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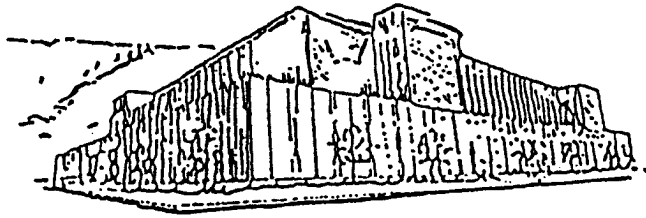
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ROOM POEMS

by

Patrick J. McCormick

B.A., University of Montana, 1989

Presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements

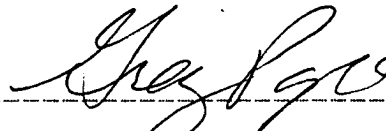
for the degree of

Master of Fine Arts

University of Montana

1996

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## Preface

This project is a testimonial to my progress as a student of the Creative Writing Department at the University of Montana. The name of the book is "Room Poems" and like any room I've ever inhabited it reflects tastes and influences that refuse any sense of an organizing strain of thought. The six sections that comprise the room, qua room, signify the six main components that one could imagine as comprising any room.

The poems listed within each section conform to, or resist, the idea of a thematic principle. Hence, my formula for selecting which poems go where has been problematic and intriguing. I decided to allow any idea or notion of logic or narration to be the controlling theme. Therefore, the poem "Daniel Durovey" goes under the heading of "Bed" because it expands upon the last idea introduced in the preceding poem "Album Scratches #7." The result is, simultaneously, a mess and inviting, chaotic and livable. So plop down, relax, and enjoy.

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I

THE DOOR

## THE DOOR

'Feet first' I heard her say  
and I'm sure, later on, this will  
be true, but for now I am pulled  
head first into the room where  
I recognize only myself as I am

alone. The noise from the street  
is muffled by the bright light  
I turn down. A distant rumbling rises  
through the walls and fades away  
before I even notice it, perhaps

I had imagined it, and even if I had  
imagined it it is inscribed  
in my brain like the sun  
at midnight. My room is quite large  
and the bed at least is warm

and supple. I lay there now  
with the smell of myself filling  
my nostrils, the door, slightly  
ajar, framed between my feet  
the dark hallway, the moonlight.

II

THE BED

## ALBUM SCRATCHES #7

I did this. I smelled toast. She read this poem. She said it was about eight thirty a.m.. We discussed my pet theory: The fishtank. The phone rang. I sensed a poem. The aboriginal tone of her skin spoke French. I answered. I felt it was necessary. To me there is a word for everything. Fatuity. Hypnogogic. Alb. It was the city.

They were moving. We moved quickly. The old house was a big, squarish frame house that had once been white, decorated with cupolas and spires and scrolled balconies in the heavily lightsome style of the seventies, set on what had once been our most select street. But garages and cotton gins ... the same old story.

It all started when I stopped reading Faulkner. The city limits stopped. We stopped talking about moving. We moved the bed. Behind it we found a poem. I will tell all that it said. Don't move. Outside there's a green sun and a yellow swallow tail fluttering.

Behind us there's a fruit in the big tree over there. Pluck it. She was always so good with her hands, with letters, names and addresses. She wrote incessantly. I blame myself. The note said: Lettuce, wine, sandwich meat. I waited at the grocery for hours. She arrived with the wrong message. There never was a tree.

Now I can begin. The ground was flat and warm. I slept easy under thick boughs. Across the tracks the hills looked like giant panthers. You looked fat. I never said that. The hills looked heavy. The soil roiled black with nitrogen. The shade around us

turned turbid. The air of truth turned around us. I breath and you exhale. I inhale your breath. We are too close. This economy must change. Picture this: six boys and nine girls. The girls are all smiling. I'm taking their photo. Am I wrong? It's the phone again.

Now no one will believe me. Scattered rocks of crumpled paper litter the linoleum floor while her platinum hair lights up the toaster. Do I know her prescription? Yes. It is inscribed with the words oeuvre, sentient, and inertia, on the wall above our bed.

DANIEL DUROVEY  
4071 LARKSPUR

sinful, illegal, homosexual, Daniel,  
propaganda, agenda, Missoula,  
order, behavior, flier, Larkspur, murder,  
sympathy, nudity, obscenities, publicly,  
history, society, adultery, lavender  
lobby, ultimately, Durovey,  
coercion, reason, organizations,  
obvious, heinous,  
gay, parade, displayed,  
cause, destroys,  
accept, theft,  
achieve, received,  
one, anyone, 4071,  
homoerotic, tactics, sex acts,  
indecent, abhorrent, pageant, movement.

## CEREMONY

Sharp whiskers startled my cheek,  
pursed lips punctured the air  
with a kiss, my vision trapped  
by this closeness stared at the wild  
gray tuft spraying from his ear. The smell

of Chesterfields, Old Spice, and gin,  
held me long and as firm as his grip  
that squeezed my hand hard and made me  
squeeze back, that hooked my lean body  
down into his bulk sunk deeply in his chair.

Too old, I thought, to kiss good-night  
I hid beneath an urge to run  
I shook within queer adolescence  
I could not numb or dull with sleep,  
his whisper triggered my release.

