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TABLE OF CONTENTS

John Smolens	Wren: Story For Long Standing Children	1
Joe David	Birdie	21
Kyle Cohen	Photograph	34
Alan Britt	When Grandad Pulls Out His Banjo The Condor	35 36
Jan Long	My Poems Stangler	37 37
j.m.m. faria	Way Out There A Poem	38 39
Gerald Cohen	Mostly For Song	40
Helen Yannessa	Drawing	41
Greg Kuzma	The Left Hand The Leak	42 44
Shelagh Healey	Lowell Lingerie Co.	45
Dyan Houston	Drawing	46
Kyle Cohen	Moss	47
Bill Lustig	Rising In Fire Center	48 49
David Dupré	Photograph	50
Lou Papineau	December, 1961	51
Joseph Wilson	Joy Poem To Bob, On Learning He Has Gotten Up	52 53
Paul B. Roth	Yogi Horse And Boy Contributors Notes	54 55 58

Journal of Management Education

ALDEBARAN

ALDEBARAN

EDITORIAL PROCEDURE

The board of ALDEBARAN of Roger Williams College accepts submissions from all students, faculty members, and also from outside contributors who enclose a return address. Submissions are separated and classified as "prose," "poetry," or "art" and then given to a group of readers according to classification. The readers criticize all submissions from a reprint of the material which excludes the author's name. The criticisms and recommendations are then given to either the prose or poetry editor, who then meets with his board to discuss the submissions and reach a decision on acceptances and rejections. All of the accepted material is read by the editor-in-chief and discussed by the editors together. In addition, all submissions are reviewed after the magazine deadline, and the final format is then decided upon.

It is the policy of the board that no submissions are returned unless accompanied by a stamped self-addressed envelope. Mail with postage due will be refused. Xeroxes and carbons will be returned unread. We would appreciate receiving appropriate notices and publications.

The Editors

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John Smolens

Wren

WREN: STORY FOR LONG STANDING CHILDREN

Summers the boy slept in Granpa Paps' room where the windows could be opened. Winters he slept next to the pot belly stove in the kitchen. It had snowed for two weeks, then the cold Canadian air descended on Maine. At bed time Wren LeFleur's mother hoisted his lumpy mattress and carried it into the kitchen. He slept in starts that first winter night and once he woke to find his left arm strangled beneath his side, all needles and numb. He rolled over and looked across the kitchen to a grey spot on the black wall. By not looking directly at the spot, but just to the side of it, he could see it was the window in the door which led to the yard. Now that he knew what it was, he could see four distinct sides and the sash dividing the window into quarters. He could not sleep and he thought about the moonless night outside being lighter than the darkness in the house. He wished the window was not there because then it would be pitch black in the kitchen and he could sleep forever. How can I like the dark when I can't see anything, he thought, rolling on to his back. How can I like the dark when I can't see anything?

Wren awoke, his knees to his chest, hands clamped between the thighs and his forehead against the greasy wall. The stove had cooled, the quilt was heaped on the floor, and he could see his breath at the end of his nose. He uncoiled and shrugged and pulled his cold clothes over his longjohns. Stamping his feet into his boots, he called Paps as he went to the toilet in the closet by the icebox.

When he came out he called Paps again, as always. Then he pushed open the door and went to the bed where the old man lay on his back with his eyes popped open the dried blood running out of his mouth, down into his grey beard. His tongue was black.

He picked up Paps' wrist like Doctor Lance always did. The fingers did not shake so he knew Paps was dead. He walked over to the straight back chair by the bureau and sat down. Sitting there a

John Smolens

Wren

long time he swung his legs from the knees, clicking his boot heels against the legs of the chair.

Hanging on the plaster wall above Paps' head was the cold crinkled picture of Christ with brittle palm leaves flaring out from between the wall and the frame. The night stand between the bed and bureau was filled with religious statues. Dusty and faded, another dozen or twenty lay face down with a base or raised arm broken off, revealing dark hollow insides. They were not an accumulation over a long and pious life. It was only four or five years ago, on the periphery of Wren's memory and about the time Georges left for good, that Paps had yielded to age and became God fearing and sucked on milk soaked bread.

The statues meant nothing to Wren, being nine years old and used to walking in and around them on the floor. Mother often scolded Paps about keeping them as she sidled out of the room with a tray of soup and bread. "Could bring a fair dollar from somewhere," she would hiss, knocking one over and cursing. But she never did more than complain because whenever she would bring it up Myles would just laugh tightly, saying that if they were not made out of wood they were not worth a plug to anyone up in these parts. "They might bring somethin' down Augusta, though. If you'd want to haul 'em." "You're always dreaming up ways of making a buck," Mother would snip, "there's a difference between getting them things out of the way as a hazard and selling them."

A fist of wind came around the north end of the shed and jabbed that side of the house, causing a thousand cracks in the wall to swell, sounding like pops in a fire, and the plastic sheeting stapled over the window to snap and billow. Paps had not heard, had not moved. Wren knew what dead was. Old Mort was dead. And Cleaneth Billings, Miss Anne's husband, had been dead so long Wren had not had the chance to meet him.

John Smolens

Wren

This was a special day, Wren felt. Like the day last winter when he stayed home all day to watch Toby have her pups right under the kitchen table. She would not let anyone go near them and everyone had to take off their shoes and be careful not to kick during dinner. Black, blind peeping balls of fur shivering and waddling under the table, the pups would not even eat a piece of meat when it was held up to their nose. Wren would look down and they would be kicking and crawling over one another, trying to bury their heads in Toby's dark belly.

It was much brighter outside now; the sun had had time to rise over the trees on the ridge. The fir trees, smeared by the plastic over the window, swayed and nodded in the wind. Wren left Paps and went into their bedroom. Backs to the sagging middle of the mattress, he went to Mother's side, her limp arm, greasy face. He stood and watched her stillness, wondering if she was dead too. Myles was not because he was breathing in a roar of wind and snout.

Then her eyes were open and on Wren, still seeing some warm, livid dream. The corners of her mouth melted into a smile and her eyes slid closed as she clutched the quilt to her shoulder. She was still for minutes, then she breathed, "What is it, Wren?"

"Paps."

She got up, throwing the quilt back on Myles, pulling on her boots and winter coat, which she kept by the bed as a bathrobe. She rushed through the kitchen and stopped in the doorway of his room.

"Wren, pump some water." She closed the door behind her.

From the pump Wren heard Myles calling him through his gravel shoveling cough. He went into their bedroom where Myles was sitting up in bed, bare-chested, with cigarette ash falling like snow.

John Smolens

Wren

A short time after Wren's father Georges left, Myles was there in the bed, in his place. To Wren he did not arrive but gradually became a permanent presence. The boy would hide behind a barrel in the shed and spy on this strange man as he hammered metal or worked wood with his hands. Early in the morning he would be leaning over the basin, working the pump with his solid arms and an extra plate would be on the table for breakfast. He seldom spoke and seemed to pass through the house without ever noticing the boy.

