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the Unrorean

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"Not bad"

According to how I was raised you should be in Hell.
And I don't like thinking that's where you are, but
what choice do I have? The night I met you, you came
at me like Bush heading into Iraq, all *Shock and Awe*
all over me. No one had ever ripped the panty hose
from my legs, so you made it easy to leave my
passed out boyfriend on the couch and go home
with you. You made it easy for me to want to be
your girlfriend. But you wanted no part in any of that.
You were too wrapped up in Melanie, Stacey,
Chastity, Rhonda. You were too wrapped up
in snortin' a line or smokin' some crank.
You were too wrapped up into
going out with a bang (your words)
that you never let yourself feel. So when
Angie called to tell me you were lying
dead in the middle of Sievers Road surrounded by
cop cars, I knew you had just had the time of your
life *fighting the bad guys*. I confessed to the priest
in high school that I had sex with you.
I got five Hail Mary's, three Our Father's.
"Not bad," I thought, "Not bad for a hell of a night."

—Amy Kitchell-Leighty

Gather up the Fragments

Gather up the fragments:
The ruthless shards of existence,
The jotted notes and broken pencils,
The mornings spent in desperate hope,
And nights lost to the gloaming.

A thousand diamonds floating, medallions on the sea—gather them up.
Gather too the wind-strewn leaves, oak, maple, sycamore and beech.

Brace yourself with boots and go
To where the brook boundaries the field,
Where exhausted snow gives way
And melds with mother sea.
The place where the sand licks out,
Where you buried the cat after its stroke.
That place where you once gazed
After the luminous red fox.
Take all you've gathered and release it
To the water,
Like a votive in the Ganges.

—Doug Bruns

Restaurants

More than the usual provision
and people you don't need to know
in semi-darkness with troubles
like your own, mismatches,

and a child balleting in the way.
The sweet morphine of drinks,
friendly servants you need not check on,
the protective semi-public enclave with

little chance of real gangland slayings.
The mystery food appearing at the table
as in childhood. In the confronting chairs
the relief of eating, the chance of love.

—Francis Blessington

Rain In Chicago

In the geometry of early morning rain,
moving lights on rivery roads
reflect off asphalt streets
like a great lake, bejeweled
in diamonds, emeralds
and rubies: sea-going traffic
running down planes
of broad avenues
in bright lights.

The Sears Tower rises up
from a bottomless
trough like the prow
of a great freighter
cutting through the city's shadows,
unnoticing, a blank mass
on a dark day.

—Tim Napier

Editors pick!*

The Strings to Heaven

The strings to heaven were severed with scissors of water. All fell down. Stood up. We went shopping and bought. Nicolas Joseph Cugnot invented a steam powered automobile in 1769 leading to bank robbery getaways, milk bottles delivered quickly and safely, and steaming hours stuck on stagnant highways to the beach and waves. Men and women stopped wearing head coverings as prescribed in Corinthians and the wavy look became fashionable here and away. Louis-Victor de Broglie claimed that all matter, not just light, had a wave-like nature. We sat on the knoll by the lake and watched the wind ripples all day. Less and less of the body was covered. We were not ashamed. Edison invented the light bulb and electric distribution and soon night was day and the stars plucked down, placed on the cobblestoned and filthy streets. Trains were given overhead catenary systems and people traveled from Hoboken to Gladstone looking out at cows and horses, tractors, threshers and night gathering from clouds of gray. Elevator climbed. The iron frame raised. Cities were mountain ranges; apartments caves. We wore less and were not ashamed. Steamships traveled oceans, rivers, lakes, dropped goods at ports and didn't stay. We looked around and saw ourselves. What we thought we printed and it stayed. We dissected. Saw how we were made. Diseases were catalogued. Cures, if there were any, remained. We looked around and saw ourselves and waved. We made steel and built tanks and machine guns, hand-grenades, airplanes and bombs to detonate. Soon we looked around and saw what we were. We were less than naked, millions were merely body parts. We played the harp. We couldn't reattach the strings to the sky again. (though some thought that they had and would) Looking down from the observatory of the Empire State Building are lines of yellow cabs and cars and corners, grids, and dark stops. You can see Piet Mondrian in his studio purified of things painting Broadway Boogie Woogie. You can anticipate Shinya Tsukamoto. I took an ocean liner and stood on the deck and though no one was waiting for me at the dock, like everyone else I waved and waved until my arm dropped.

