The Touch of the Future Lover

Standing at my open window, unable to sleep
as snow lands on my outstretched hands.
I touch my neck, the way you would
if we were together on these cold nights.
Skin awakening and eyes going blind,
your touch curls me into the creases of your palm.
Your hands are large and warm,
covering my skin like another skin of my own.
Your hands are made of polished wood, covered with leather,
left in the wind to carve you life and heart lines.
A touch like rain runs down my shoulders, collecting
in a pool in the small of the back, soaking in deep.
Your fingers close above my head, I am a
sleeping child in your closed lily of skin.
Like lace a wind blows between your fingers,
rippling the still, moist air in the cradle of your palms.
Sinking into the whorls of your fingertips,
your pulse radiates into mine.
We are within each other as we sleep.
I wake, hands aching from holding your warm, absent hand,
far too distant to touch.

--Katherine Shapiro
TRAPEZE ARTIST

I want to go home
Or at least Chicago or Pluto
On a big red rocket ship
With racing stripes:
Traveling west or southeasterly,
Hopping across a few deserts
With great whirls of sand behind me:
Following mad butterflies
And mating with them.

I want to be raised by
A pack of wolves
And join a circus:
Learning the delicate art of Trapezeing,
And then using my skills
To take over the city by night:
A clown flying past office windows
And board meetings,
A tightrope walker on fire
Tiptoeing between buildings
On clothes lines.

I want to change my name
From whatever it is now
To Quazer, or at least Billy Blade:
With blonde hair and a gleaming white smile,
With a tuxedo and a pooch named Stardog,
Not to mention a red sports car
Named The Stunt Mobile:
Stunt jumping across rivers
Or the Death Canyon,
And plummeting to the bottom,
Exploding into 97 bazillion pieces.

--Putnam Trumbull
Then, with a jolt, you pull me
from stepping off the curb too soon,
pull me so heavily
back to this one world we share
where you have been talking
and all the time I have nodded
not wanting to articulate this distance,
this place I am unable to explain
like the snow which is still falling,
falling and thickening between us
like the snow that falls year round
in our sleeping and waking dreams.

--Melissa Stephenson
Memories of Surgery on the Heart

for Meredith

Undressing, her fingers
rub up against the scar,
rippled and hard, between
her breasts. She pulls
away her hand, touches
the soft skin around her ribs.
Her heart beats, a constant rhythm

She remembers sanitary smells,
white sheets and white walls,
nurses and strangers entering
doors, walking through chambers;
soft words murmured as she lay
like a rag doll on the bed,
a needle feeding into her.

She remembers sisters as apparitions
who appeared off and on
to play cards and give her gifts;
those who stood by and watched nurses
change the gauze and tape that covered
the hole in her, squinted away their eyes.

She remembers how they came and left,
the humming of the TV taking over
where their voices left off:
a Louisiana cook preparing dishes
with bottles of wine and a grill.

And the nights: dreams of being cut
open like a fish, scaled down and
cooked. The feeling of loneliness,
of being forgotten as she lay
on a pee-soaked mattress,
too weak to call for help.

Not Being There

Even now as I walk beside you
diligent as a nun to Christ
to assure you of my wanting,
I cannot tell you how I am here
and not here. You take my hand to warm it
pulling me closer for safety
in the streets of Boston.
I am trying to stay with you
but your words begin to blur
like eyes that cannot clear themselves.
I keep nodding my head
like my grandmother kindly pretending
to understand my poems
and you cannot tell I've slipped
into another waking dream
easily as my body slips through
the air between us.

In my disconnected fantasy,
we are walking down this street
in Boston, Christmas snow falling
like clouds that have grown too tired to fly,
their shattered whiteness
catching in my eyelashes so that for a moment
I cannot find you. Then your voice
mixes with the screech of a car,
I am pushed aside as you take
my death before I even see it.
I sing to you in the streets and the snow,
I sing to you as you fade like the day,
your eyes, two tiny suns melting for good
into the hills of your lids.
The Pull of Long Lake

I stood, a young child in a sailor suit,
on the lakeshore behind our summer cabin.
Feet dug in sand, sun freckling face,
I wanted to reach all oceans by swimming this lakefloor.
Restricted, I could only wade a few feet in,
my mother would be calling my name,
"Katherine...Katherine...it's time to come home."