For no good reason this memory  
rises, it rolls past rooms abandoned  
or burning, this ceremony lost  
and long buried in debris calls  
softly and I reach for his hand.

## DREAM POEM

I recognize this loose string,  
the way it wraps round the base  
of the lighted lamp that shapes  
this room, in the accidental knots  
innocent as beads of water  
hanging on a trestle, in  
the fiber itself, the braided  
cotton strands splitting off

become my mother's silky hairs  
draped across my face, an old  
lover's fingers, a familiar voice  
from outside. Upstairs my father stares  
at the television set. I have something  
to say, something to show him.  
I stand waiting for his face.  
He smiles. I hand him my papers, he asks,  
"Who ate the last of my ice cream?"

I head back downstairs. My hand opens,  
a spool of thread unravels, a flower  
unfolds, an unknown scent rises  
revealing my empty palm waving  
as gold and red as the Adirondacks.

## THE WHITE WHALES

A pod of white whales crests the white ridge.  
The wind blows. The various spews of ice  
Crystals glitter in the contour of light

That glazes over the near moon cast sky. The plumes  
Mix with the light snow blown from the laden  
Fir branches. My chair sways in the cold wind.

It is too cold to remove my mittens. Too cold  
To smoke, to light a match. My toes have grown hot  
With numbness. The whales are beautiful

In their motions and musicality. I anticipate  
Their passing and pray none, in their leviathan ease,  
Strikes my tower. I am afraid of sleep, afraid

I'll miss something. The white whales fill  
The landscape. I hear their murmuring  
And wonder would they hear me? But I can't speak,

Like in a dream when you know you're not dreaming,  
I'm too cold to dream as a squadron of Japanese  
Whaling ships appears atop the hoary ridge. Descending,

Fog horns bugling, their harpoons crack the frigid  
Air. The whales undulate. A fleet of Russian processing  
Boats emerges from the culvert on my right. The whales

Undulate down the slope unaware of their peril. One after  
Another, the whalers pierce the billowing husks. One after  
Another, the processors scoop up the buoyant remains. I

Throw down my hat and goggles hoping to distract  
The harpooners. No one turns. I find myself screaming  
"Where are the Americans? Where are the Americans?"



## TANGLES

Because I can't anything  
everything I'm not,  
especially any conduct  
every hardness in me bends,  
you spiral stories high  
twisting in eclipses  
never nearer than anyone.

Because I have no who  
for how want would succeed,  
nor any fear of one mind  
assembling less than full,  
the we we bind binds us  
to virtual imaginings  
reminding me of someone.

Because I believe in this  
we, ourselves regardless,  
hairs beaming with sweat  
drip their rooted impulses  
to gather in thin stains  
a knowledge known in caves  
when dwellers danced on walls.

Because I lie still, still  
as reflection, half-open  
in darkness, half-able  
in effect, half-mindful  
of feeling for feelings felt,  
walled night tangles moon  
for time to turn around in.

III

THE MIRROR

## BEGGAR

Knuckles on my window pane  
an alcoholic's drum  
distracts my attention, disrupts  
my thoughts of driving on  
this Friday night. I roll down  
the window to hand him some change,  
his pellet-eyes swimming in wide  
rubescent seas, his breath  
white lightning engulfs my nose  
it stinks. A practical man  
would just drive away. I wish  
my logic could hold against  
this burnt butter brown face that smiles  
for change with an unsteady hand  
full of forbidden disgust.

## MY EROTIC DOUBLE

A very pregnant woman was arrested  
by her twin on highway 90, and  
called the police woman "Shortbread"  
twice, say police. My mother, in leathers, paused

by her twin on highway 90, and  
I urged her not to interfere. She cartwheeled  
twice, say police. My mother in leathers paused,  
stared at the cop in her mirror, and then took off.

I urged her not to interfere. She cartwheeled  
because she had ruined her lipstick. Pam  
stared at the cop in her mirror, and then took off  
the blue shirt the message warned us not to.

Because she had ruined her lipstick, Pam  
peeled rubber. While the novice cop thought of  
the blue shirt, the message warned us not to  
whoop and holler "Yippie" while driving. We

peeled rubber while the novice cop thought of  
urging my mother to not pop wheelies. I said, "Please  
whoop and holler 'Yippie' while driving." We  
jumped the flaming puppets sprawled across the road.

Urging my mother to not pop wheelies, I said, "Please"  
And then I saw a horse, and then I  
jumped the flaming puppets. Sprawled across the road  
Pam tried to cover up my blunder. She cracked a beer. Pam

and then I, saw a horse, and then I  
called the police woman "Shortbread."  
Pam tried to cover up my blunder. She cracked a beer. Pam,  
a very pregnant woman, was arrested.

I blend well here with the neon,  
wood, and glass, with the regulars  
who bump loosely beneath the grainy  
grey portraits I deem prestigious.  
Dust clouds the mirror that frames  
my reflection. I nod to the barmaid  
who twirls in her dress. She pours  
me shots that spring into hands  
that were stiff upon entering  
though now their knuckles flare.

