

ALEMBIC

Alembic
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For My Wife

This night in the Maine woods
west of Portland
the October air gives me gooseflesh.
A single owl
hoots to himself in the dark
as I move through the briar.

Deeper in the woods
a yellow glow
among the trees.
I see a woman
with a blanket over her back.

By the fire
she looks like she
holds a child
in her arms . . .

She offers
to share the blanket
and we sit
quiet like the night
in the chapel
before the votive candles.

Joseph Osborne

The Owl

The owl rose out of bone and is a denial of moonlight
seeking to give a brown and breathy
throat to that which is silver.

You also imitate a conspicuous longing.
You bathe and dress as if there were some place to go.

If we would kneel and bless our very
knees the gesture could save us
from a beaked and haughty sleep; days
hanging open like empty mouths.

Do not blame the owl for coming on so strong.
It's that way with any creature who sings alone.

Jane Lunin

Underbrush

Dusk shakes hope from me.
The hills darken behind my hand.
Loneliness breaks; small fires
over the fir trees red streaks trailing off
down the valley. The moon wounds me cold.

I sink down with the small animals
in the underbrush, listening.
The deer walk above my head.
The glaciers pull back:
I am a fish with a thousand fins,
the black elm branch for a back bone.

Jane Lunin

Late

1

A girl told me
God washes cuts
like a mother

When I was thirteen
I gashed my elbow
on a piece of glass
looked in the cellar
but there was nothing
to stop the blood

Upstairs you caught me
running the blood off
under a faucet
so you wouldn't see

2

I come home late
In the dim kitchen
you sip coffee
with a crossword puzzle
and a pile of ironed linen

You look at my eyes
I say I've been out
In my room I stand by the window
watch the snow
fall past streetlights
Drinking with a girl tonight
why was there nothing

Below a car moves
through the heavy snow on chains
I draw the shade
and sit on the bed edge
wanting to pray

Paul McNeil

Feeding

I was a cheap grey peeping then.
You led me to a mound where the sun
seasoned your breast. But the smell
of arranged food shook me. I was
a fake, naturally, clever at starving.
You knew. You kept me alive enough.

I saw the sky all claws
now, nights running at the mouth.
But the earth was waiting where you pointed
and pointed: my face went down finally
for something of flesh, half buried, alive . . .

The summer you helped ground my mouth.

Edward McCrorie

The Nail

The nail goes deeper and deeper in-
to a board; becomes its kin.
It's alien to the wood awhile
Then becomes its metal child.
I see the nail and wood together
Beaten, kissed by the weather.
First two things; now only one
Eternity has just begun.

April Selley



pastoral

can you remember
the silence we spoke
gray mares trudging
homeward through our pastures dying

the willow understood
the fading sunset, the deepening gloom
gently swept it
away onto backs
of birds in flight

Gene Gousie

this morning

this morning was a grey empty
room I gave you yourself now
where is my self in all
that is gone with you

I am out there
night comes over the hill riding
a cool patient breeze

Gene Gousie

Genesis

for Steven

I have clung to myself too long;
letting go,
I have empty arms.
gathering flowers, I bury
my nose in yellow faces;
soon, they die.

I pray to myself
I hug my body; cry.

clouds gather—
drops, tiny crystals pierce
flowers creak around me
I break into a run.

slide,
mouthful of dirt
I spit the roots.
digging my toes into the earth
I grow, limbs
fingers, leaves
water soaks my trunk and my jeans.

laughing,
I dig up some flowers—
arms full,
I replant them at home.

Ana Margarita Cabrera

The Traveler

Timothy watches from a midnight window, heart
flung across a thousand miles of the dark country
soaring with lights swung upward
on the arcs of the great bridges.
He hears the hum of distant cities
and the wind on sand on sand hissing
of the desert paused
momentarily at the city limits.
A sadness,
like the living, final note hung
quivering on the still, dry air,
a man who sees too deeply into his own eyes.
From the canyon wall of the city, a light calls
softly, desperately into the dark. Yet,
Timothy chooses not to hear. He sleeps
clutching a handful of bed-linen like an airline ticket.
Day, he eyes the ground suspiciously; night,
dreams of terminals,
flying.

Terrence O'Neill

Parlour

In your parlour
with wine-punch and music
I sat with your friend
on the green couch.
We opened the window
 it was so hot,
he talked about poetry
and a walk with me
 on the beach—
but Jamestown, his home
was too far.

He is so gentle,
I believe in your friend
want to be with him
 for a while—
I never have your hands
or talk with you
about my poems
 and gentleness.

