Aldebaran
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Father Benedict Auer

THE DROWNING

We'd planned a walk to keep our sanity, Dad, my brother, and I. We were spending a few days in Wisconsin for my grandparents lived in Menasha on the shores of Little Lake Butte Des Moris and often got bored while visiting there. As we neared the lake we heard the urgent whistle of a train screaming emergency as it told us someone had been hit and knocked off the trestle. We ran down to the beach where Johnny, Dad's boyhood friend, was already attaching the grappling hooks to his boat, which we now jumped into. Once seated I caught the anxiety on Dad's face for he was not someone who, given the choice, would have had his kids exposed to this odyssey. So we rowed toward the trestle, up and down, the current swift, up and down, hooks skimming the silted bottom, up and down, our clawed fingers playing with the lake reeds, up and down, searching out our prey. I knew Dad didn't want us to find anything, so when the boat a few paces off yelled, Dad told Johnny to head for shore. But as we turned I caught sight of a man's head as it broke through the water, hooks grappling his arms. His face was transfixed with horror. He couldn't see the sunset which now flushed our faces with a summer blush--mine ashen with fear, his with death, as we slowly rowed away.
SPRING IN JANUARY

Drapes rustle
in the late
afternoon breeze
as I sit staring
into winter
etched in green.
Trees are bare,
skinned of leaves,
but the ground
takes on
a lime tinge.
The Fox River
wiggles and twists
its ice freely
down this Illinois valley,
while geese fly
in winged formation
north, not south.
And even the robin
did not go completely
away, but is spotted
pecking at corn
beside Bohemian sparrows.
And it is only
January seventh.
Cynthia BalloH

THE COTTAGE ON MOUNT HOPE

I must paint you carefully
in this season and the next,
between the advent of crocusses
and the death of asparagus.
I'll go about with my harvest basket
looking for berries.
Bending toward you, a narrow rut
carved by autos, rain, erosion --
I've complained about this drive,
blaming it for bad shocks.
But I'll miss the pathway
to your unraveling screen
when roads are laid out fresh,
impervious.
The last house bordering nowhere,
so humbled,
your shingles crumble,
 meshing leaves and soil.
More space than structure now,
with tunnels for each small visitor,
rafters well inhabited,
nests for the comfort of the living.
INTENTIONS

Things I remember....
like the old bathroom carpet--
for months now its been waiting
on the backyard picnic table.
Washed once on an autumn afternoon,
I had good intentions:
dry it in the sun,
lat it on the tiles,
golden as a spaniel's curls.
It rained the next day,
and I left it out, thinking,
tomorrow, when it's dry.
From my window, I see it
folded by the wind,
rotting, forgotten in the sun.
It slipped away slowly,
ever wholly out of sight;
torrential winds and thunderstorms
helping me
to put aside my plans.
Ballou

WALKING THE EVENING STREET

What light covers this town
in September--
dinner waits at six o'clock.
Windows are luminous
from the sidewalk;
inside, children wish for sunsets
kept hidden inside a shell,
safe with a drawer,
where summer's stored.
Little faces at the table,
home from school,
nudge and titter,
miming words
behind the pane of glass.
I pass, but only slowly,
not with youth's celerity,
all my streets are narrow,
no room for turnarounds.
They'll wake again in morning
and wonder if the night
is just a tool for elders
who never cease to tell them:
take your time.
FLUTE MASTER
on an anniversary

winter trees frame him
in kimono by the window

so small; I try on
the bare places of my life

he lifts a large bamboo flute
to thin lips; a basket

belled over his eyes
like this love of ours

strange sounds drop
over each person, rapt

and climb from the center
of the flute master

out, apart
from the one who makes them

like love; he stops
removes the basket

then goes into the back
to breathe; his associates

circulate among us
selling brown rice

and the people, released
chatter about history
their studies; I move
into photographs on white walls

sad Victorian women
an oak, blighted, picturesque

on a hill of flowered grasses --
the song begins again

"asking the higher spirit"
and I want to do this

it is like conversation
with the Humpback whale

I look past him, to the winter
trees, and am taken into them

a shivering bird
Taika Brand

AT THE NUCLEAR COUNTRY CLUB
(Special note: Peace is not served here. It is far too inexpensive to be on the menu.)

I am on a special diet.
My breakfast,
fear.
Its' poison barbed with missiles
bulls-eyes white with terror
gone blind.
My lunch,
destruction.
Sliced with power and warfare,
it contaminates futures
dresses them with disease.
I snack on
contaminated candy bars,
until dinner when death is served.
My appetizer is melted down
with graves,
the main course pressure-cooked and bloody--
one world's violent suicide.

for Anika
Chet Corey

LETTERS TO A TRAVELER

One

Your letter/card arrived without return address--postmarked San Diego Sep 6. You write of October on the North Shore, the need for reservations. And I have such reservations... but not for rooms. The weather clouds here, pain the length of leg--I'll drive up town for parts, repair a lamp, attempt to end the Session's paper chase. My film did not advance: that quality of light along your hair, the wooden bridge above the creek, concrete abutment--white as a mission church--all photos lost.

Your departure for LA delayed a day (the late arrival, a plausible excuse) but you avoid the polyester tour, walk out with wave, reach for driftwood, shell, water that rises along your arm unasked. You write you slipped a moment back to bed--tongue thought and touch. Where I walk tonight, dark sounds that disappear and reappear in reed and marsh will be reminders how. Your life has wreckage enough. The iron ore you'd salvage from my Superior would cost too much to surface. Dive into your own!