I can't help but watch the Viet-Nam vet  
ordering his pension check drained,  
his fingers pinching tumblers of gold,  
his lips parting, his coral dyed arms  
flexing muscles of sand. I turn  
toward six variations of myself  
taking aim at the doe-eyed blonde  
choosing amongst a thicket of cue  
sticks. She leans against the brown  
split paneling. Composing poems  
to be carved sometime later above  
the bathroom urinals, they howl  
with raised glasses, while she waits  
her turn. I can't make out her tatoo

as she chalks up and breaks the nine-  
ball rack, the vet cries out, voices  
crack with peanut shells, laughter whips  
like loose paper it wraps around  
slow legs and dies in the doorway.  
Tears grind into ashtrays as dreams  
plume with smoke rings that roll and expand  
so softly they seem to say, "I'm lovely,"  
though too thin to touch or hold  
they cloud and claim stale corners.

I count my money as the bar reduces  
to the hum of cars warming outside.  
The barmaid replaces my glass  
with a plastic cup. She snaps up  
the dollar bills rapped flat beneath  
empty fists. She knows all change ends  
thrown into her emerald jar. The

mirror explodes in florescent light  
exposing the nearness of drunks  
sunk down to their wrists. I nod to  
the blonde, to the smiling faces  
still screwed to the wall and smiling  
pass out into the night where I peacock  
across another moonless sky.

## CHEW

Written words with pleasant sounds  
balance on the thin lines of the lined  
paper. Letters loop, cross, swirl,  
and flail across the parchment. While  
certain consonants may stab or spade  
one another, vowels for the most part  
lean increasingly into the page, into  
each other, creating pleasant sounds, round  
as a planet. As if mimicking birth  
ideas inscribe this movement  
into the parchment of blankness  
itself, at once, indomitable and receding  
alluringly, beyond the ability  
of erasure to undo the violation  
to emptiness, the desire to create. Words,  
less like links than refuse, persist  
even after thought has been lost,  
the effort to prove it spent, the idea  
itself reduced to used paper flagging.  
Unused sheets snap to the touch. I lie  
between sheets. My girlfriend keeps  
a photograph of me taped inside  
the lid of her chew can.

MARSHALS HONORED FOR NORTH IDAHO SIEGE

killed Marshals Service's Roderick Degan  
Degan Weaver's August squad ground,  
was siege before gone  
of if  
shot Alcohol start David Degan  
unit. son.  
Marshals call Gerry crossed marshals Marshals  
federal

Bureau Firearms killed Bill  
Degan reconnaissance Degan Senate friend,  
shot I'm still children issued highest  
award as

standoff The their  
courage to Junction long after marshals  
Without  
congratulates  
peacefully  
exceptional  
supremacist's  
congratulates  
congratulates

U.S.  
Marshals valor Larry Marshals marshals Marshals  
federal  
Firearms

a Friday Arthur Idaho Arthur Weaver's  
remote son under fire returned surprised  
unexpectedly  
Roderick,

of and the  
of after  
FBI Firearms Five wife

David Degan deputies returned country deputy  
marshals Marshals Service's Marshals marshals  
Marshals  
federal  
Firearms

which were Marshals Roderick  
has boy continued honors surprised Congress  
crossed



friend son firing  
The the the admitting government  
report Tobacco killed received  
Idaho and  
the that the  
Aug. Junction began deputies crossed admitting  
14-year-old 1992 1992 1992

shot wife the long siege  
of of  
Randy failing son Friday Larry  
with Degan Weaver's Weaver's 14-year-old Weaver's  
Weaver's  
hearings

Congress last cabin Kevin friend  
issued and  
Norris Roderick formed unit death  
in admitting Weaver highest patrolled.

## Gates

Open, and gates open in, and within the gates  
lie closed and open graves. My parents lie  
beneath one marker and mowed grass dulled  
by a drought bent sun. Flowers droop  
in the heat while silence rules  
the still air, and if silence softens  
into breeze it is the numbness  
in my veins I dream as flowing. It is  
my obedient silence that reminds me  
of home and home is an argument  
I've never buried.

Pray, and prayers curve with the sky.  
They bend with the blossoms  
that lean badly against  
the tombstone I touch  
with fingers that trace  
their names and dates  
to their definite ends,  
while my own etched memory  
goes on carving for an end  
or warmth. No warmth in hands,

in colors or words. No warmth in sky  
but the rage of sun that equals somehow  
the darkness of rooms in which I've lain drunk  
imagining pain, in which I've lain staring  
at smoking red embers rising and failing  
within the blankness of my reach. No warmth  
in memories kindled into flame. No warmth  
in flames built from piles of rust. No end  
in rust.

Leave, and graves open and close with the sun,  
fists flatten out into open palms. Leaving  
is all I know about decay, about why stones  
bake beneath the sun and moon, why flowers  
fail as flowers have always failed, why  
I hate my parents the way they loved  
their early ends. Stay, and voices roll  
echoing through an empty house.

IV

THE DESK

## WALK

Patrick walks at night  
on the Northside  
and as he walks  
he kicks the fallen leaves  
and those he does not kick  
he crushes and those  
he does not crush  
he does not know  
any less or any more  
than the dead cat  
crumpled in the road  
two skate boarders  
stop for and lift  
and lay in a shallow  
pile of leaves. Patrick  
talks to them for a moment, turns  
and then writes it all down.