Then it was as if Myles had always been there. He maintained such permanence that Wren naturally thought of him as Father, but the man only had to correct him once for calling him anything other than Myles. It became the same as when Georges was there: Wren did not understand what went on between the three adults, he could only sense the currents that would shift or blend or cross one another or be restrained until some invisible dam broke and the fighting would begin. Only the personnel changed. Paps no longer raged. Myles took Georges place and held iron strength in his silence, until he drank. Then he turned on everyone but the boy, as long as he kept out of range. As he drank more it would get worse; Mother would come off a sharp bout and clutch Wren to her while she cried and said she was so sorry and that she had given everything so many times. The three adults would get worked into such a lather of fury and hatred for days that Wren would be afraid to speak to anyone. Then there would suddenly drop a veil of silence and each would recede back into themselves for reassessment and a regrouping of forces that could last months.

"Boy, you know we breathe two ways."

Wren stood beside the bed, watching the ash collect on his chest.

"Don't ever breathe in through your nose. That's the way you suffocate."

John Smolens

Wren

His big hand caught Wren's wrist, human manacles of hair and flesh.

"See these? They're pores. It's your skin that you breathe with. This way you let it seep in slowly. So slowly you can't feel a thing. Breathe through your nose and you'll die young and live long, like Paps."

Myles dropped Wren's hand and reached for his jeans and cigarette. Wren returned to the pump in the kitchen basin. Climbing back up on the chair he began working the handle with his whole body, holding his breath until his face started to heat up and he thought he would burst inside and puke blood like Paps.

Alone outside, the air was cold and thin, making Wren's lungs sting wonderfully. He walked in the path out to the shed, where he took a pair of snowshoes off a nail. Fitting them comfortably under his arm as he had seen Myles do so often, he went out to the road that was packed with hard, white snow and headed in the direction of Doctor Lance's. It was three and a half miles down to his house in the town, but by bringing the snowshoes and hiking across the fields he could shorten it by a mile. His mother often fought against the vision of Wren's getting trapped in the snow and freezing to death, so she made him go without snowshoes when he went to town alone. Then he would have to take the long, safe way by walking the road all the way down. Only when he went with Myles would he get to cross the fields by shoe. But they needed the doctor and not having one of those telephones, they sent Wren by the shortest route. This *was* a special day.

The morning wind had died and the only sounds came from the Jocalin Lumber Mill, which was at the foot of the hill that rose, full of evergreens, to Wren's left. The high scraping sounds were distinct and jarring as they came across miles of fields. They could only be heard on Saturdays, when the wind was down. On weekdays the con-

John Smolens

Wren

stant whine and growl of the circular saws shearing lumber could be heard above a forty mile per hour wind. Only on Saturday, when the mill was closed, did the lumber men have the time to thoroughly sharpen the teeth of their circular blades with a file.

Wren listened as he walked, wondering who would file Myles' blades today. "When you're gettin' paid by the cord, you're not going'ta take time durin' the week to file blade," Myles would say. After he drowned the pups last spring, Myles took Wren up to the mill. The men drank whiskey while they filed; drinking more and filing harder with finer irons until the last hour of sunlight began. On the path home, that day, Wren followed Myles, listening to him roar and snort through his nose. It was just dark when they got to the door; the sky above the ridge was thick and velvet with one star, a silver speck of cold. Myles was still mean to Paps because he had refused to drown the pups and Paps shut himself in his room after supper, while Myles kept on drinking whiskey and being mean to Mother the way he always did on Saturday nights. Wren sat underneath the kitchen table trying to calm Toby, who was being rough with the one remaining pup because she could not find the others. Wren had worried that Toby would never be the same, but after about a week she did not seem to miss them anymore and she left the pup alone, not letting her suckle again.

Wren stopped in the road and looked across the field that sloped away from his left. It was well past noon and the snow was too bright to look at for very long; but he knew he only had a couple of hours of light left before the sun went behind the mountains and the long shadows brought night to the low country. He knelt down and strapped on the snowshoes with the cracked leather belts and rusty buckles. Standing, he looked across the field again, where there were no shadows to break the sun's intensity, trying to make his eyes adjust. He crawled over the snow bank on the left side of the road and started out across the field, each step sinking down in the powder until it packed firmly enough to support him. All color was bleached from

John Smolens

Wren

his eyes and he walked parallel to the black line of woods to his right.

When he went to bed that night last spring, Wren heard Paps whimpering. There had been much confusion that day. The pups were creeping around underfoot while Mother was taking the food out of the icebox and laying it out in the snow so she could change the ice. Myles came in from the shed hollering that he could not find his files. Paps was sitting at the table, moaning and bleeding into a towel; Doctor Lance had pulled the rest of his teeth the day before.

Myles finally found the files in the bureau in Paps' room. He was grumbling and stripping to the waist to put on his mill overalls when he stepped on one of the pups' tail. He looked down at the animal as it blindly pirouetted in pain. "Paps," he said, "take 'em all out to the shed and drown 'um, 'cept for Toby and this here pup. That's all the dog I can live with." He started to close the door to put on his mill overalls when Paps let out a long howling "Nooo" from beneath his stained towel and shook his head gently. Myles came out of their room and stood in front of Paps with his hands on his knees howling "Nooo." When Myles got mad at Paps he would always mime his old queer manners. He stood there, his face right up to Paps', who could not talk but only howl. Myles shook his head right along with him, then slowly turned the "Nooo" into a sizzling "Yesss" crushed between his teeth and nodded his head up and down. They were getting louder and louder and Wren and Toby, who were under the kitchen table, began to woo-howl too. Then Myles suddenly raised his hand off his knee and slapped the top of the table. Everyone stopped but Toby, who kept woo-howling until Wren clamped her jaws together. Myles went to a drawer and pulled out a gunny sack. He collected all but one of the pups, then walked out to the shed, still bare-chested, and the sack, lumpy with life, hanging from his fist.

There was a break in the black line of woods to Wren's right. The white gap, like a single tooth remaining in a dark mouth, was the path that wound through the woods along the bottom of a soft ridge

John Smolens

Wren

to the west end of town. He entered the path, passing from sunlight to the shadows of the trees, where his eyes were unaccustomed. He walked in the center of the path where other snowshoes had fallen, until the path was suffused with new light because of a clearing that ran up the side of a ridge to his right. The sun had just gone below the ridge, leaving its outline crisp against the sky. He trudged on at a wearier pace, alternating his glance from the ridge to the navigation of the path. He was almost beyond a small clearing and under the wood again when he saw someone walking along the top of the ridge in the same direction. It was a man, simply a silhouette; a flat, black form wading across the brilliant black hill. He seemed stooped with age or was the bulging back something being carried over the shoulder, pressing his body forward? Wren squinted until his eyes watered, but could manage no detail. He cupped his snowy mittens about his mouth and hollered "Paps" several times. Not once did the man break his stride in an indication that he had heard and soon was down the other side of the ridge.