And may St. James adjudicate your fear.

9/10/85
It was a sunny, warm July morning and the cold, pale body of Dennis Norman was lying in the center aisle of St. Michael's church in Boxville, Connecticut. The body was wearing the blue three-piece suit Dennis had bought with his own money almost a year before. "There might be some special event at college," his mother had told him. "You never know when a suit might come in handy." "Yeah, I guess so." He hadn't liked the idea of spending so much money on a piece of clothing (It's not a piece, it's three pieces," his mother had said), but when he saw how it looked on him for the first time, alone in his room on a hot August afternoon, he forgot about how much it cost. He looked so... important in a suit. He looked forward to the first time he would be able to wear it. And today, as if in a final effort to keep it from going to waste, he was finally wearing it.

His parents, three sisters, his brother and his brother's wife were all sitting in the first two pews of the church. The oldest of the sisters was crying. She was the only one crying. For the last three days people had used words like "tragic," "unbelievable," and "sad" to refer to Dennis. There had been a headline story in the local newspaper and a television station did a spot on "yet another tragic incident."

The rest of the church was modestly filled. Dennis' youngest sister had hoped there would be more people there. She thought for sure that her brother was more popular than this. If it was me she thought, it would be packed with high school kids. She took a quick glance behind her to see if any more people had come in. She caught the eye of one of her relatives whose name she never remembered and recalled how she was supposed to be. She restored a look of despair and returned her focus to the pulpit where the priest was delivering the eulogy.
Father Francis was never very good at these types of things and this one was especially difficult with so many people. He touched his balding head with a white handkerchief and readjusted the thick glasses on his nose. "It's hard to understand this type of tragedy. We know Dennis had a strong family-oriented upbringing and a solid religious foundation. We here at St. Michael's would see the Normans at Mass every Sunday. They are well respected members of our community." He glanced down at the notes he had prepared but suddenly found them all inappropriate. He couldn't say this stuff--it was too...too sappy. He turned the piece of paper upside down and looked at the congregation.

"This...this is why something like this is so difficult to comprehend. Dennis had everything our society has to offer. He had a loving, comfortable home which provided for his needs; he was pursuing a college education; he had many friends at home and at school, evidenced by the number of people here this morning. He was not involved in drugs and he helped out whenever he could. His father tells me that Dennis took the trash out every night at home."

About half-way back on the right side of the church Barry Turner looked down at his hands as he remembered the first time he convinced Dennis to take acid with him. They had been roommates as freshmen. Dennis had been cautious about the heavier drugs. He smoked pot and did coke every now and then, but nothing more until Barry talked him into the acid. Since then, Dennis had done acid as often as he could afford to. Until about six months ago. Then he stopped. He stopped everything. No acid, no coke, no pot, not even booze.

But now that he thought about it, Dennis' stopping wasn't half as strange as his reasons. "It's a waste of time, Barry," he once told him. "Don't you just wanna know what it might be like to go a whole weekend in a
normal state of mind?" "Hey--I’ve done that. We all have. It’s boring."
"Jesus Barry, don’t-you care what you think instead of how that shit makes you think?"
"Dennis man--lighten up." "You mean just go on doing what everyone else is? Well fuck that. Fuck you. Fuck the whole damn thing."

After that they simply started to go their own ways. They didn’t have any major problems, but the didn’t party together anymore. In fact, Dennis didn’t party with anyone. On weekends, he spent the entire time sitting in the room listening to albums.

Barry Turner looked at the priest but could only think that what he really needed right now was to get high.

In the front pew Dennis’ father glanced quickly at his wife. He had lied to Father Francis. In the two months he had been home from school Dennis hadn’t taken the trash out one night. It had always been his job and he had always done it. "No Dad," he had said. "I’m not going to let myself worry about the trash anymore. If it bothers you, you take it out." Jay Norman had been stunned at first, than he got angry. Very angry. "If you think your mother and I plan to drop to our knees and cater to you then you’d better wake up young man. We’ve taken care of you for twenty years. We’re putting our lives on hold so you can get an education and a decent start in life. Now you come in here and think just because you’ve been to college for a year that you can tell us what we have to do? Well like hell! What kind of appreciation is this?"

"Oh yeah Dad, let me take a moment to express my deep gratitude for all the great things you’ve done for me. You’ve just been fucking terrific, okay? Is that what you wanted to hear? Just let me live my own fucking life, okay? You just wander back to your little fucking measly existence. Stay the hell out of my life."
First Jay Norman wanted to hit him, then just throw him out. But what finally prevailed was the astonishment. What had happened to his son? Who was his person in front of him?

His wife was staring straight ahead. He thought it would be a good idea if he took her hand. He reached over and grabbed it. He was surprised at the bony quality of it. He didn't know his wife had such bony hands. He also hadn't noticed how pale she was. And her face was more drawn than he had ever remembered it being. Did she look like this all the time?

The priest was continuing but Jay Norman didn't hear him. He thought about how the last two months had been with Dennis. For the first couple of weeks after the initial fight, they went through that difficult time of having to be polite to each other because they shared the same house. Neither wanted to be near the other and if his wife hadn't convinced him otherwise he would have told Dennis to leave. But they were near each other and they exchanged greetings when they had to. But soon even that stopped. Dennis just wouldn't respond anymore. They hadn't said a word to each other for over a month. Jay Norman had no idea of what was coming. "Just a rebellious phase," he had reasoned.