## Crib Sheets

O never say that I was false at heart  
Not even to the grocery clerk who spoke  
Of man's first disobedience, and the fruit  
He said I stole. I am two fools, I know  
"Taket the fruit and lat the chaf be stille,"  
She said, but in my youth a kiwi's skin  
And cost (a dollar forty nine a piece)  
Was not so easily subdued. And now  
Of all the causes that conspire to bind  
Me to a rumor, theft, ideal, or dream,  
I find in them a putrid soul. She said  
"Strange fits of passion have I known  
Like colorful sandals surrounding sore feet,"  
And I believed her voice. I had no choice.

My scientific background failed me. I  
Look'd up in perfect silence at the stars  
To find the point of my myopic eye's  
Convergence, summarized as

$$\frac{1}{S} + \frac{1}{S'} = (n - 1) \left( \frac{1}{R} - \frac{1}{R'} \right)$$

And realized then she wore a blue kepi.  
My moccasins needed oil. She said, "Meet  
Me in Andover, England on the next  
Full moon." I worked all winter trying to  
Forget her. One must have a mind of winter,  
And silence and a gulf of air. I played  
The lute and wrote Horatian Odes. In time  
I learned DOS and re-enrolled at Princeton.

## WAR PHOTO

I study the gauze wrapped man rising  
off his cot, his open mouth and eyes  
peering through the slits, his one arm  
pinned to his chest, the other extended

its bandages bulging into a fist. I notice

the soles of the six shoeless women  
kneeling at the railing. They're all dressed  
in black except for one with long straight  
hair. She wears a flower print dress. I tell

myself she is young, widowed and beautiful.

Across the marble floor, the diffuse shafts  
of stained glass window light adds depth  
to the vast apse. A priest prays over  
the eucharist while an altar boy looks

past the praying heads, straight into

the camera. The burned soldier whispers.  
I inch closer. I can't tell a blood stain  
from a coffee stain. I believe his raised  
arm is a signal. I believe he's motioning

for a cigarette, or news from the front. I

search the church clues. The altar boy  
continues to stare. His eyes become  
a monologue. I perceive his wonder,  
and declare it weariness. My eyes roam.

Blades of church light scissor the photograph.

not me here, relating  
an experience, removed  
physically but psychically  
unforgotten, anonymously  
inscribed though           distanced  
by metaphor and  
grammar and imaginative  
writing, or whatever,  
somehow, since I'm not a part of how  
this is done much less thought of,  
I'm present  
only to myself, absent  
only for myself,  
like a

Voice: someone else's  
Let the poem dictate

### The Sonnet

If "Herman" did not use the 'language' of  
His neighborhood, @#-\$%^=&+!, it would not live, evolve  
Or notice. I don't know this Herman guy/  
Gal, sentient being. \*Music invades my study\*  
Here it comes again; it was absent for  
A moment while this \poem\ never ceased.  
There it goes again. If only music~

would invade my [work]. Friendly Herman, just  
an ARBITRARY name, is not me. I  
try to avoid \_ arguments with my friends.  
I rarely know how eye feel:-) <Sorry> Blue:-(  
I rarely say fiduciary. What  
    about tomorrow?           Karin oceanates.  
What about Her...man? he { } don't work, here:

WITH KATHERINE at JACKSON HOT SPRINGS

We turned at Wisdom where the valley  
opens out and drove south toward Jackson

between fields of winter wheat and huddled  
herds of cattle. We argued about

Limbaugh, Bakhtin, and where to stop  
to pee. I drank Town Pump coffee, while

you smoked a pack of menthols. The barrel-  
blue snow peaked mountains carved

the evening sky. Electric lights sieved  
the moonless valley floor. The Jackson

Hot Springs Hotel stood surrounded  
by crystalline clear space. Framed

by a loud array of big game trophies,  
we debated in the lodge lobby. I paid

for a suite without cold water. Cold  
gravel broke beneath our feet. We breathed

in the white diamond air and warmed it  
blue. The sign above the fireplace

warned us not to Bar-B-Que in the room.  
You forgot your swim suit. At dinner

you said, "We haven't fucked near enough."  
That night strangers carried me to our room.



## AN EGYPTIAN AFTERNOON IN NEW YORK CITY

The bust of a bearded man, and  
to the left, a priestly figure  
in a lion skin cloak shakes  
a whip, unjams incantations wrapped  
round his wrists. We feed the lions.

Six males, abated in stone, labor  
in oblivion toward Thebes. A clever  
attendant flops down the program guide  
and tosses his i.d. into the crowd. We  
mob the donation box. We turn opposite

the coat room. Where's Nefertiti's  
zoo? Gold and brass trinkets twinkle  
in the monitored light. Leaning  
beyond the beam we sound the alarm.  
Vicki says, "yum, peeled kiwi

is best," Karin says, "peeled nut jam  
is best," peeled, peeled, peeled  
paint chips from an ancient crib  
drop unseen, unheard, but noted  
by an archeologist back from a dig

in Peru, where he was holed up  
in a double-wide while uzi guns sprayed  
the head waters of the Amazon. Fixated,  
a raven goddess sports an iridescent black plume  
fated for Anibus. Chard whispers ooze eggy

from our lips, echo off the faded tartan  
neon lights blinking like skeet blasted to bits  
in an afternoon hoax. The King pours his libation.  
These walls are lined with ferocious beasts  
and innumerable docile slaves.

