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POSEIDON'S BAKERY  
A COLLECTION OF POEMS

By

Niles Choper

B.A. Harper College, Binghamton, New York, 1970

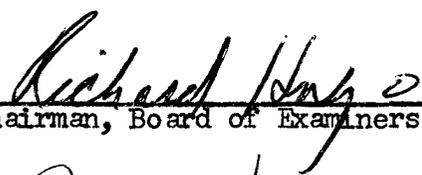
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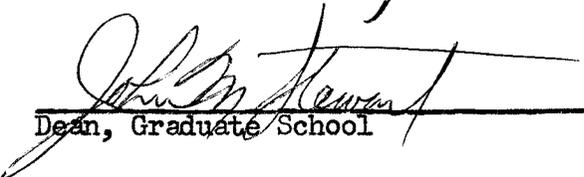
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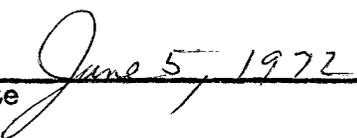
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oracle

every movement,  
every turn of the tongue,  
the slightest pursing of lips,  
we are joined  
and language floods my spine.

my face is buried,  
weaving incantations in the dark:  
every breath anticipates violence.  
These shaking bones want wings.

The Ogre

for Bill Burriss

When my neighbor walks the tundra  
pain curdles in his pockets.

His is a white country,  
squirrels guard his path.

This deep-bearded carpenter  
sires a well mannered line of chests and caskets.

His buzz saw whines ecstatically  
from the barn, sends birds flapping.

This winter, we bring fruitcakes.

His eyes drop tiny sparks  
when he eats.

## The Banker

slush, wreaths, flashing lights.  
They ask about Christmas Clubs  
mortgages and credit.  
No one comes to say hello,  
to talk of fishing or the children

An orgy of words and small change,  
faces like sinking minnows,  
I wish them health.  
They trickle through paper streets  
and disappear. The vault moans,  
growing louder towards afternoon.  
Beyond its steel door, I wish a room  
chest high with green paper  
where I might go of a lunch hour,  
jack off the pain, the precision  
of their lonely faces.

## Riding Close

if our clothes vanish  
and the train keeps lurching  
I would be on you in a flash.  
We would pass thirty-fourth street  
and wouldn't care till after yankee stadium  
had disappeared.

what dull magician, then, keeps us both  
holding the handles  
quietly riding these subways?

## Good Morning

or waking up in your own room  
beside a woman who looks just great  
only she's someone's wife  
and you can't remember her name  
but there you are and it's raining outside.  
She's not awake yet and looking around  
you see empty glasses,  
bottles you left open and Hey!  
there's cigarettes on the floor.  
She turns in her sleep,  
but you can't reach a cigarette  
and you feel oh, almost sick this morning.  
When she wakes the first thing she will say  
is something about roaches.

## The Love of Chaos

Chaos opened her lips to me  
and I pushed my tongue deep into her mouth,  
into a sea of flashing lights and false friends,  
lovers who forgot me and strolled past with broomsticks.  
I drifted through empty shops,  
all night bars where women yell  
tearing out hair by the handful.  
Only the beer accused me--  
no one ever knew me like that:  
the dizziness, the failings,  
shrill jap radios, wedding cakes iced with vomit.  
Chaos spread her legs for me.  
Screaming in her mouth,  
I tasted her terrible love.

## Incantation

O rise  
from the bed where you dream  
slowly, like smoke in the night  
feathers, wings,  
rise on the wind  
rise, drift over mountains and lakes  
over forests  
(grasses and sage scurry beneath you)  
ride the wind through the night  
through clouds and blue air  
to the city

streets and subways,  
bars, movie houses,  
find me  
through offices and couches,  
cops and countermen  
search with feathers and amulets  
through the dead flesh

find me  
and give me blue feathers  
singing loud  
wrap me in your yellow blankets  
and draw the blue smoke from my mouth  
find me with your song  
find me  
lift the blankets from my shoulders  
and drop them in the ocean  
singing loud in the city  
singing  
wrapping me in feathers  
and rising, a yellow wind  
above the clouds

Poem For The Muse

I said "In sewers and steampipes,"  
but you said "No!"  
so we went off to the Botanical Gardens  
and the museums.  
You bought postcards of Rubens and Titian  
then we went back to your place,  
spent the evening drinking pink ladies.  
When you left to take a leak,  
I listened to the delicate water,  
from where I sat. I listened  
to the trickle as it fell  
and was spirited away.  
This poem is for my muse,  
waters moving.