—Jack Galmitz

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Go with Her

Old man,
his twisted toes in old boots
steps to his front door,
the frame bucks each time he forgets
to drop the chain.

His mortgage is satisfied
but the house is empty.
His slow blue sedan and he
have an understanding
that saves both their lives.

But he misses her cooking still,
the steaming kitchen in winter.

He rakes the maple leaves now
without being there with them,
telling their treasury of
summer stories,
tendering crimson and russet comfort,
a minuet of circular faith.

But he sees not
the delicate cellulous prints
diffuse on the sullen dark earth.
He lost his crimson,
bleached from his heart
like the paint on his barn
when she grew thin.

He lost love;
opens his mail,
shifts the grate on the furnace
and reaches in half arcs
to gather lost strands
that now seem to honor
no new beginnings.

—***Heidi Morrell***

Somnambulist Poet

Into the lamplight
reading Flaubert
embarrassingly so
as the hours dance
along my day bed
with the same chapter
and my weary French
needs a dictionary,
as the cat next door
stares at the water lily
under the still life
of a Cezanne print,
and almonds fall
from the card table
full of solitaire,
it starts to rain
the windows hear
taps on the roof
and breathless showers
from unarmed trees
on an insomniac night.

—***B.Z. Niditch***

Chupacabra

they whisper
to the children
shushing them
down in stocking feet
past the squeaky stair
and crack the door
so it doesn't creak
then hide
in the pantry
huddled by
the sal & pimentón

—***R L Raymond***

American Radical

without asking
it came to me
while I was
sitting still
in my office
thinking about
who I was
what I was

decrying
the lies
the deceit
the soul theft
of democracy
by pious
law protected felons
full of hubris like
helium balloons
rising

in the end
they both
will
come down

until then
my job is
to bear witness
avoiding
the hemlock
as long
as I can

—***Mike Perkins***

War everywhere—
I wear a white shirt,
stand on tiptoes.

—***Michael Meinhoff***

Counselor

I saw her today, her eyes like raisins
and let her delving verbal tongs
lift and measure my mad nest for awhile.
My voice rolled out like a bad cartoon,
not matching my lemonade rimmed lips
at all.

Afterward, I structure a
public countenance again
on the breezeway outside,
but there is no breeze.
Social standards seem to
erase singular worth.

At home, the kalanchoe looks
so muscular and pretty.
Its green scalloped fleshy leaves
present
the orange splendor of its tiny blooms,
all pelvised in terra cotta.

And how the sun encouraged,
its wet soil to
push up new weedy shoots next to it,
that spoke to me.

—***Heidi Morrell***

My Daughter, My Child

For Maralee, after William Meredith's "Parents"

She rose out of the wet sea, beyond belief:
Miracle on a half-shell.

Maybe you spoiled her too often,
Held her warm to your breast a moment too long?

The last time she went to bed well,
You lied about the dark.

She was more than child to you;
She was your best friend, your worst enemy.

"You are grotesque," she might say,
"The way you go on loving me, I go on loving you."

She knew how to push your buttons,
And which ones, and when, and did.

Suddenly she was as old as you used to be,
And she did things that you did,

Save dying;
That she did on her own.

All she wanted, she said, was to drink in life,
Straight—don't we all feel that way?

The worst thing you did as a parent—we all do it—
Was to do everything wrong.

And not just wrong, but embarrassingly
Wrong. This is fact. She told you so. Repeatedly.

What are parents for, if not to be wrong?
You will learn. We call this "Guilt."

And there is nothing anyone
can do about it.

—***Tim Napier***

Storm Country

I remember the chill of unseasonable cold
through my pink summer shorts,
and the black mold flowering up
the walls in the corners of the basement.
At least once every summer,
mother, you ran me and my sisters down
the wooden steps when the radio called for tornadoes.
Years later, next to your hospital bedside,
in the fog of chemical-clean plastic smell,
I recall that story you once told us
about the time you saw your friend
flip up, car and all, into the sky and then
into a ditch as the funnel cloud
disemboweled the highway.
Here, in the cancer ward, where
the only music is the fading chirp
of the elevator going down,
I will shut my eyes to the memory
of dragging my heel through the sawdust
on that cement basement floor
to space myself away from you
and my sisters as we waited for the storm to
pass over us and out to the lake.
I will come tomorrow morning, before dawn,
before the office, and wait with you.
If you open your eyes, I won't cry,
in case you can see me.
Your eyes, full of blood and drugs,
used to see clearly the warning cloud,
used to see straight to the shadow.