## CONEY ISLAND

We're four suburbanites taking in the sights riding the F train down from Brooklyn Heights to Coney Island: the Cyclone, the Boardwalk, the Parachute Jump. Are you with me? Do you have a token for the ride back? There is not a pine tree on Coney Island. I ride the Cyclone shotgun. My thought is this: don't stand up. Astroland is for kids. Whoa! The planks shake and the chains rattle. Suda doesn't raise her head until the end of the ride. I don't notice the Boardwalk planks the way they slant from left to right, from right to left, but their new brass colored screws shine. It is a weekday

in June, cloudy, temperate, and the ocean is dirty-water grey. Teenagers stop us, ask us for cigarettes. I watch them huddle a match from the wind. We walk down to the solitary pier where fishermen cast for flounder, sole, and fluke, where a woman lowers her baited crab cages into the pallid swells for blue crabs. A fisherman reels in his line. A spider crab hangs on the baited hook. He crushes its claw with the heel of his boot. We protest. "Bait" he mutters, casting his line back into the surf.

We rode the F Train from 1st and Smith, rising out of the earth and into a slide as if we were sliding off the face of Brooklyn. I bit the air conditioned subway air and talked of Coney Island. I thought of prison and race riots. You said "the Cyclone" and I got in the front seat. The ocean spread beyond the littered beach. Laughing kids ran toward Astroland and McDonald's pausing only to bum cigarettes or empty their pockets. I'll tell you this: the abandoned concession stands, defunct parachute jump, cloudy skies, dirty water and littered beach neither shocked nor depressed me.

I stood on the Coney Island pier, the Steeplechase Pier, the southern most point of Brooklyn,

next to a destitute man in powder-blue sweatpants  
who played out his own vision. The ocean breeze  
combed odors through his hair and beard  
and all his half-baked mutterings that  
lolloped above the lolling waves. He  
had collapsed at the end of the pier,  
the most southern point of Brooklyn, unable  
to swim or fly. He sat gathering whatever refuse  
the wind tangled about him. The cigarette  
hanging lip fisherman eyed me  
ignoring the most destitute bum  
in New York City, who scratched with one finger  
his scrotum that hung loosely through a hole  
in his sweats. He had taken up residence  
at the southernmost extremity  
of Coney Island with his plastic bag.

We strolled along the weathered, freshly  
screwed planks like tourists as tourists.  
The Cyclone planks held us just long enough  
to let us off half alive. Vicki and Karin  
swirled with excitement while Suda shook out  
a brave "Let's go again" beneath her breath.  
I could do little else than deride  
the broken-shell, weather-blown, littered expanse  
of Coney Island's beach and Amusement Park. You

filthy bum fingering your exposed genitals, mumbling  
passages I dare not lean down to or step to near  
to hear, presuming your stench and potential diseases,  
man!, what restaurant refuse container brims  
with such neglect as your body squatting  
at the end of this pier? Your beard bears  
too much blackness to ignore your probable  
age, the weathered stone at your feet is  
your foot rubbed the color of stone  
the color that remains absent from  
your beard. A tractor rakes the beach  
upsetting the litter and sea gulls  
populating the sand. The grey sky  
and soiled waves color the air grey. It will  
neither rain nor shine today. The haze insists  
that the man is a part of nature, a part  
of the ocean and sky. But he is homeless

and dying. A fisherman's line becomes snagged

by a spider crab. The fisherman crushes the claw with the heel of his boot. We protest vehemently. Astroland opens. McDonald's opens. The sun is a haze colored disk. We leave the pier as a boy catches a flounder, a woman hauls in her traps. Four blue clawed crabs battle each other in her bucket. The pier is littered with hollowed spider crab shells. I'm tired and cranky, and Karin wants to run the show. She insists we walk down

to Brighton Beach to hear the Russians speaking Russian, to watch the handball players playing handball, and eat Knishes. What the hell are Knishes anyway? Suda lights up a cigarette and tosses the match onto the sand. The handball courts are full. I watch them play as the girls go off to the restroom. The man who lives at the end of Brooklyn pees through a hole in his sweatpants. I admit I stared at all of him and when our eyes met his eyes looked like the eyes of a fish and they swam through me like an ocean's current. Today his whole body floats.

Four teenagers not even old enough for high school confronted him, punched him, kicked him, and he tried to escape. He jumped not on me I wasn't there, I was here, back home in Montana reading an article Karin had photocopied for me from the New York Times, and there he was and all of Coney Island, the Steeplechase Pier, the southernmost inescapable point of Brooklyn. The article stated, "The man with the puffy face and powder-blue sweatpants ... leapt, into the heavy windblown surf." Or was he thrown? Did he jump or stumble? Can you see him diving? Can you see him leaping? Can you see him floating? They found his body floating in the heavy windblown surf but not his plastic bag. The ocean kept that.

