fishing line
around my neck. I put this gift
in a glass of saltwater each night.

Moonrise. Partly cloudy.
We roll out the trundle bed
and wool blankets. The water
strips and sweeps the beach.
The spray trickles down
and dampens the air surrounding
our black breath haloes.

We ascend the stairwell
to the mentholated steam-room.
We strip down and throw
our clothes in the dumpster
marked WASTE. We keep
our stares above the neck.
We make some connection
with our lips even though
our lips are thin, dry lines.

Dar es Salaam

I will name the child Gabrielle.
Every morning I sit on the terrace
to breathe evenly in sunlight and hot wind.
I can control the nausea now.

I walk through dust paving the market.
I won't let my eyes near the temple of the Goddess.
Not even on the Feast Day of Fertility.
Who are these coming to sacrifice? Let them cut
the heifer on the altar of mint white plaster.
Let them clean up the blood. I am too tired.

My amor is mine, not to be bought with gin and ice.
The circle of drummers and dancing women
takes me nowhere. I have no veils to discard.
I can not settle for small ceramic trinkets.

Here is a trail to a green shrub.
The markings are stored in little clumps of dirt.
I am figuring things out for myself.
I am on good terms with the flies who live
in the shrub. They land on me.
They swallow my sweat.

I expected magic here.
I got it.
I wander the ports.
I am on a boat. Adieu.

My body rocks and sweats. I feel myself falling.
A kind woman lets me rest in her home.
Her children wipe my skin with cool cloths.
Their fingerprints monogram my face and neck.
She touches my swollen belly and smiles.
I smile back. These days I have little to say.

IV. FOLK SONGS

All's Well That Ends Well

I. It All Starts Because

They have been rutting like goats. Nan stands and preens. Disgusted. She zips on her skin. "Monster, I do smell all horse-piss; at which my nose is in great indignation." Darwin runs chase and corners her by the ladder rotting against the wet cave wall. She stiffens. Her way of coping is this all-night litany. Call it a summons:

"Love, love don't go away.
Stay with me for one more day.
Leave with the rain
that keeps out the sun.
Leave me to die
if you must say goodbye."

Her bones sing long past her skin
becomes humus. Sing on in the cave
so I may find you. I will sit and rock
and warble myself, until I am dumb
with you. Until I am blind enough,
my eyes wrung dry with such visions,
only oracles, and you, should see through,

II. In Another Life

She was known as Madame D'Gizarde, and, in the early forties, she used deceit, drugs and her beguiling charms to become the bane of chicken farmers everywhere. A man was her downfall. She must have mistook him for a stunning cock. He convinced her to get comfortable. She bought chintz. She got soft. Rumors got going in the coop. One night they swooped upon her. She swooned. They pecked mercilessly. You know how merciless chickens can be, especially when they're all caged up like that.

III. Long Distance

Let's say we are two mountains on either side of the Continental Divide. Complex systems of sound and light vein our whole mass, connect us how we belong. Each beam is radius. $(\pi)(r^2) = C$. C is circumference, sufficient hyperbole to carry through, to let us live alone.

IV. The Search for a Cure

It is a dry sleeping bag I crawl in
this night of insects popping in fire,
this night of utter tree silence. At dawn
I will make oatmeal-- microwave at HIGH
about one to two minutes; stir. I will.
Everything comes down to a Yamaha drum kit
and that man with sticks out there, somewhere.
Find him for me, please. I'm sure he could help.
For now I will ride in the hearse of night.

V. Blind Date in Hawaii

At the Flaky Club he told me a joke
over dolphin steaks. Later we would
have beefalo pie for dessert. Wild.

I laughed so hard I spilled my beer
milkshake. This is the joke. Listen.
What do Jesus, Francois Mitterand,

and Liberace all have in common?
One's a Hebrew, one's French
and one's a cheesy American.

None of them are American.
A very tan man at the bar
asked the bartender, "A really

good looking blond didn't
come in here?" "There's so many
of them." "Well, this is a free country.

Give me a cocktail." He ordered
an Island Girl, which is some parts
rum, some parts mango, some parts

grapefruit, served in a pineapple.
He wore loafers with a beret
but his tan was better than mine.

VI. Romantic Memory

Storm sits down to retrieve his fishing line from his sack. "You could find wood and we could make a small fire," he suggests. Pretty strong words coming from Storm, and I have known him since I was twenty-three, the days of chocolate and eightballs. That and running from the cops. How did I lose the cops so many times? Maybe they were on my side. The wood and the fire swerve each time I open my eyes. Maybe they are working against me. So I keep them shut. Just to be safe.

VII. Just Between Him and Her

Fine. Go home to Italy early. You are irritable.

A long drive along the Missouri River isn't what I want.

So many cities, so little time. Eight cities down. Forty-three more to go. Then we can go home and relax a little.

Oh, let us talk instead of romance novels. Yes, I do remember Mexico. I hope the children are alive.

"I like big butts and I cannot lie." What a marvelous song!

Oh? (She was thinking, number two-eight-eight-zero-one-two was pure, the way I should have gone. The cork screw will tell such crass lies. Who is this man?) Yes, quite lovely.

Before the cock crows three times tonight,

(She thought she was thinking this, but really she was saying this aloud) I will, a blip and a blip and maybe half a blip.

you will betray me. Don't get out of this car. You'll be back in ten minutes. I know just how you operate. (While she strides away he thinks, minutia. Wait, does that have an e somewhere inside? Inside is just another safety valve like my baseball cap. I heard, you should only wear it backwards when you're giving head. Who could know? Not me.) Where did she go?

VIII. The One True Story

The pretty girl, with chapped lips,
wearing the red sombrero, she knows
what it scarcely ever feels like.
She walks down the highway, waiting to hear,
"Oh, switch your stilettos for sandals.
I promise you a lead in Swan Lake,
even a cameo in the Sistine Chapel."
She's waiting for me to help her,
to keep a promise made under duress,
under the influence of love.
That promise of bones singing.
That promise of hollow-socket vision.
That promise is nothing more than dirt.