Wren started into the woods again, the night clinging to the firs like a mist of phlegm. An unseen crow cawed, rejecting one branch for another, both nodding from the weight and shedding their snow cover to crash through lower limbs and drum on the earth below. Wren's brain fluttered in his head, his heart rattled in the eves of his chest.

Doctor Lance Brin watched from his office window as Mrs. Merriweather, his secretary, struggled up the dark icy street towards her empty house. He hesitated to take off his smock, knowing how often a patient had arrived as soon as he hung it up. He disliked handling a patient in his suit coat.

He stacked all the papers on his desk and put them on top of a larger pile in the upper left hand corner. As he lifted back the lapels, letting the smock fall off his shoulders and down his winged arms,

John Smolens

Wren

he looked at the picture that had been buried beneath the papers. It was pressed between the desk and the quarter inch glass which covered its top. Poorly printed and amber at the corners, it had appeared in the local paper, pro democrat, now defunct, some thirty years ago. The caption read: PAPS LeFLEUR AND DR. LANCE GET TWO GOOD ONES. Their faces were shaded by wide brim hats and their ready clothes bagged about their slim bodies. Each with a goose in hand and a rifle in the other, their smiles were faint, lost forever; the goose looked better.

The sudden whistle of the tea kettle on the stove broke off his stare. He peeled the smock off his sleeves, took his wool coat off the tree with one hand, hung up the smock with the other, and lumbered into the kitchen, pulling on the suit coat. Just as he turned off the heat, silencing the whistle, the doorbell rang. He looked up at the ceiling, closed his eyes, nodded slowly, half exasperation, half understanding. The bell jangled again.

“Wren LeFleur! Come in, come in.” He made an extra effort because he had mumbled curses as he walked through the vestibule to answer the door. He noticed the snowshoes under the boy’s arm; he would probably have to rig up the horse and sled. If it were just for medicine Norma would have made her son take the road all the way down and not risk the fields. Wren entered the steamy vestibule, not taking off his mittens or removing his wool cap. Covered with snow and clothing but for a coin of a face, he looked so much like his father, Georges. The doctor saddled his desire to say so.

“Tea, Wren? I’ve just turned off the kettle.”

Then turning with a tea cup in each hand, the doctor walked cautiously towards the kitchen table, eyes intent upon the steadiness of the wrinkled hands as if the cups were filled with living fluid. His chin was pulled in towards his neck, to keep it out of his line of vision, Wren supposed. The half donut of jowl forced out to its

John Smolens

Wren

fullest seemed as firm with tension as his dull brow. Wren could not take his eyes off the jittering cups in an effort to add support: at the crucial moment, contact with the table, both, old man and boy, were so unified in concern that when the vessels clattered down safely a tacit sigh could be felt tumbling through their collective muscles.

Doctor Lance stood in reverie for a thin moment, then, while repeatedly commanding Wren to sit until the word became his breath pattern, he picked over a scant shelf for spoons and sugar. After this chore and a trip to the table, he went to the icebox for milk.

“Do you like milk?”

Wren did not like tea.

“Either way.”

He did not know exactly what “either way” meant but he had heard Myles say it when asked how he like his coffee. An odd feeling struck through his being, leaving the queasy flutter in his chest and a vice-like pressure building in his head. He became fascinated with the curling designs the steam made as it lingered and then came off the tea’s surface, growing fainter and disappearing. The doctor’s slurping desisted, perking Wren’s ears to the lack of its rhythm and sharp dialect in an air that had become warm and heavy with silence. In that silence Wren heard the slurping more distinctly than when the doctor was actually drinking his tea. He watched the smoke rising from his cup, listening, and listening harder as the pressure built in his head.

“What is it, son? Tea too hot?”

Wren just stared at him.

“Rolls. I had some rolls I bought at the store, now what—”

John Smolens

Wren

He slowly turned his face away and squinted at the shelf. “When your Granpa and I were your age we used to hang around the kitchen door of old Dupree’s Bakery to work up an appetite.” He glanced queerly back at Wren for a moment, then craned towards the shelf again. “What this town needs is another doctor *and* another good bakery—”

“Paps is gone, Doctor Lance.”

Wren wondered if the doctor had heard. He just sat back and jammed his pinky in his left ear, rotating it so his huge, mauve ear wriggled up and down the side of his smooth head. Then he got up and shuffled into the vestibule. He returned with his hat on with ear-flaps down, scarf across his shoulders and handed his coat to Wren to hold while he slid his arms into the sleeves.

Wren followed him out the kitchen door, down the steps and into the stable, watching his feet carefully so not to tread on the doctor’s heels. The doctor sat on a stool while Wren hitched the horse up to the sled.

“What do you mean by ‘gone,’ boy?”

“Well. Well, he was still in bed this morning and looked dead to me and Mum sent me to fetch you and on the way through the woods north of town I seen him walking along the ridge, right along the top, and I called him but he didn’t hear me, as usual.”

As he listened the doctor’s head was lifted as if looking up, but his eyes were lowered to the horse’s back in a pose of inspection that was familiar to every patient who had ever said “Ahhh” to him. Then his head slowly sank, his eyes surveying the sawdust floor.

“We believed ourselves to be pretty clever fellows, your Granpa and I. We had the run of the hills before he went to the mill and I

John Smolens

Wren

went to school. The summers were ours. School was out and chores seemed easier and shorter than in the winters. Of course, more sunlight, the days seemed longer.

“We built a cannon, one summer. Got some pipe and scrap metal and mounted in on wheels and an axle from an old buckboard. We snitched some powder from the mill and hunted round the creek for stones that would fit the barrel. Kept it out in the woods behind your place, then in the middle of the night pulled it up the road to the pasture on top of Woodrow’s hill. The next day was Bastille Day so the mill was shut down and it was quiet as a Sunday. We left it there with the cows milling around it until just before dawn.

“At first light we went back up there with a couple of gunny sacks of stone over our shoulders and pushed the cannon out to the corner of the pasture that was overlooking the town. Just as the sun came up we shot ‘er off. Weren’t worried about hitting anything, the stones only went out a little ways before they landed and rolled the rest of the way down the hill. But, oh, did it make a sound! Especially with the mill shut down and it going out over the hills and coming back with a clap. The cows all ran up to the other end of the pasture and broke open the gate. We didn’t plan on getting caught. We were going to run ‘er off a few times and then make out through the woods to our beds. But it was so much fun that we kept on loading and shooting ‘er off.