Crossing the threshold,
I entered the softly lapping waters,
splashing myself wet.
Bending over, I reached for the
plug hoping to drain the lake since I could not
have it, yet pulled up handfuls of only
pebbles, shells, and sand; handfuls of
smoothed years, crusted beauty, and earth.

Picking them apart, I pocketed the shells
letting the sand and sediment seep out of my hands;
only the small pebbles remained.
I threw them far into the water, one in every direction,
until the last one, aimed straight ahead,
pulled me with it.

Like the dolphin, I dove headfirst into the water,
molding into a globe, the beginning bumps and
tomboyish bruises of my body smoothing,
melting, into a completely confined roundness.
Fastly falling, the water darkened,
the fish became sparse, the seaweed thicker.

Currents creating a tube for my descendance,
I landed, lending myself to moistened mud and decay,
And faintly heard a muffled call,
"Katherine...Katherine...it's time to come home."

---Katherine Factor

Now she looks in the mirror
at the scar healed over, the scar
she hides desperately each day
under high-necked shirts, imagines
she can see her heart
swimming beneath her scar
like a fish beneath ice in winter,
looking up through a sealed-off sky.

---Laurel Ibey
Father to Son
--after The Last Temptation of Christ

On the first morning, you woke.
My presence was a thorn in your heart
parting the sweetness of your blood.

Your eyes opened and already your hands
held the carpenter's tools;
you knew how to build crosses.

You walked to the temple and heard
the voices in your head shriek out the answers for you;
mine was the loudest.

You dreamed of eagles rending your flesh;
but I was the dove who lit on your brow
to pluck out your eyes.

The woman who loved you
washed your feet in her tears
but she was a whore and I threw the first stone.

All food turned black in your mouth.
Your hair was tangled with leaves.
I hammered your body into radiant steel.

I am the salt in your wound.
I make you scream at my touch.
I am everything you desire;
I will pull you up to Heaven by your bones.

--Katherine S. Angus

To a Dead Dog

I.

When I was young, when you were young,
we roamed the sand dunes together,
exploring familiar ground made new again.

Squirrels avoided the woody ravine
behind the house, afraid of your shagginess,
hair the color of the soil where it meets the sand,
inches below the ground.

II.

You almost died of Coon Dog Paralysis
when you were fenced onto five feet of carpet.
But you came back to walk the hills again
before old age brought the family
to your grave in the ravine.

I watched silently, longing to sing.
But my father's tears fell
black on the dirt,
your land all those years.

--Alan Cohen
Into Morning

It is tender to part for sleep as we did in the beginning, worshipping morning by our parents' practice of separation for sleep and joy in the bright hours.

This is how we learn that the sun smiles, while the moon's face, seldom whole, glows shadowy and blank.

The sun splinters into stars and the wishes they make real are orange and yellow and round as citrus fruit on the table for breakfast.

Sometimes, I wake before dawn, my bedroom dark as night sky and my stomach stirring with the restlessness of birds set to migrate--

I close my eyes, let the light seep through in patterns: blooming marigolds, and I strain to hear: you climb the steps from where you slept couch-bound beneath me, your breath clear and coming alive.

--Britain Washburn

10.40 pm CST

I receded to the back, peering through my dim reflection into darkness. land escaping light, the air whistled and murmured. deep red light withered and shone falling on two rails reflected near the horizon. steel island illuminations and fading overpasses drawn into lightlessness killed by the night. the howling inner ear an indication of movement.

a solitary red railsign :400 continued my tired stare when I realized, with irritated fear that I had to stare through my eyes to see into a black. --Ben Brandt
Thaddius sat precariously on the radiator, a pair of not-quite-dry wool socks under him for a cushion. His feet were wedged by the heels between two of the hard metal ribs of the heater. He gripped the window sill behind him for balance, stared blankly into the small living room of his third floor apartment. Thaddius was a very thin, soft-spoken man, friendly and intelligent, who had only one large flaw; it was that he was an alcoholic. He was not a chronic alcoholic, the type who was nearly always drunk and disfunctional, but he did crave a fair dose of liquor at least once a day; he had an undying devotion to liquor.