Father Francis went on. "...the influence of rock and roll and modern day television and movies. The pressures of sexuality young people face today are enormous. It is a tragedy like this which reminds us of our responsibilities as a church and as a society that we have to our young people. I won't kid you--the breakdown of our spiritual foundation in today's world is painfully obvious. The values and ethics we grew up with are disappearing all around us. We must start to reeducate our children in the basics of our society's principles: respect, toleration, love of family, hard work,... We must teach them to treat their bodies as a temple of
Evans

God; to discard sinful thoughts and lustful desires. We must teach them to love God, not to challenge him.

"My friends, the tragic death of Dennis Norman must not be a mark of sadness but a reawakening of our Christian spirit and responsibility. It must be an example for us of the tragic consequences of allowing our young people too many avenues and too much responsibility for their own lives. There must be more guidance." Father Francis was gaining confidence as he went along. The Breakdown of Christian Values usually bailed him out of tough situations like this.

Sitting alone in the very back of the church was Karen Martin. Karen had dated Dennis for a few months during school. They had slept together a few times and things seemed to be going well. Then Dennis started to act weird. He would go to dinner without her and wouldn't meet her after Marketing on Thursdays like he had all semester. And then her roommates told her they had seen him talking to that little slut Marie Burns. And then he had the nerve to talk to the bitch while they were supposed to be at a party together.

And finally it all blew over one night in his dorm room. Everything was going fine when suddenly he stopped and asked her to leave. "Leave? Why? Aren't you having a good time?" "Uh, I don't know." "You don't know? What the hell's that supposed to mean?" He got up from the bed and walked to the window. "I'm not sure. I'm not sure of anything right now." "You can't tell if you're having a good time? That's the stupidest thing I've ever heard."

He came toward her and she got frightened. "Look, I don't know about anything anymore. I don't know if I like you--I don't know if I like this school or my friends or anything. I don't even know why I'm here; I didn't decide my major...hell, I don't even decide which clothes I should wear. Everyone tells me what to do and I just do..."
it. This isn't my life, it's my parents' and my friends' life. I'm everything everyone wants me to be!" "Dennis just be yourself."

"Myself!" he screamed. "Myself? Hell, I don't even know who that is! I lost myself a long time ago. I haven't been 'myself' since the last time I took a shit in diapers."

He paced the room for a while and then he stopped and looked at her. "What the fuck?" he said calmly. "I asked you to leave." She straightened herself out and left, not sure of anything. For the next week they didn't see or talk to each other at all. Finally, she went to his room one morning and told him that she wanted to call everything off. "What's to call off?" he asked. She left him and decided later that she hated him.

Karen Martin was not listening to the priest. She had come out of duty and regretted it. It was a beautiful day outside.

Dennis Norman's mother pulled her hand away from her husband's. She reached into her purse for a kleenex. She had listened to Father Francis for most of the eulogy, but had stopped now. He was wrong. A year earlier she would have agreed with most of what he said. But not now. Not after having watched Dennis change. She had to keep herself from standing up and telling everyone that he was wrong, that it wasn't that simple. But that couldn't change things, could it? Let him have his time. His little speech was very popular. She saw herads nodding in approval. They wouldn't want things upset by an hysterical mother. Yes let them be. All the things she realized now were useless anyway.

"...and the teaching of The Bible. These things have been overlooked too long." No, he was wrong. What he presumed was missing in Dennis' life was always there. It was very ordered. All the right schools, church on Sundays, proper dress and behavior when called for, all
the standard lessons, college, a field of study geared toward his future, all the material things an average boy his age could want or need--a stable quiet upbringing. It was all there Father Francis was wrong. None of those things worked. They had done it by the letter and it didn't work. Dennis had listened to his mother read from The Bible until he was twelve years old. She stopped reading because he stopped listening. She couldn't control that.

But that was minor. A typical twelve-year-old. He still grew up the right way. He played sports, got decent grades, went out with a girl for a while. It was all coming out perfect. She had beautiful visions of three-piece suits and wall-to-wall carpeting. But then more things happened that she couldn't control.

At twenty years of age it's hard to control the length or style of your child's hair, or if he decides to wear an earring. (Where the hell did he get that thing? her husband had asked.) It's hard to make him take the trash out. You can't control whether or not he works, or if he gives his stereo and all his records away. She couldn't control how much he said or how often he took a shower. One time she had come upon him staring out the window, unfocused, eyes still--just staring. "Penny for your thoughts?" she offered cheerily. He kept staring for a while before slowly turning to her and then back out the window. "Leave me alone old woman," he said. She had left him that day and cried. No Father, it didn't work with this one. You just can't. She knew she had lost her son long before he took the razor blades to his wrists. Now was just the painful process of discovering the truth; of finding out why it didn't work. It wasn't the priest's fault that he was wrong--how could he know about these things?

Father Francis finished the eulogy and stepped down from the pulpit. Dennis' mother looked around herself.
How many people were trying to find out what really killed Dennis? How many were nodding their heads and letting the priest tell them what was right and what was wrong? How many were passing it off as "another tragedy of a mixed up kid?"