“Then when we were just running out of stones we saw Councillor LaBlanc, old Goodridge, Dupree and a few others climbing up the hill, some still in their nightshirts and boots, and crouching low, fearing that they’d get hit. Well, we just glanced at each other and stood our ground, greeting them with a smile. Councillor LaBlanc was in a stew, his English slipping back into French. He hollered about throwing us in jail or being sent away to a prison farm. The others stood behind him, grumbling their support. They were stunned and still half asleep. The town had faith in him as their spokesman for

John Smolens

Wren

seventeen years, until they found out where their taxes were going.

“Then St. Martin came down across the pasture in his nightshirt, carrying a shotgun. He was hollering about his cows, who had broken through the gate and were wandering up into the woods and even down into the town. Old St. Martin spoke little English but it was plain enough. He just tilted that muzzle towards our chests and said, “Cows.” So that holiday we spent tramping up and down the hills, looking at the backsides of cows. When we brought one back to the pasture we could look down on the town and hear them celebrating. Boy, did they carry on! There was even some shooting. Beryl, who was so homely she couldn’t get a man no other way. Dupree shot him in the back of the head running down the alley behind the bakery shop. He thought that he had shot a thief. It wasn’t until he went back into the shop that he found Beryl. But that was at night and people were so worked up none but a few took any notice to see.

“It was after dark when we finished rounding up the cows — yes, we took our time. We had stashed some liquor, too, and between each cow we’d sit and sip a spell in the pasture. When we’d fetched the last ones we sat down, finished our liquor and watched and listened to the town hooting and howling in the darkness at the bottom of the hill. By that time we were plum happy to be where we were and we weren’t about to go down and join them. We heard the gunshot that killed young Malec, but we didn’t think much of it at the time. Actually, t’was a good thing for us because the people forgot all about us and the cannon when they found out about the shooting, next day.

“Councillor LaBlanc had some of the men wheel our cannon down to his place and it was kept locked in the shed until six years later when he was found out about the taxes. That’s our Bastille cannon that’s chained to the flag pole in the common.

John Smolens

Wren

“The next year I went away to school and Paps went to the mill. When I’d come back he’d always want to go hunting. He’d become real gun happy and would go after anything. Some take to drinking or women or gambling. Your Paps was a stranger to none of them. But his real thing was hunting. He got so wild he finally drove your father out. But what’s your mother do? She gets another man. That did it for Paps. He was just too old for anymore bickering and became like a hawk with no claws. Your mother’s a strong woman, she is, keeps two men down under while she holds ‘em up at the same time. I’m surprised that Myles stayed and took it. Paps probably should have died a long time ago, he’s been gone so long. Once you’ve become something other than yourself, you might as well be dead. T’aint make no difference.”

The doctor’s body became rigid and tense beneath the folds of his clothing as he started to get up. He uncrossed his long legs; both feet had been planted evenly on the ground. His wide thick hands, seeming like creatures in themselves, bit into the edge of the sled’s running board and aided him, with the shuffling of shoes and the groan of the stool, to his own feet, somewhat miraculously, once more. “I’ll just be a moment in the basement, turning down the boiler. The spirits that wander around here don’t mind the cold as much as these bones.”

“Up and gone down to Augusta, I suspect. Or maybe back to Nova Scotia,” Mother said.

Wren went to their bedroom door and opened it. Doctor Lance sat at the kitchen table across from Mother; Wren was aware of their too quiet talk behind him, but he was not sorry that he could not make out what they were saying. The room was the same. The bed was made. Myles never had any pictures or anything on the bureau. The room did not look different; there was no object moved or missing to denote Myles’ departure.

John Smolens

Wren

Then he went into Paps' room. It was dark and he stepped carefully to the center of the room, pulled the string, and saw two things: the statues were gone and Paps' face had not been cleansed of blood. This was Paps who coughed and groaned in the night and would become weary and irritable with constipation? There was his body but there was no wind in it to stir the limbs or quiver the eyelids. This body fired a cannon at a sleeping town? Where was the insatiable desire to hunt and kill? There had been a celebration here?

Mother came into the room with a pan of hot water and soap in one hand, a towel draped over the forearm, and a glass of whiskey in the other. She closed the door with her leg.

"Get out his suit and vest," she said, putting the items on the nightstand. Leaning over him her fingers raked through the beard to see where the blood had soaked to the skin. "I should have done this earlier. I should have done it five years ago."

The familiar cross tone in her voice immediately drew up a swell of guilt and fear in Wren. But he also felt a slight wave of reassurance as he opened the closet; for this tone was familiar, it was not something new, as was the weight of the dark clothing as it came down off the hook. He went to the chair holding the suit up so it would not drag on the floor. Draping it over the back of the chair he was relieved and felt successful as he had when Doctor Lance got the two tea cups to the table without spilling. Feeling confident and a part of an organized activity, he went to the bed, standing opposite his mother, and began to unbutton Paps' nightshirt. Somehow he felt her equal.

"Where'd the statues go?" he asked, not looking up from his work.

"Myles took them."

They lifted Paps up to pull the sleeves down the arms. Wren

John Smolens

Wren

thought to ask about Paps' shoes, but then he said:

"He won't be needing his shoes, will he." He made it a statement, not a question, keeping it equal.

Mother's face was lights and darks, the forehead gleaming under the pale bulb, the hot cheeks shifting with the slight movements of the lower lip. Her eyes no longer darted, ferreting out objects; their pupils sat dryly in their shells, coins of waste. With rotating movements she sponged off Paps' chest as if it was the oil cloth on the kitchen table. She only needed to cup her free hand at his side to catch the crumbs.

"Did the doctor feed you anything?" Her eyes skidded across his, not holding them for a second. Being obsequious to her child's needs was the only response that remained.

"Yes. I'm not hungry."

"What did you have?"

"Tea and rolls."

"I have a stew I'll heat."

She went out to the kitchen and lit the flame beneath the pot. Wren looked at the naked body. Then he got the suit from the chair. Mother returned, leaving the door opened a little, seeming happier for the activity, the future of preparing a meal.

"Did it hurt much, Mum?"

"He's better off. Do you want milk?"

"No."

John Smolens

Wren

“He was in a lot of pain. There was no point in his going on any longer.”

“Like Toby’s pups? They were always squealing and crying. The pup couldn’t even see when Myles stepped on his tail.”

“Yes, but that was different. Lift up his leg.”

“I know,” Wren said, reiterating in a monotone what he had learned by rote, “there wasn’t enough milk for all of the pups to drink.”

He changed his mind and went to the kitchen and got a glass of milk. Sitting in the chair in Paps’ room he drank some of the milk, put the glass on the bureau, and began kicking his heels against the legs of the chair. “Myles said the pups were alot better off after he drowned them, and he was too. He said he hated to see them squirming around, peeping and getting lost in the walls. Don’t you feel better now that Paps is dead?”

Mother tucked the white shirt into Paps’ trousers. Wren took the vest and coat off the hanger while Mother knotted the blue tie which had a small white dog in pointer position knitted just off center. They sat him up, the neck muscles relaxed, the head rolling around freely, and pulled his vest and coat up his slack arms. They laid him back, propped the pillow, put his arms straight at his sides, palms up, and Mother lowered his eyelids.