V

THE CLOSET

## The Truth Is

The truth is my parents lie two deep  
beneath one marker and mowed grass dulled  
by a drought bent sun. So, I dug all night.  
I exhumed my mother first. All ashen,  
her stench rose tearing at the insides  
of my nose. Except for the way her bones  
fit in my hands, I would not have recognized  
her. I arranged her on the grass. It was all  
I could do just to hold her, it was sad  
really, after all this work how little  
I had to say. I stared into her empty  
eye sockets until I almost vanished. She  
seemed whole, and content, finally, to be left  
aside as I dug deeper into the ground.

When I reached my father's casket it's lid  
flung open. I reared back, "Hello son,"  
said my father's corpse completely intact.  
I heard a soft breeze whistling  
through my mother's skull. I felt  
as if I were a cell in my father's  
flesh. He stood up and told me how much  
he missed everyone, and how happy he was  
to see me. But he seemed a bit preoccupied.  
After awhile he admitted he had to go  
and look up an old client. I tried  
to dissuade him. He tried to jump  
onto the graveyard lawn, but his left leg  
fell off. "Don't worry about that," he said  
smiling, tottering, "Let's get this show  
on the road. Give me a hand." I grabbed  
his arm. It popped out of its socket. Cotton  
and flesh oozed between my fingers. I stood  
still as he tried to claw and snake  
his way onto the grass. His grunting  
and gasping sickened me. I dropped his arm

picked up the shovel and swung it. His lone  
knee cap exploded on impact. He crumpled back  
into his box screaming. I pelted him  
with the shovel crushing his forehead. Down  
went the edge of the shovel' blade slicing

his torso. My body swayed with the stain of his splattered blood and bits of flying flesh. I spat and swung stroke after stroke mincing his body. Finally, I slammed the lid shut. Four severed fingers fanned out from beneath the closed lid. They hung for a moment and then fell to the ground.

Feverishly, I pushed their caskets back into the grave. Refilling it with dirt, I dropped the shovel and ran past my car and through the streets. I ran avoiding every headlight and bark. In the shadow of dawn I stood gasping atop a highway overpass. I tried to recall the sequence of events. I remembered, suddenly, that I had forgotten to replace my mother's bones back into her casket. I remembered how neatly I had laid her out on the cool, short grass, and realized how vulnerable she was now. I thought about going back, and about how it was too late. I felt a weight on my chest. I

reached into my shirt pocket and pulled out my father's tongue. I held it between my fingers, over the chasm of concrete, asphalt, and sporadic sounds of traffic below. I wanted to hear it splat on the pavement, for a windshield wiper's swack, or a metal's thump or thud. A breeze rose from the valley. I held his fat, saliva coated tongue above my head and dropped it into my mouth. It tasted purple. It slid down my larynx. I felt its bulk swell and bulge in my throat. I leapt over the railing and floated in the quiet half light of the setting moon. And then I slammed into the pavement. For a long time I refused the help of passing motorists.

## BLUE

When I open or close my eyes  
I see blue: her eyes so blue,  
the sky so blue, the tree, the house,  
the sea so blue, the shade, the spade  
I found in the ground, the chair, her hair  
left dangling on the stair, the cigarette smoke  
spiraling through the air, cars and ducks  
a rolling fleet of trucks, her moods,  
my 'ludes, Picasso's famous nudes, the cat  
in the hat, a grizzled piece of fat, it's true  
they're blue, my uncle's prison tattoo,  
the ink from my pen, the fire in the den,  
the chipped enamel sink, and solid oxygen,  
her tight fitting jeans, and Trident submarines,  
the moon at night, my knuckles before a fight,  
gas spilt on the street, and old peoples feet,  
bows for sheep or little Bo-Peep, barrels of a gun,  
Keats' poem "Endymion," the furnace in her cellar,  
the name tag on a teller, book bags and cops,  
state flags and shocks, are only a few of what  
constitutes blue. So what do I do when I'm burned  
out on blue? Walk through the zoo, quit cigs  
and chew, cry boo-hoo, join a coup, canoe,  
make some home brew, coo or moo, yell yahoo,  
cook a stew, sniff some glue, Kung-Fu, become  
a guru, accrue, eschew the few people  
still speaking to me? The mountains are blue.  
The heron is too...



EX-COP

enter

expressed

year-old couple's

home reported

her headless

policeman

yard

It's

Anderson Mrs.

burned

Barron Fred

Sixteen

murder

Death Row Has a Special Kind of Talk

I have a rusty pair of scissors snapping  
at an upper black molar. What's bothering

you? My ex-girlfriend is a police detective  
famous for her ability to enter

intuitively the mind of perverse,  
and sadistic murderers. And "How does that

profit us?" asks Maxine Kumin. And who  
is Maxine Kumin to ask such a question

anyway? What does she know? And yet, how  
does anyone care, and even if they said

they did how on earth would that help or effect  
me? us? How tight are we anyway? I live

in adequate quarters with central air.  
I'm upset at my W-2 form,

the broken calculator, and a poem  
by Maxine Kumin. Does anything move you?