She followed the priest back to the alter with her eyes. Slowly, but steadily, she felt the church grow. It became huge around her and the distance between her and the people next to her was enormous. And as the church grew and the people moved further away, the stench of her own perspiration became increasingly apparent to her. And soon the sounds of the church faded, surrendering to the increasing volume of her own heartbeat. How many people cared? A lump rose in her throat and she felt as if she was alone in a vast, smelly hole, slowly being covered...buried. And soon everything faded as the tears turned the candles from flickers to huge crosses and from crosses to smears of random brightness.

She didn't feel her husband's hand touch her shoulder because she had become filled with an impenetrable numbness, which was the best feeling she had had since her son called her an old woman. She surrendered to the numbness. I'm sorry Father, It doesn't always work the way we want it to. They become themselves and we lose them.
John Grey

LIGHTS OUT

On some country roads,
many street lights are broken
and there are long patches
of darkness
where trees and grass
and even gentle fenced paddocks
take on the sinister
air of a black room bustling
with odd noise --
I have slipped out
on those winding highways,
feeling as if I was leaving
something behind that I
would never recover.

Night in these backwaters has
a purpose,
cracking lamps,
clouding up the tiny speck of moon,
shaking the limbs that brush the
wind-shield's rims like skeletal arms,
blowing hysterical wind out of
grisly blackness,
a telephone no one wants to answer
drawing me further and further
into the shadow of unnamed things.
Fritz Hamilton

TOO SMALL MORSEL

The lion on Phoebe's book bag (seeing me a bit depressed) walks away from his picture to crouch before me on my rocking chair & I ask

"What's the matter, Lion?"

&

he says

"I have to eat you."

& I counter

"This tender morsel? Why?" &

he says

"Because you've never lived up. You've never been enough, & now you are beyond the potential you never fulfilled ... hence you're no damn good & I'm going to eat you."

& I say

"It's true I never made All-State &
Hamilton

I was a poor student &
nobody reads what I
write (which includes
this poem

) but
is that reason to
eat me?"

& he says
"Why else would I do it
You have not accomplished enough;
you have not acquired enough;
& you are not loved enough because
you are not enough."

& I say
"If I am not enough, why
not eat someone who

is enough? Otherwise
you will still be
hungry."

&
seeing my point he
roars with resignation &
returns to Phoebe's
book bag &

now

that I am not enough even to
be devoured I'm
really depressed
!

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Richard Haydon

HAUNTED BY OWLS

My haunting lasts
weeks of half-sleep
each night scratching
deep, jagged groves
above the eaves
feathered unknown
with pale, pale eyes
and a beak snapping,
hissing old mice
or fluttering past
the shaft of window light.

Every night a sudden
nightmare of pacing,
sharp nails clicking
along the peak
my eyes rivetted
to the shining window
waiting for the tap
on glass or the face
peering in that never
quite comes.
Haydon

THE WINTER ORCHARD

We've come to the new season
carrying something unmet,
like a hint of death or famine,
winds steadily warping the old fence
while the apple trees bow and bend.

The sun has abandoned us to vicious icicles
that drip from gutters, old apples wrinkling
in their dry, dusty bins.

The scent of snow winds and the season
come hard, rising cold and pushing
against the fence and the empty orchard
with its writhing, leafless limbs.

When the snow winds come, they'll wrap the orchard
and the house like gifts, laying us cold and stiff
in bins beside the apples.
Haydon

YOUR UNNAMED ISLAND

How to name this island, you ask, a thin, wavering voice kneeling in soft flats of ebb tide mud. Pondering your new home’s name though I’ve patiently explained it as only a barnacled rock, wreathed in golden algae, humped with leathery chitons.

How to name this island, you murmur again and again, until only the tide returning, rising swiftly, tells me of your desperate clinging. A grip on the smooth stone anchoring you firm, a grip I can not loosen, while drowning waters swell, spreading over your unnamed island.
Frederick Kiley

NUISANCE BOY

The third grade hardly seems the place where one encounters revelations of grave truths about human behavior. More likely, it's where serious doubts arise about Santa Claus, the tooth fairy and finding a new baby under a mulberry bush. And Sammy Briggs seems least likely as the herald of such portentous truths.

Sammy was a scrawny, freckled, tow-haired boy who wore a scab on the bridge of his nose, year in and year out, until the tenth grade, when he became a member of the debating team, affected gray suits and competed with lofty style in the National Forensic League. Half-buttoned and scuffed, rumpled and stained, tousled and ripped, he dropped things, spilled ink, hurled apple cores at girls' backs, defaced lavatory walls with stolen chalk, tripped over his own feet and held up lines. He ate and belched noisily and sometimes talked angrily to himself or to shrubs. Although he had been in my class since the first grade I had not paid too much attention to him. We never exchanged valentines. Besides, he belonged to the Maple Street gang and walked home with his neighborhood pals. Those were the days before safety patrols and I went to and from school with the noisy Taunton Road pack.

But one early spring day, when I had been kept in from recess to finish an assignment I had missed, Sammy, as the class filed in after the second bell, gave my sweater a tug in passing and snickered maliciously.

"Well, poor fish couldn't go out and swim today," he said, "hey, Kiley?"

I didn't find the remark particularly offensive. In those days cruelty was an expected part of schoolyard protocol. Even outright barbarism seemed, at times, chic. But I saw Miss Donovan glowering at him.