It was Wednesday, which meant he had to go over to his mother’s to make up stories about the job opportunities he hadn’t looked into, and a few of the interviews he hadn’t even set up, let alone gone to. He felt it necessary to fib to his mother so that she wouldn’t nag him or meddle with his life, which she inevitably would anyway. Also she would give him a fat cash loan to last him another two weeks until he got a job. He decided to go right then, got down off the radiator, and grabbed his jacket. He went out, closing the door softly behind him.

He walked the four blocks to his mother’s apartment, not looking at the glass in the store fronts. He had a neurotic fear of them, feeling that if he looked, he would see a reflection of the face of someone who hated him. He made no effort to overcome this fear.

When he got to his mother’s apartment, she was sitting in her pink upholstered chair with crocheted acrylic blankets thrown over the back of it. She always sat there, smoking fat, brown Canadian cigarettes, and coughed ritually, every three minutes. That day she looked older than he had ever seen her. Her skin was a shade of gray, with tints of yellow in places, and her hair looked like it would disintegrate to the touch. For some reason, all the furniture in the crowded apartment looked to Thaddius like it was made of sugary marshmallow, and the room was so hot, he felt he could go no faster than a slow crawl across the room to meet her. He finally placed his hand on the back of her chair, looked down at her. She did not seem to acknowledge him.

"Hello Mother. How are you doing? You look good as ever." He lied cheerfully.

"I’m fine darling," she said, still not looking up at him. "And don’t lie about the way I look. I can feel your thoughts. Have you found a job? I shouldn’t even ask. The tone of your voice tells me you haven’t."

---Katie Eyer

Bursting into light,
hot notes catch in my throat.
I end my song then, as it began,
with desire,
with the conflagration of wings,
tiny deaths illuminating such dark skies.

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My song for you would begin
with the moths littered upon the windowsill.

If they could speak
they would whisper to you,
This desire is deadly...

II.

Open your eyes in night's deadest hour
to the sound of bees humming down your throat.

I wish to teach you this song,
force a breath of desire between your lips,
let it be your last.

III.

Deception, then,
is what I speak of:
this promise is whispered so sweetly.

But within the promise lies the curse.
You may love only this once.

IV.

Lovely are the lesions
upon my hand.

For in this respect,
I am so like the moths.
I have known desire far too often,
and it takes only once.

Even the lucky
bear the scars of coming too close
to exquisite flame.

"I've been trying very hard lately. I'm so bored all day in my
apartment, I really want to work."

He lied again, wondering why he bothered. His mother's coarse,
wrinkled lips clutched the wet end of the cigarette. She appeared
not to notice his lie this time.

"Have you been drinking lately?" she asked.

"Mother, please don't talk about drinking..."

"I'm going to talk about drinking now, before you cease to
look for work, get evicted from your apartment, end up in the
gutter, and all because of the bottle glued to your lips! I want
you to know that it's there, and if I ever see liquor shining in
your eyes when you come here, I will never give you money again for
as long as I live!"

"Mother, please, I haven't had a single drink. I've been
looking for work."

She picked up her check book which lay on the small table next
to her. "I can't support you forever, Thaddius." She handed him the
check. He was almost ashamed now, to take the check, pulled it out
of her hand and quickly hid it in his jacket pocket. He kissed her
old cheek, felt how soft and fleshy it was, like the marshmallows
that made up her furniture. He left quickly.

He walked to the bank directly after he left his mother's
apartment, and cashed the check immediately. He thought of going
home, but his feet took him to the Polish bar at the end of the
street. It was small and dark, like an underground pub, and there
were yellowish orange lights which splashed rippling reflections on
the dark wood of the floor and the bar. Thaddius sat down and
ordered a bourbon. He drank this quickly and ordered more. He began
to talk to, or rather AT, the bartender, a fat, gray-haired man who
tried desperately to conceal a bald spot with a gelled sweep of his
hair. He had red, splotchy skin and he could not manage to keep his
polyester, pin-striped shirt tucked into his maroon, polyester
pants. He stood leaning back against the wall behind the bar, his
chin sunk into his neck. He listened to Thaddius, as he listened to
all the drunks who came in to intoxicate their problems.