She was sweating from the work. She drank some of the whiskey.

“It’s the waiting for them to go,” she said, “there’re different kinds of dying, not all of them like Paps’.”

“Like breathin’?”

“Like breathing.”

John Smolens

Wren

They went into the kitchen, Doctor Lance got up and, without saying anything, went into Paps' room and closed the door. Wren got another glass of milk while Mother emptied the pan in the basin. She stirred the stew, then sat down at the table with her glass and whiskey bottle. She poured the cupreous sunlight into the glass and sat quietly while the doctor cried. When he came out of Paps' room he closed the door slowly, as if someone were sleeping.

"Stew's almost ready. You want a drink?" Mother said, going to the stove.

"Nothing, thanks, No, after a point it doesn't kill the pain. Only the pain can kill itself." He struggled into his coat, hat and scarf. "Mighty cold out. The horse'll be wanting to get inside."

After a scrub of Wren's hair the doctor let himself out, the wings of winter getting by him and landing on Wren's shoulders, making the boy shiver right up to his scalp. The door to Paps' room slowly swung open on a dry hinge immediately after the outside door shut, allowing the warm air from Paps' and the cold air to mingle and lap up against the walls and envelop objects. Wren closed the door without looking in and returned to the table, where a bowl of stew awaited him. He sat in front of the steaming bowl, not seeing it but seeing Myles sliding a lumpy gunny sack off his shoulder onto a counter in a dark store that smelled of sawdust. He ate rapidly, not really tasting the food or its heat, thinking about the spiders that were housed in those statues. Wren did not like spiders and he was not as worried about their being thrown together into the gunny sack as about the man in the dark store, who would pay Myles for the statues. Maybe if he was a good man like Doctor Lance and because he lived in Augusta he would brush the dust from the folds of their faded red and blue robes, kill the spiders, and glue them together before he sold them.

John Smolens

Wren

“You want more?”

He shook his head.

“Well then, come, lets go to bed. You sleep with me tonight.”

Wren was already in bed with his longjohns ravelled up to his knees when Mother came in, took off her clothes, almost tripping over her skirt as it fell in a loop about her feet, and pulled on her night gown. She turned out the lamp, breathed hotly on him with a whisper, kissed him, and turned over, still whispering. At first Wren could not see her back, though it was less than a foot away. He could hear her whispering voice distinctly, but without understanding the words. Occasionally she would cough, the racking like dozens of wooden chairs in the church hall being folded after service. All the sounds she made seemed to come from far off as if her back, its outline now faintly visible as his eyes adjusted to the dark, was a hill separating them. Then the sound shifted inside her; a steady undulating wheeze reverberated from the very center of her, the hill.

He waited, slipped out of bed and carefully tiptoed out of the room with a heap of clothes in his arms. Dressing without any light, each button was cold and elusive sliding from thumb through button-hole to finger. He took many seconds closing the outside door because now, swaddled in the night, he could not bear to have her call out in the void just as he stepped into the road. She had attracted and repelled men in a house that always failed in love, and now death had taken the wind of life away. The pattern would eventually effect her son as well. The love there, and the loss, sent him away with anxiety wriggling beneath his skin. He went to the shed and looked into its pitch-blackness. He could go in and sleep forever, or he could grope along the walls past Myles' adze and files until he found the

John Smolens

Wren

snowshoes. But if he took the snowshoes he would have to take other things, too. Paps' cannon on the town green, or Toby, who had been "put to sleep" last summer — Wren now understood that she was dead, would have to go with him.

He decided he would forfeit all, including the snowshoes. Turning towards the road, he only thought of the adventure of crossing the fields that lay under the night. All lay behind him and all lay before him as he went down the road, running and sliding, running and sliding.

Joe David

Birdie

BIRDIE

The block-long shopping center had once employed hundreds, but now since the summer riots, like some of the other buildings on Franklin Street, only a fragile skeleton remained. Birdie, followed by her gang, walked home from school in the shadow of the skeleton, throwing rocks at the few unbroken windows.

“Hey, Birdie,” one girl called.

“Yeah?” Birdie said, turning.

“Tell us the time you fight them two teachers.”

“Again?”

“Yeah. Tell us again. Faith, she new and don’t know ‘bout it.”

“All right. But this is the *last* time!”

The girls stopped and gathered near Birdie. Even though it was a cold winter day, none zipped their jackets. They followed Birdie’s lead of leaving their jackets open, as they listened to her retell, maybe with *slight* alteration, how she escaped from two male teachers by using karate.

“Karate?” Faith said. “You know Karate?”

And three times, for Faith’s behalf, Birdie demonstrated the deadly right-hand swing and the side kick which floored the two teachers. Each demonstration, though, was perceptibly different. On the third demonstration, she added the loud, savage cry which sent the teachers running in fear to the principal.

Joe David

Birdie

“Gosh,” Faith said, looking up at Birdie with large, glowing eyes. “You done *that*?”

Birdie had difficulty containing the pride. Her chest swelled suddenly to its limits, placing undue stress on her tight fitting blouse. For a moment, she was sure every stitch would snap. “Sure . . . and them teachers *still* talkin’ ‘bout it!”

“Man, there ain’t *nobody* tough like *our* Birdie!”

“I bet she can lick *anybody*!”

“Even Zelda?”

“Oh, Zelda ain’t shit,” Birdie said.

“There she come now.”

“She sure a mean lookin’ nigger.”

“Zelda?” Birdie laughed, turning toward Zelda. “She ain’t mean,” she added loud enough for Zelda to overhear. “She only look mean ‘cause she so fuckin’ ugly!”

Zelda, walking toward the girls, listened to her transistor radio as though she didn’t hear Birdie.

“No, Birdie,” Faith said. “You wrong. I seen her fight, and she *mean*!”

“Shit!” Birdie said. “Nobody tough like Birdie!” And Birdie then strutted up to Zelda and knocked against her . . . so hard that Zelda fell to the curb, dropping the radio.

Joe David

Birdie

Zelda's look hardened, when she saw the radio in pieces. "You crazy nigger," she said, jumping to her feet. "I gonna kill you."

Birdie laughed at the slight-built girl who barely came up to her chin. "You and who else?"

Zelda yanked something from her pocket, which released a long, silvery blade when she extended her hand. "Me and *this!*" And she walked cautiously toward Birdie.

Birdie stared so hard at the gleaming blade, which moved in a slow circle toward her, that her eyes ached from the concentration. She began to step backward to Zelda's every step forward.

"What's wrong, Birdie," Zelda said. "Scar'd?"

"Birdie ain't *never* scared!"

"Show me how tough you is. Throw me like you done them teachers. Go on, Birdie. Throw me!"