"For being so smart, Briggs," she said murderously,
"you won’t swim for both recesses tomorrow. How do you like that?"

Sammy stared at Miss Donovan and then glared at me. He looked hurt, innocent, confused, infuriated, wronged. And later, when Miss Donovan stepped out into the hall to gossip with Miss Nichols, the first grade teacher, Sammy shook his fist and said he was going to get me after school.

"I’ll break your nose," he hissed. "I’ll knock your teeth down your throat."

As ridiculous as he sounded, Sammy appeared to be serious. I hoped he wasn’t. I’d had a few fights before and felt certain that I hadn’t enjoyed them.

Miss Donovan kept us busy with long division for the rest of the afternoon, and I almost forgot Sammy’s threat. His argument wasn’t with me, anyhow. I hadn’t said a word. He needed to settle his quarrel with Miss Donovan. Let him get her.

And when the final bell for the school day rang, Sammy wasn’t in sight. Relieved, I joined my friends and we started for Taunton Road.

We had reached the bare spot beneath a massive oak tree in the schoolyard near Adams Avenue. Peaches King, a sixth grader, was describing an Errol Flynn movie he had seen on the weekend.

"He waves and gives a big smile," Peaches said, "to this German pilot who’s just filled him full of lead."

"Look out," Doris Murphy cried.

I started to turn when something hard struck my back and caromed off to the left, rolling in the dust. It was Sammy.

He scrambled to his feet, snarling and spitting dirt. His fists danced in front of his face and, assuming an exaggerated fighter’s stance, he charged, flailing at me.

He had more experience than I as a brawler, picking
Kiley fights with fourth and fifth graders and getting himself half killed two or three times a month. He was the kind of kid older people called scrappy. I considered him much less reasonable than I.

"I warned you," he shrieked, "you yellow belly. I'll kick your brains out."

He didn't give me time to think.

I wanted to assure him that I, too, disapproved of Miss Donovan's idea of justice. I also felt that the maniac's assault on me to even himself with her made no sense at all. I was terrified. It was bad enough for someone to club you until you bled and then to grind your face into the dirt, but to have it done in front of your buddies would be an unspeakable humiliation. I abandoned any hope of explaining my innocence in the matter and simply hit back as hard as I could, grunting with the effort. Strangely, the ferocity went out of Sammy's attack. I saw the scab fly off the bridge of his nose. His lip began to bleed. Tears of pain and rage streaked his soiled cheeks. I hit him in the stomach and then beside the eye.

"Ow," he yelped when my knuckles pounded him below the ear. I took careful aim and swatted him again in the same place, twice.

"Foul," he screamed, jumping up and down in an absurd appeal to the hysterical kids milling around us. "He's fouling."

"Fight," they were screeching. "Fight."

"Get back, get back," I heard Peaches yell. "Give them room."

Gradually, I lost all sense of myself. For the first time in my life I had achieved complete concentration, and it was an eerie joy. I had become exactly what I was doing to the exclusion of everything else from my consciousness. I was a hitting machine, selecting precisely where I would punch Sammy, ignoring
the blows that caught me on the face. The stinging
impact of my fists on his flesh and bone was a thrill I
did not want to give up. I was ecstatically prepared to
beat all life out of Sammy Briggs, who happened to be my
target at the moment. I even forgot the bloodthirsty
congregation ringed around the action. And I didn't
return to myself until Peaches King hoisted me onto his
shoulders and we marched in triumph to Taunton Road.
"I had to drag you off," Peaches explained. "You
were killing the moron."
I looked down at the jubilant faces, heard their
repeated descriptions of the victory and decided that
being the hero of the moment was worth the horror and
brutality of the fight.
"What happened to you?" my mother said when I came
into the kitchen.
"I won," I said.
"Well, I should imagine," she said, heading for the
gauze and mercurochrome. "I'd hate to see the poor
other fellow."
"It was Sammy Briggs," I said. "He started it."
"I hope Grace doesn't decide to phone and have it
out with me," she said. "Here, hold your head up while
I get off some of that dirt."
"I didn't cry," I said.
"That's right," she said. "Not you."
The next morning, as we lined up in the schoolyard
before class, Sammy, a fresh scab forming on his nose, a
marvelous welt under his left eye, a healing split in
his lower lip and a blue bruise on his jaw, leaned over,
grinning satanically.
"Hey, you stupid jerk," he said, "how did you like
that beating I gave you yesterday?"
I pondered that remark all through spelling and
graphy. It had stunned me far worse than his fists
beneath the oak tree.
How could he believe anything so outrageous? But he did. I could tell by the triumphant glow on his battered face, his swaggering smirk and the fearless glint in his tawny eyes. I felt certain that he would be eager to go through the ordeal again and again to prove it. And I had no intentions of spending the rest of my school days paying the emotional and physical price of trying to convince him otherwise.

The little weasel had contaminated the victory that had seemed so simple and pure at first, even to the point of making me seriously doubt it. I had no way of knowing then how often he would await in a variety of disguises on the road to manhood and beyond. I felt profoundly disheartened.

"Frederick," Miss Donovan said, "what is the capitol of Pennsylvania?"

"I don’t know, ma’am," I said. "I don’t know."
Thomas Kretz

PARABLE 8

Winter sunrise St. Peter's Square,
Pink skin breathing as a facade,
Marble humanized for a prayer
Trying to appear man-made-God.