## DIRECTIONS

No one knows for sure why  
    we're so hungry, why  
The son must kill the father  
    in order to lose himself  
The daughter must bear a child  
    in order to lose herself  
The mother must never die,  
    never rise  
From her electric bed

As when she knew me first  
    and her screaming  
Filled my lungs, became  
    my air, now  
I remember the cold  
    billowing plastic  
Covered windows, my desk  
    covered with  
Books, disheveled notes, late  
    all the time, unable,  
Unwilling to call, to decide  
    for certain: baths  
Or showers, and the day  
    I first learned  
To kiss, not hard,  
    but soft like this.

VI

THE WINDOW

## SIRENS

Beneath a marble jacket of November clouds  
we rode our thumbs up to Canyon Ferry  
to witness the eagles gathering to prey  
upon the sired salmon returning to spawn

and die. Tri-pods and cam-corders packed  
the observation bridge. Eagles perched  
in the firs, or leisurely swooping, lifted  
lone carcasses floating fat and pink

while barely exciting a splash of foam  
between their taloned plucks and the flapped  
air. Your eyes as blue as the mountain lakes  
printed on the map in my pocket, peered long

into the wavy black columns  
of exhausted kokanee curving  
in the low current. You spoke  
of how the exactness of salmon

fighting like hell upstream would forever  
escape your grasp. Heavy snow flakes  
hissed on the water's rippling surface.  
I ran out of cigarettes. We left

for your aunt's house where she put us up  
in separate rooms. I watched your shadow  
cross the lawn with the loose leaves tumbling  
toward the hedge. Your bedroom light

went out. The moonlight threw my shadow  
across the bare oak floor that creaked  
so loudly I had to stop. I stood waiting  
in the spare bedroom listening, listening.

## METAL

Across the street along the train  
yard tracks a group of boys  
inspect the rows of coins they've lain  
on the glinting alloy

rails. Some check with their ears for deep  
rumblings in the sun warmed  
steel. The weight of the freight cars weeps  
through the ground. Hornets fly

round a shading tree. The boys stand  
back as the rusted square  
wind rolls past. They throw rocks that brand  
the box cars cheap, and dare

one another to touch the swaying  
bulk. A hand stretches out  
through the din and catches nothing  
but breath. Anxious eyes scout

the loose gravel for the flattened,  
warm pennies. The warmest  
sun glints in their palms. Each contends  
his is best, the thinnest.

One boy turns, tosses his token  
into the air. It dings  
my car. The others follow him.  
My car! Its metal rings.

## STALK

I drive by your house, stop  
At the end of the street. The moon  
Moves across the cross hairs formed  
By the telephone wires. The sound

Of the crusted creek gnashing beneath  
The train trestle provides a moments  
Distraction. Track rocks give up,  
After a little kicking. I don't feel

Like asking for anything, as I pellet  
The pole, rails and streetlight. My fist  
Is a rock. I can wait all night, I can  
Walk on water. Glass shatters the silence.

## THE JUMP ROPE BOY

While sitting with nothing on  
my mind, a boy walks by twirling

a jump rope. He steps on it, drags  
it, splashes a puddle, kicks a waist

high pile of leaves into the gutter,  
(too bad these streets are flat, I know

how leaves can make great dams). Standing  
momentarily absorbed he whips the rope

out, and the rope whips back wrapping  
him around his legs. He totters back

and forth, barely attempting to untangle  
himself. The rope finally falls limp

onto the ground. Freed, he proceeds down  
the sidewalk once more. Slowly at first,

thoughtful he seems, then skipping, he jump  
ropes hatless through the pouring rain.



## AFTERNOON WATCH

Fires, spread out  
    along the base of the tree line,  
        burn piles of dead timber

and grass. The smoke  
    curls. It climbs close to the hillside  
        obscuring the peak of Stone Mountain. My

neighbor walks across  
    his lawn whistling and yelling  
        his dog's name. My phone rings. Fires

initiated to prevent  
    wild fires, controlled burns implemented  
        to imitate the natural cycle of forests,

burn Stone Mountain.  
    The air in my apartment is sharp  
        with the smell of Chesterfields,

with the sound  
    of the phone ringing. Nothing  
        is quiet, still or calm. The

all too familiar  
    pitch of my neighbor's voice  
        echo's across the valley, off

the surrounding hillsides  
    commanding the air. I restrain myself, try  
        to concentrate. Stone Peak is a man induced

cloud of white.  
    I write this down. Smoke fills my lungs,  
        spreads against my window. I watch the slow

nervous return  
    of my neighbors dog: the beating, its  
        yelping. The afternoon sky turns hazy. I

watch my neighbor.

## RAIN

We stood beside the fire engine truck drenched and smoking. Peter said again that he was going to the aqueduct and left. I listened to the firemen shouting through the house. Steven sat alone. I tapped the window twice before he drove away. Their father, with cellular phone in hand, walked around. The canvas hoses flattened. My mother consoled Mim in our kitchen. A lamp, the only thing she'd grabbed, sat on the floor. Dripping from the rain our comical getups made us laugh. My mom's plaid robe was new. "The rain" Mim said to her cup of tea "started just as Steven woke us up."