—***Kristina Popiel***

Soft Voices

when I'm alone in the woods
and come across a meadow,
I'm met with wide-open
silence

all the grass, all the flowers
are talking at once

—***Michael Meinhoff***

At the very instant

At the very instant
he struck the tree
he wasn't pondering
the ultimate destination
of his soul
he was wondering
what he would do
for dinner
how he needed to
finish that report
when he got home
and how he could
really, really
use a cup of coffee

—***Joseph Arechavala***

Reflections at DeHaven

- I. We wake every morning expecting to climb rusty ladders,
Put our faith in Mason jars
And bury them in the backyard.
We roll our hope in a piece of tarry cloth
And stick it in a can of pork-n-beans—
Throw it all in the mulch of the flower bed,
But it's easy to stick inadequacy under your mattress
And sleep on it.
- II. I wonder if the minnows gaze up at us
Through the murky sky...
How it must feel
To have a muddy-water soul
And be pushed back and forth.
The fish cry bubbles and bleed cigarette ashes
And the water never forgets
To gently crash upon the shore.
- III. A hippie in the wrong shoes,
A rippling addict in the making—
Cause I take shots with the waves.
To stretch my toes into a murky cloud,
Feel the waves in my veins,
Taste a slippery shell on the tongue—
It's better than paying a bill any day.
Algae hanging at the back of my throat,
Muddy water flowing in my eyes,
Gritty sand in my teeth...
Washed away
One wave at a time.
- IV. If we just sit here
And let the towers crumble around us,
Feel the bombs explode in the dust,
Watch the meteors crash into the atmosphere...
If we just sit here
And feel our heat,
Instead of the blood bubbling
From a sliced throat,
Or the cracking bones of a little kid...
If we just sit here,
All we need is this flannel blanket
At our feet
And this bottle of Seagram's
- V. These withered boards are full of splinters,
Like your tongue
They pretend to hold themselves up,
But are waiting for just one false step
To crumble into the water
With the only splashing thud that I've ever heard.
Rusty nails stick out
Like your playful costumer of faith.
Your soul can be found
At the place where the dry, cracking boards
Meet the incredibly wet water.

—Randy M. Taylor

East New York

East New York looks like Munich after WWII. Guts of buildings, no certain # of stories, spray paint black where there had been windows, the copper piping stolen. Blocks and blocks of desolation your ghetto. They come in the dark from what were corners, each alone, crossing the dry, spent dirt where nothing can grow, where there had been carpets of grass, and neighbors talked. The buildings glow like corpses laid out on morgue tables. Converge on one structure in the open where people wait nervously, shaking a little from sickness and stretches too long between injections. Each puts tens, twenties under a steel door and out comes a glassine envelope of horse. I wait my turn. Put a hundred under and ask for a bundle. It comes wrapped in a rubber band and I put it in my pocket. My friend buys four bags. He also buys coke. He likes to shoot them together. I've seen him boot it and just stare glass eyed for nearly an hour while the blood congealed and I was afraid he had left the earth. We drive back. I snort one bag and soon it drips and that taste, a bit bitter, enters my mouth. In a minute the view of Manhattan from Brooklyn looks like it was sculpted in stainless steel with lights on the water by the Navy Yard the docks gently rock, the lights caught in the waves undulating, sinusoidal traveling plane wave entering a region of lower wave velocity at an angle, illustrating the decrease in wavelength and change of direction (refraction) that results. I lit a cigarette the way a man does after sex. A conquest? Not much. The enveloping dark is what I want. The chop of a toy piano set up. I'm high. The moon is up (witness of a shooting). Pleasure is in my veins. We pass old houses like film grain. The moon is out (an ambulance waiting). There are just lights and night and two of us. When we get to his house, he shoots up. We put on an album of Bud Powell's. He was institutionalized a number of times; received electroshock therapy. Mentally unstable for his life. But could he play. Could he play. Could he.