Inside hungry altars await
Wafer and wine, grandiose plan,
Knuckles on chalice, crumbs on plate,
Transforming God back into man.
Walter McDonald

DOGS IN AUTUMN

These are the fallen apples, 
roots' labor, rotting in mud, 
the worms' Eden. Even the dogs 
aren't tempted, unless they scoop one 
begging us to play. Poco nips one up 
and prances. Pugsley falls down 
groaning on his back, wallowing. 
I've seen young hunting dogs 
stumble on bones and rotten fur 
and turn to wolves, rubbing 
the grinning corpse, ruining 
their sense of scent for hours. 

Called, all dogs tuck tail 
and follow, smelling of harvest, 
eyes hollow and blinking, leaping 
like bones that rise again.
McDonald

PLUGGING AT LAKE BUCHANAN

Tugging the first sharp bite all night, I reel

and dip, reel and lose
a two-pound catfish

overboard. Sucking blood where it speared me,

I mold raw doughbait over the barb,

reel to the sinker and cast to a dark lake

like love, risking it over and over.
McDonald

**THE WONDER OF DRY FIELDS**

Living on hardscrabble, a man
burns his name on his rifle. Out here,
killing's always in season,
time enough for scruples

home in the shade of willows
he waters by hand, a zone so dry
no trees grow native. Hawks stay aloft
for hours, rising on thermals.

Gliding in sunlight, they lure
blind rabbits out of holes
and dive with wings wide open.
Rabbits near burrows of flint

see without believing
that angels with stiff wings
will kill them. They wait,
wide eyes and rapidly beating hearts

too slow to save them, writhing
against sharp claws that bind them,
flying the first
and only time in their lives.
Russel G. Metzger

JUSTICE OF NATURE

Today I saw seven crows eating breakfast
In a parking lot
A man approached from the distance
He clapped his hands loudly
Scaring away the black crows.

The next day the same man
Searches in overturned trash cans
Looking for food.
Seven overfed crows fly above
A look of revenge in dark tiny eyes.
B.Z. Niditch

THAT EVENING CALLS
(In Memoria Phillip Larkin)

That evening calls
you like leaves
dividing into infinity
the wind is vying
over huddled counsels
of the trees
and your eyes
now pale as birches
and unreal as the ripeness
from echoing in your past
a mask of blood and dream.
Ann Patrick

ASTRONOMY

Somewhere between Providence and Worcester
We stopped on the roadside to look at stars.
You pointed out Sirius, the Dog Star.
It dominated the horizon.
"It's red and green," I said. "See the colors?"
You said, "I'm lacking in color vision
to some degree. I think I miss a lot."

You've never caught my silent invitation.
It's not just colors that you miss, I thought.

GEOGRAPHY

To get to Martha's Vineyard
Fall directly down a rabbit's hole.

The Steamship Authority is not an authority on
steamships.

Go off season
Feel the lashing of November rains
or the chill ocean wind of April.

There are gnarled gnome-oaks upisland
And holly grows at Cedar Tree Neck.

The offseason heart of the Island
Beats in a bar in Oak Bluffs
Frequented by Portugee fishermen
And hippies who don't care that the sixties are long past.

Be warned though.
It's a hard climb back up that rabbit's hole.
Some people never make it.
True Thomas left his heart in Faeryland.
David St. Lawrence

FOXFUR

When you dreamed I was a foxfur
you wore me around your neck,
and jeweled my tail with rubies.
I could not smell your perfume,
or listen to you talk with your boys.
When we went to the opera
you tied me neck to tail
around the balcony railing.
You left me there and I was stolen.

In the morning, I awoke by your side, a man.
You shared the dream with me, but you said
it was no nightmare, and all you needed
was a new foxfur. So I bought you one,
then lived my life behind the concession stand.
Hugh T. Smith

AN INTRUDER

It was a morning of uncertain weather; a stiff breeze blew along the edge of the village, sharply snapping dungarees and dresses and underwear on the line and lifting the drooping heads of shivering lillies. Sparring with scudding clouds, the sun momentarily was gone, throwing the whole backyard into shadow. Rosemary stood at the windows and watched her polio striken son, Ricky, kneeling by the hen house beyond the garage as he fired an imaginary rifle at something moving in the thick weeds growing rife between the alley and the creek. She watched the boy for a minute, not disconsolate because she had never had cause to believe that life was not hard, then went to the chicken coop and reluctantly seized a hen amidst a fluttering of feathers and helpless squawking. It was never a thing she liked to do. She couldn't wring a neck casually with each whirling hand like her Tennessee bred mother, but she could flinch and then pull the head off.

The spectacle of the headless body running about on frightened legs until the heart finally collapsed had always appalled her even as a child. When the headless body finally fell ove, she hung the bird upside down by its feet on the little stretch of clothesline between the chicken house and the garage. Blood poured out from the gaping wound in the neck to make the meat clean as she ran her fingers along the leg of Jake's dungarees that were still damp and cast a disapproving glance at the rapidly changing sky.

"We having old chicken for supper again tonight, Mom?" Ricky said, limping around the side of the house. She nodded. "Look at you, Ricky; you're a mess already. I told you not to go down along the crick in all that spring mud."