After he left we sat
on the same couch by the window.
You joked about
 living with me—
me making all the pies
and you all the love.

I laughed but ached
to be at Jamestown
because you held my eyes
and became my only friend again.

Patricia Slonina

To Fill November

In the November mid-afternoon
I come home
when dampness seeps
 through the storm windows,
and the kitchen needs a light.

Waiting for the heat
I get lost in my father's sweater
with holes in the elbows
and no middle button.
It smells like his neck,
his pipe and sweat . . .
the good smell of his warmth.

With a cup of tea
I curl up in his leather chair
thinking of past Christmases
and the love
I wish I had to fill November.

The afternoon darkens through the house.
I put on one light, then another,
place my empty cup in the sink,
the radio is on,
the table set and supper started
when they come home.

And he laughs,
he always laughs
to see me in his sweater.

Poem

1

This need—to need no luggage
to be number one in someone's eyes
not afraid to let go.

“You're the first son,” my father said,
“you'll never know what it is to be second,
you'll do alright,
just pay your debts and keep clean.”

I won a two-wood once
for being best-dressed caddy.
Altar boy for six years
I picked up the Latin fast,
never faked the Confiteor.

On vigil once at night,
the empty pews behind me,
I was afraid.
Eyes fixed on the Monstrance
like the priest said,
I had to look back
to check for killers,
leave Jesus all alone.

I was afraid
and I never could tell you.

One day, all day, in the attic
I poked through bags of old clothes
trying to make some sense of your life.

I fished in a worn trunk of yours:
a clipping of you and the new company trucks,
Knights of Columbus cuff-links,
old checks for proof of bills paid.

A baby picture of me
in your arms.
I stared hard at the stranger
in the khaki work-clothes.

A shot of you and my mother before the wedding.
Your arm was stiff around her waist,
it looked like a first date.

It got darker in the attic
I shut the trunk
and went outside to listen
for my own name.

2

Hours into night from Massachusetts
the boat pushed to Nantucket
like a factory in the night shift
drugging the riders to sleep.

Pacing the deck
like a night-watchman
I grip the railing and stare
at the black water spilling
spit-white off the prow.

The foghorn groans into the wind.
I hold my topcoat
tight at my neck
and grip the prow-rail hard
like an old man cursing the wind

3

Leaning on the boardwalk-railing
I tap my foot,
 watch the dancers
as the Polka band jams
under the loudspeaker clock-tower.

The hands on the big clock,
the trumpet jitter on the bandstand,
the bumper cars and bells in the arcade
drown out the sound of the ocean.

I step off the boardwalk,
my bare feet sink in the wet sand
looking in the dark for a woman
to hold me with her eyes
 like a prayer
as the night sea pounds New England
 in white fury.

4

This thick morning
I walk up the slope to the horse ring.
The steady sputtering of a plane in the gray
does not disturb the horse
or the girl with chestnut hair
 eyeing the first jump.

The Piper-Cub dips off
like a boat bobbing in the fog
 over Long Island Sound.
A lone bee drones by my feet
 to a far flower,
whining like a hungry baby.

A picnic table with three glasses
half-full of rain
is sunk to its knees in the wet turf.
She canters by me,
kicking up clots of mud.
It does not bother the fresh boots
or the belly of the horse.

Crows stop cawing in me now
not bickering at the peace
the way they used to.

The girl with chestnut hair
takes the first jump flawlessly
and does not look back.

5
Pitching bales
into the back of the tractor,
I like the taste of the sweat
and the August air
sweeping the fields of uncut hay
to lay it all over.

Walls of tall trees
swell with their leaves
like the sound of waves,
Little Compton, Westport . . .
the relief in each wave
like somebody's arms.

I believe
the heart lives to embrace.
Nothing grows from parched lips
and snapshots of the desert.

I still see your wet eyes
like the eyes of the women
outside the tomb.
You are not dry
like an insane woman
with wasted hair.

I can look
at you forehead and your lips
with the open fingers
He makes of my fist.

6

In this small hour
 when the sun comes up
over the backs of mountains,
my new shoes tap down
the board-steps of the porch.

The already-grazing horses
flip their tails in silence,
a dog still sleeps
in the wet September grass.

Handfuls of birds drift
across the small valley
blending into the last hill
that thins into sky
 like the ocean

Because of my father
I see these birds
 fly without fear,
banking back along the near side,
up out of the valley, back
to his brown-shingled home
where we eat breakfast together.

Charles O'Neil Jr.