America Comes to Life on the Stage

The stranger didn't applaud.  
He sat alone, drumming his fingers.  
You paraded and the scenery moved.  
He sat alone, drumming crossover patterns on the seat  
while you changed  
from Statue of Liberty to the girl from West Kansas.  
He watched your eyes go black.  
You, tearing into your pockets,  
covering the audience with pennies and sawdust,  
throwing keys, sunglasses, rings.  
When the houselights came up,  
your clothes were torn.  
You shivered in the sound of their hands.  
They left you, went home  
to type notices. "Awesome," they said, "Ritualistic.  
America comes to life on the stage  
and suffers a nervous breakdown."  
Meanwhile you were alone with the stranger,  
the one you fell on, last act, and grabbed by the throat  
just before everything went dead  
and you forgot who you were, America,  
before things had gotten this bad.

Beware the Bastard Poem

They turned on the porchlight  
when they heard the noise and found it starving.  
Idiot innocence dripped from the small eyes,  
but none could fondle the little bastard.  
With blind arms they lent it love:  
vitamins and sunshine,  
hearty liquids were urged.  
They bathed it, bought fresh air, delicate robes  
and sat down to late night t.v.  
  
While they slept, he took off in the Lincoln  
totaled it before he'd reached Bayonne.

A Street in New Brunswick, N.J.

If I hadn't seen better streets  
I knew there were better poems somewhere.  
Anywhere but Joyce Kilmer Avenue.

"Who's Joyce Kilmer?" I asked  
my sister and she just back from teaching  
Early Childhood Ed in Iowa.

"The poet," she said, safe, knowing  
she had never seen the poem more lovely.

"I think that I shall never . . .!"

was where I stopped her and mused to myself  
past factories, parking lots, a dog lifting  
a delicate limb above broken pavement

and mused on. A neat pile of aborted boughs,  
lines of stunted saplings in a row and  
Joyce Kilmer, writhing somewhere in hell

somewhere in the trees.

Yellow Light, Winter Sky

Light walks across my room,  
yellow light from a yellow sky,  
mixes with the incense  
winding thick and yellow in the light.  
I look through the window  
where grey clouds move roughly and scrape  
against white mountains

I have been waiting too long.  
Every foot moving up the stairs  
resembles your step.  
I rehearse as miser,  
counting the pennies, dimes and quarters  
we borrowed from school, work,  
and the man you live with.

The grey shapes rise  
disclosing white clouds,  
white sheets, white pillowcase.  
No yellow light,  
not even the smallest finger  
moving across my body  
turning the dark hairs of my belly sudden and gold.

Yellow weather balloons vanish through clouds.  
My skin pales in the cold  
and soft fur folds around me  
covers my eyes, arms,  
another part of my body  
dreaming of your body  
your hair  
soft yellow light  
in a winter sky.

Fer-de-Lance or The Gun Poem

I hold this like a gun  
and press it close  
against your ear  
load it with .38 caliber metaphors.  
Like dum-dum bullets  
they promise to expand on entry.  
I hold this in a hand that sweats  
and trembles with power  
and mention casually  
it has no safety.

Maybe I'll take your hand  
and let you touch it  
maybe it's only licorice or wood  
maybe it's only a picture of a gun  
Understand that it has no safety  
it dreams beyond the edges of things  
it sleeps beyond the limits of my grip.

## Testament of Fingernails

Once we were the weapons  
the tools you lived by.  
Now you cut us off like friends  
you have known too long.

We were the key  
a man would look to us  
before he could gaze your face.  
Now you cut us off like distant relations,  
old jesters in funny suits.