"Aw, Mom, a little mud ain't never hurt nothing." "Don't answer back, Ricky," she said. Just then the telephone rang. She went back into
Smith

the house past the pump and her scrubbed little kitchen and into the living room under the picture of Franklin D. Roosevelt and answered the telephone. As she stood in the living room she she could look out the front window past John Thompson's newly planted eight acres of corn down along the tree line that followed the creek up to where it bisected the railroad tracks. Her eyes came to rest on the wedding picture of Jake and her, both only nineteen, she scrubbed but tentative in the homemade white gown and Jake red-faced and uncomfortable looking in the unfamiliar necktie, his hair plastered down with Vitalis.

"How's ma babe?" Jake said over the line from the feedmill.

"I thought you was so busy today," she said, her back stiffening at his voice.

"What? Still mad about this morning? Hey, babe, I don't care if we do goto that church social thing instead of any picture show. I just want you to be friendly."

"Well, I didn't like what you said," she said, remembering how he said, "I don't believe there's no Jesus died for us no way; so why waste time in church with a bunch of fussy old women?" She knew he didn't mean it, but his tone bothered her. But then men never realized what they did.

"I didn't mean nothing by what I said," he said. There was a long, sulky silence between them so you could hear jabbering along the wire, then Jake burst out in his big chested, hearty way. "Say, if you don't get back to being sweet to me, I'll have to bring home a big old present this evening."

"Jake, don't," she said, "you know we ain't got extra money for presents."

"I might surprise you."

"No don't," she said, "just don't come home drinking so we'll have time to get to the social. I got some special chicken and noodles I promised Bertie West."

"That old biddy? How come you're so nice to all them antiques and treat me like an icicle?"
"I'm going to hang up, Jake," she said abruptly, "I got work to do!"
"I guess it's more important than me," Jake said, slamming down the receiver, and even though she couldn't see him she knew his lower lip was trembling with rage.

After she had hung up she went to the backyard and looked at the ominous sky and tested the laundry again. Ricky was teasing the cat with a loop of rope. She pulled the boy aside by the ear, aware that arguing with Jake always made her harder on the boy.
"Now why do you want to go and tease a cat like that, Ricky?" she said. "A cat's got feelings too, just like a human. Ain't got no sense in you not being kind to somethin God put on this green earth."
"Ain't nothin, but an old tom cat," the boy answered back.
"You want to grow up to be hard and cruel?" she said with too much feeling, knowing the boy didn't know what was so wrong.
"I just want to grow up to be a man is all," he hollered back at her as she turned and reentered the kitchen where the smell of baked bread for the church supper was beginning to make the air thick and rich.

After she plucked the feathers from the two hens and plunged the naked little bodies down in boiling water, she heard a blunt knock at the back door.
"Well, who's that?" she thought, glancing at the clock that was at a little past ten.

The hobo at the back door was a big man in muddy shoes, maybe thirty it was hard to tell; he was needing a shave and dressed in a dark stained suit with a dirty white shirt with no tie, the shirt all buttoned up at the neck and a soft brown cap pulled down over one eye.
"Couldn't spare a fellow a bite to eat?" the stranger said in a big, confident voice that went just right with his large seamy hands that dangled from the sleeves of the wrinkled suit coat.
"Why you was here once before, wasn't you?" she said, thinking he didn't look so bad, at least not for a
Smith

hobo.

He cleared his throat. "Might a been, mam," he said. "I aim to cover the whole north to south every year. I'm headed north right now."

"Well you wait right over there," she said, motioning him to the two foot oak stump that Jake had leveled with a crosscut saw. "I reckon I got something here to eat."

Jake had always warned her about feeding the hoboes that wandered down the mile from the railroad crossing, but that was Jake's opinion. It just seemed right for someone in the church to feed someone else that was hungry. But even so, strangers made her feel unsure, not afraid, just edgy and all hands.

When she came back with a plate of scrambled eggs and sausage and hot bread and mush, she thought she noticed the hobo staring at her underwear flapping on the line. But he interrupted her thought.

"Looks like rain," he said as she handed him the plate. She noticed the black hair on the back of his thick hands.

"Well it's April," she answered, "you never know what to expect in April. I just hope them clothes are dry before it pours."

He nodded and looked at the food. "This sure enough looks good," he said.

"Bless this food we are about to receive," she muttered hurriedly before he could begin to eat.

He struck his right elbow out as he maneuvered his fork and she noticed the hungry flash of his white teeth and the way his tongue searched around his cracked lips and beard for little scraps of food he had missed. He talked steadily between bites as she stood there by the back door. He told her how he lost his job at a foundry in Wheeling when he was twenty five and how he rode his first freight to Mexico and how he got beat up by three railroad dicks, he called them that, in a freight yard at the Mexican border his first night out. He said he'd seen a stabbing and a man run over by a runaway freight car and a baby born alongside the road and a man burned up
inside a carload of straw that caught fire. She wondered how much of it was just blow, even though the hardbitten look of his unshaven face made it sound true. Then the hobo leaned back and used the tines of his fork to pick his teeth.

"You heard about that big murder, have you?" he finally said, lowering the fork.

"What murder was that?"

"Oh back up the line aways," he gestured towards the railroad. "Just two days ago some lady and her baby outside New Hope; they was chopped to death with an axe."

"Is that so," she said. The stranger's eyes came up from where they were scanning the clothesline and met hers, as though trying to estimate the impact of what he had just said.

"They ain't got no idea who did it," he said. "I'm surprised you ain't heard. It's all over the newspapers. They think the old boy that done it's half crazy, but they don't know who he is."