"I got to get home to my wife soon. She'll be expecting me to
dinner. My wife's the best cook in the world, you know. I tell her
that- "Judy, you're a dynamite cook!!"- but she just smiles and
tells me I don't know what I'm talking about. She's so careful
about it too, wakes up every morning to make sure she gets
breakfast ready on time. Dinner's always on time too, and the
apartment's kept clean. Judy's the most important thing to me you
know- I love her to death. There isn't anything I would change
about her. She's beautiful- hey, you got a wife?"
The bartender stared at him.
"Well anyway, she looks just as beautiful as she did on our wedding day. Hasn't aged a minute. She's the most important thing to me, you know, my wife and my business."

He ordered more bourbon.
"I'm in the film business you know. I make movies. I'm real well known in the New York City area. It's a good line of work, let me tell you. So EXCITING. I get to work with all the famous people. I don't know if you're familiar with Jack Nicholson at all, but I just recently worked with him on a film. It was great fun let me tell you. My wife you know, she's really into it as well. She likes to come and sit on the sets while I work. A real opportunity to meet people..." His sentence trailed off. He raised his hand suddenly. "Hey, give me nine bourbons lined up on the bar here." He lay down some of the money from his mother's check. The bartender lined up the bourbons.

Thaddius stared at the sparkling glasses of deep brown liquid. He imagined each one was a person. He picked up the first glass. "Here's Jack Nicholson." He downed the glass. "And here is Sigourney Weaver. I'll drink her right down with Jack Nicholson."

He drank the second glass, and then continued, downing person after person, and after the ninth glass, he ordered nine more, shouting to the non-existent customers in the bar that he could hold his liquor. He drank again and again, finally picking up the seventeenth glass. "Oh...my mother." He could barely speak, his mouth seemed full of mud, and the amber liquid spilled in rivulets from between his lips. "Oh...and I drink my mother." He dropped her quickly down his throat. Holding the eighteenth glass in his hand, his wet lower lip shook. "And my wife." He sloppily kissed the glass. "I drink you right up, Judy my love." He brought her to his lips, sucked a bit of her into his mouth.

The glass crashed onto the floor, shattering into a thousand diamond shards. Thaddius fell into them, lay still and slid quietly into a coma.

The bartender had called the ambulance, had the sick drunk carted off to the hospital. He stood at the bar, watching as a bent, old woman came slowly through the door, looking around as if someone trying to kill her might be waiting in every corner. She approached the bar, stared the bartender in the eye.

"Is my son here? Have you seen him?"

"Well, there was a young man here a little while ago. Drank himself sick and had to be taken to the hospital. I haven't had many customers today. It's a little early for drinking."

"You say he drank himself sick. What was he like?"

"He sat there and told me all about his wife Judy, and what a wonderful cook she was. And then he drank her." The bartender laughed out loud, but the woman just stood at the bar. "He told me he was in the film business too. Did a movie with Jack Nicholson."

The woman stared at him. "My son isn't married. He doesn't have a job either. That can't be him." She left then, and walked slowly down the street, heading for the hospital.
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10.40 pm CST

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hair the color of the soil where it meets the sand,
inches below the ground.

II.

You almost died of Coon Dog Paralysis
when you were fenced onto five feet of carpet.
But you came back to walk the hills again
before old age brought the family
to your grave in the ravine.

I watched silently, longing to sing.
But my father's tears fell
black on the dirt,
your land all those years.

--Alan Cohen
The Pull of Long Lake

I stood, a young child in a sailor suit, on the lakeshore behind our summer cabin. Feet dug in sand, sun freckling face, I wanted to reach all oceans by swimming this lakefloor. Restricted, I could only wade a few feet in, my mother would be calling my name, "Katherine...Katherine...it's time to come home."

Crossing the threshold, I entered the softly lapping waters, splashing myself wet. Bending over, I reached for the plug hoping to drain the lake since I could not have it, yet pulled up handfuls of only pebbles, shells, and sand; handfuls of smoothed years, crusted beauty, and earth.

Picking them apart, I pocketed the shells letting the sand and sediment seep out of my hands; only the small pebbles remained. I threw them far into the water, one in every direction, until the last one, aimed straight ahead, pulled me with it.

Like the dolphin, I dove headfirst into the water, molding into a globe, the beginning bumps and tomboyish bruises of my body smoothing, melting, into a completely confined roundness. Fastly falling, the water darkened, the fish became sparse, the seaweed thicker.

Currents creating a tube for my descendent, I landed, lending myself to moistened mud and decay, And faintly heard a muffled call, "Katherine...Katherine...it's time to come home."