You put us in a porcelain bowl  
send us away to live among turds and eels.

but we'll be back  
See, that woman plucks a few hairs from your beard  
takes us home, wraps you in words and red smoke  
You won't stop her, she's tied your throat to her wrist  
Now she grinds your soul  
& brews a dark tea of your heart.

## The Grave diggers

With spades and shovels  
we have come to bury sympathy  
in the old quarry  
for Nachum is sympathy  
& Nachum is dead.  
Nachum the great humanitarian  
the incurable romantic of Ward 2B  
rustler of pillowcases and pale panty hose

In a shabby Ford we conquered this mud,  
come to the small town of his birth  
with nothing but time on our hands,  
the frenzied pulse of time  
riding the whole circuit from head to heart to hands -  
full of clipt sympathies  
we cover with a few clumsy stones  
leaving Nachum's bones dreaming of flags and flowers,  
small girls and peaches.

The next of kin are too old to drive in this heat  
What shall they do without Nachum  
now that Nachum is dead?  
We tell them it makes no difference.  
Go on a long trip, kill someone  
Throw all your shoes in the river.  
We tell them Nachum was crazy  
that he used drugs,  
grew rich on self denial and self abuse,  
was schizophrenic from age 7.  
We tell them we have proof.  
Everything he was we have buried  
beneath a few broken slabs  
we tell them  
in this last act of kindness.

I wake

I sit down with breakfast spread before me,  
a big wind outside, snow all over, more on the way  
and my house wrapped in paper

a blind man, I sit and wait  
no cane, pencils or dog  
just this music from somewhere,

the next room, only the music is low  
when a crunching sound  
like chains on the ice gets louder, gets

closer, closing on me  
then moves off and I taste the coffee.  
Perhaps in the afternoon,

some of my neighbors will know  
maybe they saw jaws sink into snow  
emerge full of asphalt, dig

a fast grave, a pit,  
a burrow in the street.

Perhaps I should go out and meet my neighbors.

## Envoy

I conjured a dragon  
with 30 heads and 90 voices  
it could sing the Messiah  
if I wished

I armed him with spikes and barbs  
A green poison breath  
taught him discretion and simple ways  
to impress people

Soon he had a life of his own  
800 modern and ancient tongues  
lovers and patrons all over the world  
nymphs, fishermen, millionaires  
a countess or two

I was jealous and lured it home  
I drew the circle, spoke the words  
the air shook and bubbled  
with chlorine and smoke  
I heard shouts, terrible noises  
but it worked  
the monster lost color and shape  
shrank to raw white protoplasm  
How small? Quite small.  
It's in your hands now.

star sighting

an old man

comes with gray seeds,

oceans

fills a bottle with old bones

& sends it away

Poem for James Wright

A slender moon walks  
gazing down into the midnight lake,  
finds the eyes of two small frogs  
copulating.

The lake clots with the soft,  
snow globes of their love.

Our silences meet, shake hands in the dark,  
realizing the uselessness of all fear.  
I am filled with a warm speckled sound,  
the dance explodes.

All this:  
I am old,  
fat, drunk,  
and cannot swim.

## First Winter

No one came to explain  
that miracles were no longer free.  
The sun was gone  
and we were alone.  
No one came with food;  
we discovered Pain and Cold,  
named them.  
In a cave, talking all night to the stars  
waiting for the wind to shift,  
waiting for answers.

## The Night Wind

cries,

voices seethe in my skull

Away! Away from the houses!

Away from buildings!

Branches clatter, bend on themselves,

leaves swarm at my feet.

Wind cries, breaks into shadows,

races through passageways,

towing this heavy bundle along the ground,

Moon dances on the broken bridge

flowing down to the island.

Stars stampeding the water,

I leave my bones for dead wood

and rise in smoke.

Abalone Fragment

a curve of shell on the beach  
half lost in sand  
a shard of torpid silver  
changing the coarse colors of morning  
to a single, even glow.  
curled, languid  
dreams of dark ships, gold  
and rose colored archipelagoes.

tortoises return with the tide  
and broken moon,  
dark ocean like a tongue, soft  
lapping the earth and air  
where they rest,  
turning in sleep.