"We don't get no newspaper," she said.

"Must be a pretty lonely place," he said, standing up and stretching his big frame. She hoped that was the sign he would pick up and go, but he made no offer to leave. For the first time she felt there was something off about him, trying to remeber what he'd done the last time he'd called.

"No, it ain't lonely here at all," she said quickly. "Why there's neighbors right up the road. Say my husband's due home in just a minute," she lied. "I'd better get on with my chores."

"Most fellers is at work this time of day," he said. Just then around the corner of the garage burst Ricky.

"Mom!" he cried, "come here quick and look!" Then he suddenly gathered himself back in as he noticed the stranger by the stump.

"What's wrong?" she said.

"Look there in the chicken house, quick!"
"Ricky, I told you a thousand times to stay out of there," she said in exasperation, hurrying around the flapping laundry to the chicken coop.

The chickens were off the nests, gabbling in one corner, and then she saw why. A snake, sinuous, bluish black, and thick, was moving from one roost to another. Ricky's eyes were huge with excitement as she pulled back involuntarily at the slow writhing movement of the gleaming body and the blunt, beeebe eyed head. Suddenly she smelled the heavy odor of the hobo next to her.

"Got a spade?" he said from behind her.
"In the garage, Ricky, quick!" she said.
"Yes, mam."

The hobo hefted the spade halfway up the handle like a ballplayer, then stepped deftly across the coop and brought the blade down sideways at the snake. The coop rattled with the force of the blow as it missed and the snake suddenly coiled itself back into the straw.

"Missed the bastard," the hobo muttered, sweat popping out on his brow.
"What do we do now?" she said.
"I'll have to smoke him out."
"Ricky, you get outside," she said over the clamor of the frightened chickens.

"I wanta see," he answered as the hobo moved across the coop in a crouch, spade out in front of him like a lance. He poked at eye level into the straw where the snake had disappeared. Its blunt head, mouth wide open, fangs emergent, exploded out of the straw.

"Jesus Christ," the hobo hissed, sidestepping, and bringing the spade down with a crack on the snakes back as Rosemary marveled at the horrible spurt of blood that opened from the diamond patterned skin as the snake shot by her terrified feet towards the weeds at the edge of the alley. The hobo clumsily turned and lurched after the big snake, using the spade like a maul.

"Let it go!" she breathed, forcelessly, as the hobo brushed past. Then he brought the flat of the spade down on the snake's head. The snake nearly leaped in
the air at that, coiling itself for a last stand, but the hobo was on it now, beating the snake repeatedly as the spade head turned the color of wine.

"That's one snake won't never bother and chickens no more," he said triumphantly, still brandishing the spade in the air as though the snake might mysteriously spring back to life again. "Don't you go near him yet, boy," he said to Ricky who was jabbing tentatively at the carcass with his clodhopper toe, "He might yet be poisonous."

She stared at the snake all smashed into pulp on the asphalt alley. He must have been six feet long with a lustrous blue black diamond shaped pattern on his gleaming back. Even dead the snake still made her stomach rise, but she could feel the pathetic destruction of the wild thing too. Then she realized the hobo had never stopped talking.

"I wasn't afraid of no snake, was I, Mrs.? Good thing I was here because you was sure scared to death; that was clear. Well, I reckon I earned my breakfast today. Yes sir, I laid that snake out good!"

He was holding the snake up in the air, letting it dangle from the spade now as Ricky hovered nearby in wide-eyed admiration.

"That's a cottonmouth for certain, boy. There's plenty of them where I been," the hobo said.

"You get in the house now, Ricky!" she said, surprised by the vehemence in her own voice. Then she turned abruptly from the stranger and said with her back to him in a darkened tone, "Just leave the spade there by the garage, Mister. The boy will clean it later. Much obliged to you, but I got a lot of work to do."

"But I thought" he said as she turned on heel and went straight to the kitchen. In the kitchen under the Jesus plaque she could sense the crestfallen look on the hobo's face and felt her strength against men gathering within her as she worked furiously at some fresh dough she was kneading. But she never raised her eyes to the hobo until in a few minutes she watched him crossing the bridge at the creek and trudging up the opposite hill
Smith

towards the railroad. He had pulled his old jacket collar up at the neck now, shivering against a driving shower that had suddenly burst from the treacherous, shifting clouds with all the uncertain force of April.

Then Ricky came into the room and whined, "Why'd you have to run me in the house like I was some kid."

And she answered back with sudden severity, "Just remember me this, boy. There's real snakes and there's human snakes, and it ain't always easy to tell the difference."

"What?" the boy stammered. "I thought you liked snakes."

"Just leave it be, Ricky," she said with finality, "and help me get this laundry in."
W. Gregory Stewart

accents

oh, and you complain
about anyone who don't talk
American as good as you,
and damn their accents.
yes. and how
is your Navajo? your Sioux?

son, i will not

son, i will not send you off to die.
i
will give you a book,
a plow,
and teach you the ways of fish,
but i
can never send you singing off to war.

son, i will not send you off to war.
i
will set you on the sea,
to sail,
and show you coursing stars,
but i
can never send you bravely out to die.

son, set not your children out to die.
i
was young. i know their songs;
i know
your songs--i sang them too.
my son,
sing not, nor let them sing at all, of war.
CONTRIBUTORS

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