--Katherine Factor

Now she looks in the mirror at the scar healed over, the scar she hides desperately each day under high-necked shirts, imagines she can see her heart swimming beneath her scar like a fish beneath ice in winter, looking up through a sealed-off sky.

--Laurel Ibey
Memories of Surgery on the Heart

for Meredith

Undressing, her fingers
rub up against the scar,
rippled and hard, between
her breasts. She pulls
away her hand, touches
the soft skin around her ribs.
Her heart beats, a constant rhythm

She remembers sanitary smells,
white sheets and white walls,
nurses and strangers entering
doors, walking through chambers;
soft words murmured as she lay
like a rag doll on the bed,
a needle feeding into her.

She remembers sisters as apparitions
who appeared off and on
to play cards and give her gifts;
those who stood by and watched nurses
change the gauze and tape that covered
the hole in her, squinted away their eyes.

She remembers how they came and left,
the humming of the TV taking over
where their voices left off:
a Louisiana cook preparing dishes
with bottles of wine and a grill.

And the nights: dreams of being cut
open like a fish, scaled down and
cooked. The feeling of loneliness,
of being forgotten as she lay
on a pee-soaked mattress,
too weak to call for help.

Not Being There

Even now as I walk beside you
diligent as a nun to Christ
to assure you of my wanting,
I cannot tell you how I am here
and not here. You take my hand to warm it
pulling me closer for safety
in the streets of Boston.
I am trying to stay with you
but your words begin to blur
like eyes that cannot clear themselves.
I keep nodding my head
like my grandmother kindly pretending
to understand my poems
and you cannot tell I've slipped
into another waking dream
easily as my body slips through
the air between us.

In my disconnected fantasy,
we are walking down this street
in Boston, Christmas snow falling
like clouds that have grown too tired to fly,
their shattered whiteness
catching in my eyelashes so that for a moment
I cannot find you. Then your voice
mixes with the screech of a car,
I am pushed aside as you take
my death before I even see it.
I sing to you in the streets and the snow,
I sing to you as you fade like the day,
your eyes, two tiny suns melting for good
into the hills of your lids.
Then, with a jolt, you pull me
from stepping off the curb too soon,
pull me so heavily
back to this one world we share
where you have been talking
and all the time I have nodded
not wanting to articulate this distance,
this place I am unable to explain
like the snow which is still falling,
falling and thickening between us
like the snow that falls year round
in our sleeping and waking dreams.

--Melissa Stephenson
TRAPEZE ARTIST

I want to go home
Or at least Chicago or Pluto
On a big red rocket ship
With racing stripes:
Traveling west or southeasterly,
Hopping across a few deserts
With great whirls of sand behind me:
Following mad butterflies
And mating with them.

I want to be raised by
A pack of wolves
And join a circus:
Learning the delicate art of Trapezeing,
And then using my skills
To take over the city by night:
A clown flying past office windows
And board meetings,
A tightrope walker on fire
Tiptoeing between buildings
On clothes lines.

I want to change my name
From whatever it is now
To Quazer, or at least Billy Blade:
With blonde hair and a gleaming white smile,
With a tuxedo and a pooch named Stardog,
Not to mention a red sports car
Named The Stunt Mobile:
Stunt jumping across rivers
Or the Death Canyon,
And plummeting to the bottom,
Exploding into 97 bazillion pieces.

--Putnam Trumbull
The Touch of the Future Lover

Standing at my open window, unable to sleep
as snow lands on my outstretched hands.
I touch my neck, the way you would
if we were together on these cold nights.
Skin awakening and eyes going blind,
your touch curls me into the creases of your palm.
Your hands are large and warm,
covering my skin like another skin of my own.
Your hands are made of polished wood, covered with leather,
left in the wind to carve you life and heart lines.
A touch like rain runs down my shoulders, collecting
in a pool in the small of the back, soaking in deep.
Your fingers close above my head, I am a
sleeping child in your closed lily of skin.
Like lace a wind blows between your fingers,
rippling the still, moist air in the cradle of your palms.
Sinking into the whorls of your fingertips,
your pulse radiates into mine.
We are within each other as we sleep.
I wake, hands aching from holding your warm, absent hand,
far too distant to touch.

--Katherine Shapiro

The Red Wheelbarrow

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