Her girl friends withdrew quietly into the deep shadow of the shopping center and watched with excitement. Birdie could feel their excitement through her fear, and their excitement emphasized the urgency to subdue Zelda without losing face. But each time she was ready to try, she thought of what could happen if she failed, and she would then take larger steps backwards.

"Use that karate," Faith shouted. "Go 'head. Do that to Zelda!"

"Yeah, Birdie," Zelda said, stepping forward. "Use that karate!"

"Hey, look!" someone said! "The cops!"

"Let's split."

Joe David

Birdie

“Why? We only lookin’! Why should we split?”

Birdie glanced toward the familiar red and white cruiser with relief. It was during this moment, when she saw the cruiser accelerate past her, sending glass and twisted cans flying, that she felt the sharp pain of the knife sink into her. Grabbing her side, she fell to the sidewalk.

Her friends’ faces swarmed low overhead, and their voices sounded strange and faraway. Everything began to melt and flow out of focus . . . everything, that is, except the disappointment in her friends’ eyes.

No one visited her during those weeks of convalescing at home. Her only companionship was her father, a stocky man who looked older than his thirty-eight years because of heavy drinking. “I’m awarnin’ you, Birdie,” he said, setting her food before her on the bed. “The flames of hell is readyin’ itself for the likes of you . . .”

“You crazy!”

“You see who’s crazy. The good lord ain’t gonna be kind to a no-good girl like you. Just you wait and see how He gonna punish you.”

Birdie looked at the plate of burned baked beans and hot dogs. “You the one God gonna punish for ruinin’ food like this.”

“Go on. Make faces!” he said, filling a glass with bourbon. “But it ain’t gonna do you no good. ‘Cause I ain’t gonna fix *nothing* more!”

Birdie tried to ease some of the beans down with milk. “Man,

Joe David

Birdie

you a lousy cook.”

“Stick your nose at it,” he said. “See what good that do you. ‘Sides, I don’t see none of your friends comin’ to bring you nothing.” He then swallowed some bourbon, then wiped his mouth with the back of his hand.

“Shut up ‘bout my friends!”

“They ain’t your friends. If they was your friends they’d be here now.”

“I said *shut up!*”

“You or no punk kid is gonna tell me to shut up . . . ever! So you listen good, Birdie Smith.”

“I ain’t gonna listen to you ‘cause you stupid.”

“You the one who is stupid. You blow up your chest and you walk ‘round like you think you is some tough boy. But you *nothing!* And them friends of yours know it now. That’s why they ain’t here. Don’t you ever forget it, Birdie. Ever!”

“I hate you!”

“Sure you hate me, ‘cause you know you’s suppose to take care of your ole dad instead of actin’ like some punk and you don’t like to face that.”

“Shit,” she gushed. “Who wanna take care of you? You nothing but a stupid drunk.”

“Someday you see how stupid I is.”

Joe David

Birdie

"I see now."

"Someday you really see," and his voice deepened and his gaze narrowed. "Someday Birdie Smith you really see what I talkin' 'bout. Then you see how the good Lord is gonna punish for you not takin' car of me!"

She could feel his look penetrate. Then, with one long sweep of the arm, she knocked the plate of food from her lap and to the floor. "I ain't gonna take care of you . . . *ever*," she said. "I gonna get well and go back to school and take care of me, Birdie Smith. You see!"

Enroute to school a week later, Birdie stopped at the corner carry out, a block from Garfield Junior High School, and had a hot dog and Coke for breakfast, and later at school, some laundry starch. Lunch would be over-cooked chicken and left-over cole slaw . . . and whatever else the school dietician could ruin. Birdie wasn't in any hurry to head for lunch in spite of her hunger now. Instead, she remained in the school toilet with the other class cutters and watched all the excitement around her.

Some of the girls fussed with their hair; others relieved themselves behind closed doors. But most of them smoked nervously a cigarette which was passed to everyone except Birdie. Birdie ignored the smokers by turning toward the girl next to her who suddenly lifted her skirt and said: "Look what I got! Ain't they pretty?" Birdie stared at the red nylon panties, trimmed in black lace, and watched the hands eagerly feel the nylon. One hand felt the bristly hairs the soft nylon covered.

"Where you get 'em?" one girl asked.

Joe David

Birdie

“Swift’s.”

“Bet they cost fifty cent.”

“They did not! They cost *five* dollars!”

“Shit!”

“They *do*!”

“Now where you get five dollars?”

“I stole ‘em.”

“Well, they nice,” Birdie said, running her hand over the seat of the panties. “So nice I’d like to have a cock and have it right in there!”

The girl in the red nylon panties, trimmed in black lace, suddenly jumped away. Every eye in the toilet seemed to focus on Birdie.

“Hey, you better not touch that Birdie,” one girl said. “That belong to Rod.”

“So?” Birdie said. “‘Sides, the only thing Rod Lincoln got that I ain’t got is a cock.”

“He got more than that.” someone said. “And he gonna steal you in that mouth if he catch you touchin’ her.”

“Rod ain’t so tough.”

“He tougher than you.”

“Nobody tough like Birdie!”

Joe David

Birdie

“Shit! We know how tough *you* is!”

Birdie nervously lowered her gaze, and lighted a cigarette. When she glanced up again, the girls had turned away and were talking madly about nothing.

The toilet didn't have adequate ventilation or windows, and the smoke and the smell made Birdie nauseous. Her discomfort was heightened by the strange tastes in her mouth and the furious sounds in her stomach. She now craved fresh air as deeply as she craved food, and without either soon, she would get sick. But instead of leaving the toilet now, Birdie dropped a lighted match into the disposal can with the same deliberation that she had dropped matches earlier in the lockers, and she smiled with the same satisfaction when she saw the smoke puff out.

“Hey, look!” someone shouted, pointing. “A fire!”

“Who start it?”

“Don't look at me. I ain't no where near it.”

“Get some water. Get some water!”

“Birdie done it. I seen her.”

“Yeah, Birdie done it.”

“Why you done it Birdie? You crazy or somethin'? You want that stupid-ass Slaughter to lock this one up?”

“Yeah, why you done it, Birdie? Where we gonna smoke if he lock it? Tell me, huh?”

“She done it 'cause she's mad,” a voice rose from somewhere in

Joe David

Birdie

the crowd. "That's why Birdie done it!"

"Now why Birdie be mad?"

"She's mad 'cause we know she ain't tough like she want us to think. That's why Birdie mad!"

Birdie turned to her right, then left in a frantic attempt to identify the speaker, but all she could identify were a lot of scoffing eyes. "You think I ain't tough, huh?" she said in what she thought was the direction of the voice. "Well, let me tell you!" And she could feel her chin jut out. "There ain't no fuckin' body who can beat the shit from Birdie." And her head was swaying and her pointed finger was moving. "And don't *ever* you forget that!"