## THE OUTING

The cracks in the venetian blinds  
exposed themselves. For the most part  
I was quiet. The brass rail beneath my foot,  
I was turned slightly on the stool, one foot  
on the wooden stools beam, the other  
on the brass rail, squeaked annoyingly  
when rolled. I didn't fidget. I was aware  
of how many beers I had had: One. Of how many  
more I was going to have: One. Comfortable  
with my strategy, familiar in my vigilant  
pose and attitude, I was more aware then  
of my composure than I am now of how comfortable  
I was then. I recognized everyone's face.  
The lieutenant smiling, "How's Montana?"

I was not relaxed. I was for the most part  
quiet. My father, it was impossible for him  
to be quiet around me, with his back  
bent over, tired or resigned, with his neck,  
incapable, or too tired, to support  
his flagging head, his watering eyes focused  
on the drink, or his lawyer hands, or the bar,  
with one hand barely touching or not touching  
the glass on the polished maple wood bar, sat  
to my left. With the brass rail beneath  
my left foot and the beer on the bar, I turned,  
placed both feet to rest on the stools  
wooden beam. I looked in the mirror, then  
at the bartender, Nick, who smiling  
asked me, "How's college?" as my beer

slowly lost its foamy head. Voices rose  
sporadically from the far end. A question  
aimed at my father, a gesture I think,  
that said within the question, or in my head,  
"We respect him. We know him. We've been friends  
all this time." My father, cocking his head  
toward the questioning voice, gave out  
a guttural clearing of his throat, which seemed  
to clear the whole bar of conversation. He asked  
for the question to be repeated. I can't  
remember what the question was or what

he replied, but it was all everyone wanted or what everyone seemed to want, to be satisfied with or understand, or I only understood what I had already believed as true. It was not

my first time in this old haunt of his but ours, and my first time sitting at this bar so early in the afternoon. The door opened and I was the only one to turn toward it and recoil from the burst of light that persisted behind my closed lids, that revealed the depth of cigarette smoke floating through the air, that wasn't notable then, but I see so clearly now, the shafts of slanted light and cigarette smoke floating, and my father raising his left index finger beside his glass, and Nick removing the tumbler, refilling it with fresh ice, refilling it with Harvey's Bristol Creme and a lemon wedge. I nodded and watched my reflection beside the cash register. I thanked him and took a quick sip

of the fresh cold foam. Mr. Brady, the high school teacher, who was much older than me and younger than everyone else came over to say something. The lieutenant said something. The carpenter, Mr. Golio, now dead, stood with one hand on my shoulder, and smiling, said something. I decided to say something. I told them a joke. I thought better of it earlier, not to talk too much, but I felt safe, no, I felt it was important that I say something. I told them the one about the grizzly bear and the park ranger. It was short. Clean. They all saw the punch line coming, I hadn't telegraphed it, but they were much older than myself, or I was as wrong then, about them and me and that time, as I could be correct now. They laughed. Mr. Golio leaned

into my back, pressed down on my shoulder and laughed. We all chuckled. My father raised

his head toward me and smiled, not at the joke, not with the others, but at me. The front door opened again. The conversations flowed. I was not relaxed, nor uncomfortable. I was not as vigilant, but still aware. I listened to the men talk amongst themselves and me. I was not a part of them, nor apart from them. I was thinking a lot. I wanted to smoke. I had some cigarettes in my pants pocket. I was quiet. I would not smoke. This was my first beer with my father and I was not sure how far I should go, how much to reveal about myself. The Fed, as he was known,

who had just come in a few minutes before, who was once my father's best friend, who was the father of my still best friend, tried to pull me off the stool, to box with him, as we often did when I was still living in town and saw him regularly. I wanted to box him, to wrestle him to the ground, to have him wrestle me to the ground, to have him pin me down and laugh at me until I screamed "Uncle!" like he used to do when I was much younger. He threw a few punches into my half raised arm, and as I bobbed he said hello to everyone before moving to the other end of the bar. I listened to his steps. The carpenter, the lieutenant

and teacher talked around me, sometimes to me, but I kept hearing voices from the other end near the Fed. I didn't turn around, or walk down to him, talk to him, stand by him, listen to his stories, tell him mine, feel his enthusiasm, his energy, share in his enthusiasm and laughter, though I don't know why, and I do know why, though I won't say why, because I didn't go down to the other end of the bar, but rolled my left foot on the brass rail until it squeaked, pressed my right foot on the bending wood's beam, and drank the rest of my second and last beer at that bar. My

father lifted his head, lifted an eyebrow at me, "No" I said. He left for the toilet. When he returned I had already placed a few dollars on the bar. He looked at me as if he was going to tell me to put my money back in my pocket. He left his change, a few dollars, I think, and I held the door open as he walked heavily with his cane outside. I watched the smoke waft in the rush of light, the short movement of air swirling from the opened door. I looked through the bright light that formed a bright barrier of haze, and saw the faint figures of Mr. Golio taking my seat, Mr. Brady taking the other and heard them, Nick and the rest saying good-bye, though my eyes could no longer adjust to the brown shadows diffused by the outdoor light, the brown periphery protecting the darkness, could not penetrate the areas cut off by the bright light. I followed my father out. He stood on the sidewalk in the evening sun adjusting his suit and waited, as I ran for the car. On our way home he thanked me.