"Why Zelda stab you then?" the same voice rose again. "Tell us why . . . if you so tough?"

Birdie shoved aside some girls and marched past them to a small girl in the back. "You say that?"

"No, Birdie. Not me."

"Who then? Common. Who say that?"

"Oh, Birdie," one girl said, resting a hand on Birdie's shoulder. "We only psychin' you."

Birdie shook loose the girl's hand. "Nobody psych Birdie. "Hear?"

"Sure, Birdie," the girl said. "Now let's split 'fore that Slaughter finds us."

"Yeah, let's split," the girls echoed.

Joe David

Birdie

And Birdie, for the first time, found herself following the others from the toilet.

A few children were walking the halls when the girls left the toilet. Several of these hall walkers glanced the locked classroom doors and listened to the yelling inside, but without any desire seemingly to enter. Having a place to walk their problems seemed enough to expect from school. So these few never paused long, and soon continued on their way . . . pensive, sad and easy prey for gangs.

Birdie watched them slip quietly down the hall, casting small shadows. Her awareness now of them seemed to deepen her own loneliness. But when she saw the new white teacher leave the classroom, Birdie's mood swiftly changed. The teacher, seeing Birdie come toward her, tried to unlock the classroom door and re-enter again, but in her haste dropped the keys. A slow, almost sweet smile appeared on the teacher's face, and quickly concealed, except for occasional flashes, her fear.

"Hello, dear," the teacher said.

"I ain't your dear," Birdie said with both hands on her hips, and loud enough for her gang to overhear.

"It's only a politeness, young lady. Nothing personal is meant by it."

"No white bitch honky call *me* dear. Hear?"

"Very well," and the teacher started to reach for the keys, but Birdie kicked them out of reach and stepped in front of her. "May I pass, please?"

"You ain't goin' nowhere!"

Joe David

Birdie

“Yeah,” the other girls joined in, as they swarmed the teacher. “You ain’t goin’ nowhere.”

“But it’s my lunch hour,” the teacher said nervously. “And I’m hungry.”

“You ain’t goin’ nowhere!”

Birdie then shoved the teacher backwards to the floor. After grabbing the teacher’s purse, Birdie then ran down the hall with her girl friends following, laughing. But rising above their laughter was the teacher’s scream: “Hey, give me back my purse.”

“Man, that Miss Covington is *sure* mad,” one girl said.

“Jesus, Birdie. You somethin’ else,” another laughed.

“Is Birdie tough?” Birdie said. “Or is Birdie *not* tough?”

“You is tough, Birdie. *Real* tough!”

“Hey, how much money is in there?”

There were nearly seven dollars in the purse. Five went into Birdie’s bra, the remainder to her friends, and the purse in the general direction of the teacher. The only sounds in the halls now were those which the girls made as they ran to the exit. As Birdie headed for the stairs, she glanced the teacher who was gathering the spilled contents of the purse. The teacher, pausing suddenly, glared at Birdie, and in such an angry way that Birdie remembered her father’s warning; even after Birdie left the others and was alone on the third floor landing, she still remembered.

She felt a compulsion to throw something, a book, a chair,

Joe David

Birdie

anything, through the large window by the stairs. Unable to find anything to throw, she tried to scream, but she couldn't force out any sounds. And for one passionate moment, she thought of plunging head-first through the window. But this thought passed with the banging of a second-floor locker.

She walked down the stairs toward the noise.

Sinclair, dressed in torn pants and a sleeveless shirt, was standing by his locker, looking at the badly burned coat on the hook. It was one of the lockers she had earlier stuffed with toilet tissue and set afire. His school books and paper which had kindled the fire were almost in ashes.

"Why they done this?" he said, turning toward Birdie. "Why they hate me 'n' done this?"

"Who hate you? Tell me so I can steal 'em one."

"Someone do," he said with sad, but alert eyes. "'Wise they wouldn't beat me up 'n' take my money all the time."

"Who do that?"

"Some boy . . ."

"Which boy? Tell Birdie which boy so she can steal 'em good!"

"I don't know his name."

"You think he done this too?" she asked, feeling his gaze menacingly settle on her.

"No, he only want money. He ain't interest'd in doin' this." He looked at his coat. "Boy, my dad sure gonna be mad when he hears

Joe David

Birdie

'bout this."

She reached into her bra and removed five dollars. "Maybe he don't need to learn." She held out the money. "Here."

"What's that for?" he asked, looking at her and not at the money.

"For a new jacket. That's what for."

"But I got all kinds of 'em."

"Sure you has. But this for 'nother."

"Why you wanna give me money?"

"'Cause I like you."

"You sure?"

"Sure. Now take it."

He looked at the money uncertainly. He wanted it. She could tell by the way his hand anxiously opened and closed; but when he looked at her, into her, he shook his head stubbornly, and in so doing freed himself of the desire to reach for it.

"Here," she said, stuffing the money into his hand. "Take it."

He opened his hand and the money fell to the floor, as he shook his head. Birdie stared after him, as he trudged away, the noises in her stomach coming regularly now. Without effort, without control almost, she screamed. Frightened by her scream, by the terror gushing from her soul, she ran to the exit, then down the stairs and out into the cold afternoon air.



Alan Britt

WHEN GRANDAD PULLS OUT HIS BANJO

When Grandad pulls out his banjo
and starts to play
his daughter's voice is lightning trapped
inside an ice-cube
The banjo's claws dig
at the ice
red hummingbirds fly
in the nephew's cheeks

A train rolls
under a Virginia mountain's dark pines
A black sleeve pushed
against a window

The banjo rows out
across a pond
into the cattails
and yellow spear leaves
The banjo turns yellow
as straw
until the lips swell
with dark moons

Alan Britt

THE CONDOR

A finger
points
off a building
to a dead president's motorcade
tosses
a coin
from the building

On the moon
men
in silver
suits
tap
dust
from their shoes

A California farmer
ties
string
to a piece
of poisoned meat
that lies
on a hillside rock
across a canyon
from the condor's nest

Jan Long

MY POEMS

All day they bleed
in the tossed salad conversation
at a carnival
where a freak sits
eating light bulbs.

STRANGLER

*Music is feeling, then,
not sound . . .*

Wallace Stevens

Living beneath the bell
has started taking affect. It leans into
my skin like the soft spikes
used for tattoos. By midnight
it engraves a permanent impression;
one more way
of stopping my breath.

j. m. m. faria

WAY OUT THERE

Way out there he waits
Beyond that mountain
He contemplates a tragic
Way out there
Behind the blue hyacinth
He sits on a mushroom
A poisoned one, a straight one
There he is, his stale breath
Like a cloud of locuts,
To scratch your throat, to make you bleed.

Out there
Out there

He knives his teeth on bones
He sucks graves empty
In his hollow skull you can see
The panorama of the sky
The mountains stark, through his body
Sing "Yankee Doodle went to town"
To see the statue of liberty
Eat the world,
Masturbate in N. Y. harbor

j. m. m. faria

A POEM

The reason for my being here
Should be clear to you
By now
The shadows should meet each other.
Casually
Glide over the floor, like two
Dark tides meeting half way;
A desire
Catches the moment before touching,
Before the cool Irish linen
Intoxicates,
The breath of limbs.

Prof. Gerald Cohen

MOSTLY FOR SONG

after your call
hurried dressing sorries and out
our fire, mountain high
for fog and cold of night
my scattered thoughts
wild and unsettled
in a private kind of dare
what I cannot in trust.

I try to follow you down
but I see only the lie
in every movement
where your shadows in lights
plotting
twist in mist fanning-out
even the illusion of holding you:
finding
only short cut betrayals
I get ready for your next call
to pimp you to its risk.



Greg Kuzma

THE LEFT HAND

The left hand welcomes
The right refuses.

The left is a mole crawling toward night
the right is that night.

Perhaps you have only the left hand
that dismal prospect.

The hour of dismissal has come.
As we leave the left hand opens.

The left hand likes itself draped.

Water and the left hand are not strangers.
Together they mix up the paste.

I went to meet you and on your lips
there was a faint tinge of resentment
and you put out your left hand.

I owe this poem to the left hand
for the right knew all along what it was doing.

If we will ever write anything
our left hands will do it.

There is a desert in which people are stranded.
There is a desert in which people are confounded.
The left hand is out there doing it's job.

No tent but for the left hand.

Cut off the left hand
it will grow a museum.

Greg Kuzma

The Left Hand

Admonish the left hand it will seek the company
of dogs.

The left hand is precious.
Five rivers of blood begin there.

Come, shoulders, that it may lie along you
like a sleeping snake.

In the mirror the left hand looks familiar.
It looks like the right hand.

Believe in the efficacy of the left hand.
You may believe in the left hand.

When you open your eyes in the morning
the left hand snoozing by your face
is the rest of the island.

Sometimes the left hand holds the nail,
sometimes the hammer.

The left hand shows you the door,
and now you are gone.

Praise the left hand.
It is a good place to start.

Greg Kuzma

THE LEAK

It pays to keep an open mind at least until
noon. Today, for example, I was lying around
lamenting my ruined life, there was no money
for groceries, and that was around eleven or so,
sat down, had a brief lunch. Just now, it's
five o'clock, the roof started leaking, just
like in the old comedies with the father coming
home from work, the family gathers in the kitchen
to think about how to tell him, but I'm the
father, I'm already home, I slip a bread pan
under the leak without ceremony, walk away,
I'm sitting down the hall from it now listening
to the drip. My children riot in the downstairs.

Shelagh Healey

LOWELL LINGERIE CO.

brick
touching
my palm,
shooting
life with
a phallic
jolt in
the sky,
6 o'clock
sidewalks
pave me
in the door



Kyle Cohen

MOSS

we set a candle in the wind,
an ocean storm blowing easterly
yet the flame remained,
flickering mildly upon
a jetty rock, barely eroding,
building with
algae

Bill Lustig

RISING IN FIRE

As the rising day's
first light fades into
our grey eye we see

that history is bakery
cord a cat's cradle
where our fingers sleep

and the dream of two
children who walked like
autumn away from the
brittle village wearing

all that was left them their
little gloves made of
lichen in which we carry a lump
of transparent coal history

to a green furnace that some
voice said is by the river.

Bill Lustig

CENTER

Center
of the
meadow there

is a white
door with

rusted
hinges
someone

left in the
grass on its
back it's my
eyes my hand

is reaching for.



Lou Papineau

DECEMBER, 1961

I eyed you in the study;
you were busy looking at color slides
on your Kenner Give-A-Show projector.
Your children were starving,
begging for food, for attention.
They gathered in the corner
and plotted an attack against you;
when you reached the strip
with pictures of Popeye on it
they lunged at you
from across the room —
and none of them fell,
none of them stopped to breathe,
all of them, in unison,
glued themselves to your body,
knocked you to the floor,
stuck out their swollen tongues
and painted wounds on their faces
with blue cheese.
You then realized your plight,
saw the danger in their eyes
and felt the blindness in your own;
you set about making thunderous little fists
with the fingers left over from your father's wake,
but it was too late:
the children had sucked the color
from your limbs,
and you, from theirs.

Joseph Wilson

JOY POEM

On the last day of winter they laughed,
Susan and Wayne, like they had never
Laughed before, guessing all of it

Was coming to a close. In the stale air
Of the cafeteria they laughed,
Really!, so the janitors, hearing,

Readied the high windows for seeing,
And both could see the slow, gray river,
The land unamazed by them, laughing.

On the first night of spring, lightning comes
Thrilling the gray air in every room
For miles! From my window I can see

Again they do things to be envied.
Is this old world, then, for obvious
Lovers?: the way I see it, all things

In this amazed cadenza of earth
Celebrate them: in the full harmonica
Of the night the sounds are laughter.

Joseph Wilson

TO BOB, ON LEARNING HE HAS GOTTEN UP

Dawn's rosy fingers, my ass.
The last ten mornings have been
Fucked up as a hangover —

The rain rumbling, every damn
Day on the roof like a huge,
Pitiful stomach; snuffling

All morning at screens like a
Ten-pound thalidomide nose;
Slouching in the street, a drunk

Who would like to fall asleep,
And would if it weren't so cold;
Oh it goes on, and on, and

I keep making matters worse,
Embarassing myself by walking in-
To people, places and things,

Looking like a garbage man
Drinking at the Hilton bar,
Feeling, well, ridiculous

To be happy for such days.

Paul B. Roth

YOGI

A yogi
climbs his hands of rope
past a star
into a darkness of light
sees
where all one way
streets
intersect in the gunsight
that is focused
by the eyes of a man
who when young
was punished for saying
his eyelashes
were stolen from the back
of a black
orange caterpillar

Paul B. Roth

HORSE AND BOY

Up
and down the mountain
the rain
runs above the horse
and boy
who find shelter
in a dark cave flower's
yellow center

But in the eyes of the boy
the yellow center becomes a flame the horse's mouth
mistakes for dry straw

Afraid
the boy remembers
his eyes
have once visited among mangrove roots
a salamander's home
managed by wild haired gulf lichens
by echoes
claws of crabs scratched across
sand crushed shells

The men
who will search the morning
for the horse
and boy
sleep under the blanket
of a bell
their bodies lost
to a darkness growing along cave walls
in the treeless
roots of their dreams

Paul B. Roth

Horse and Boy

These men who remain asleep
who will awake
and after long silences in conversation
with the yellow spots
puffing on a frog's green eyelid
turn their lips
away from languages shifting gears
in a machine's voice
these men will try to enter the water
at the bottom of a breath
the boy
in place of a flame
left
to mimic the whispers of
the air

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