—Jack Galmitz

Always Picking Inaccessible Men

the ones in jail are almost perfect except they get out. Let them be married, gorgeous and of course, too young and she can't resist a challenge. If they write, she's got a chance: her lure is diamond, like the one between her legs. What's left out, their wet dream. They can make what's unsaid anything they choose. But in the arms she's wild for, she's shy, her feet tangle, terror blooms under her perfect clothes. Her north collides with his south and she can barely follow until finally, sick of her prey, she yawns away. That's when like the others, he really wants her

—Lyn Lifshin

Catachresis

Well-timed silence hath more eloquence than speech.
- Martin Tupper (*Proverbial Philosophy*, 1838)

I'm pregnant, almost two months
she whispers beaming joyfully,
tears streaming down her cheeks.

This hopeful dreaded moment
as those these past three years
each loss worse than the last.

Hugging her sobbing, laughing body
I want to say something. *I love you.*
She waits for me to say more.

—Carl Palmer

I double dared her right then

We found pirate treasure
just off the beach,
past the first dunes,
but before the parking lot—
at least that is what we called
the unattended plastic six-pack ring
with three cool cans of beer remaining.

We took our pilferage a few dunes over
to the crusty husk of a dead camp fire
where anonymous glass bottles
retained the fog of wind and sand.

Tara wished she had some *woad*
so she could show her true colors
in the painted fashion of her ancestors,
declare herself the warrior
she'd always wished she was
and carry a spear into battle
at the feminist picket lines.

I drank myself into a quiet smile,
content to hear Tara espouse her conviction
that women should be allowed
to go topless just like men
cause it didn't really matter
if it was a beer belly or breasts
that gravity sagged and swayed.

—Kenneth P. Gurney

Loved and Lost

Dreams don't come true lovers don't come back cry as you might
in the underblanket dark in the after midnight shots of bourbon agonyhours
ride the months years decades-long lifewire she's still . . . damn . . . *there*
sidesnuggling whispering: I want you I love you no she doesn't she's not there
you're there, your magicmind rughooking her story on your heart's fabric
a bright sky of love in your mind's eye not the cataract she really is
but the vision better than letting her go and then she wouldn't be there at all
not even the makeout ghost you've conjured who lives next to your pillow
while you playback the sickening loop the fire and the break-up
that seemed like a good idea at the time you cannot sleep cannot accept
that she does not love you has no thought of you has flesh and blood to lie next to
and *you* are the massless ghost, dimensionless, she is not superstitious not dreaming not blue

—Richard Ross

Deconstruction Applies to Everyone

A student crazed by his grades holds us at gunpoint. Not a gun, but a blackboard eraser. The threat, if not the means, is real. The door opens, the dean swings a softball bat, and fells the disgruntled student.

Later at Twenty-One we laugh over a pitcher of ale. Your face still glows with excitement. Too bad the police have charged the dean with reckless enthusiasm. Sounds religious, doesn't it?

The student, bleeding and weeping, will sue because we failed him in our first and only team-taught course on graffiti's tribal idiom. He expected art; we fed him vulgarities he fled to college

to escape. The pub shudders as crowds of revelers cheer a stripper whose impromptu act has attracted nearly every eye. Not yours, which wobbles in its socket and rolls backward to examine the forepart

of your brain. "What are you thinking?" Tom asked Vivian, and she cried and fled to Bertrand Russell. Have you a philosopher hiding in your closet? Deconstruction applies to everyone. The dark

pooling in the parking lot congeals in a tarry mess. I'll walk you back to the office. We'll both sleep on the floor. Your books will loom overhead, threatening not to crush but to confirm our foolish dreams.

—*William Doreski*

A Note on the Type

Analysis of type A, typesetting, stereotypes or type 1 diabetes might yield more fruitful discussion. Nonetheless, we are happy to oblige your curiosity regarding the cut of the print. No longer content to have woodland elves toil mindlessly as our minimum wage scribes and being generally dissatisfied with the legibility of their work, we set the text of this poem in a variation of the glyphic standard concocted in part at Uncle Richard's parole party for the purpose of drawing up a treatise as to the percentage of butterfat and amount of overrun in the perfect scoop of rum raisin ice cream. Though some have called the design emasculating, we prefer to think of the style as classic, well-mannered and easy-to-read. This type, which today remains nameless, has a wide range of applications including but not limited to: astrology, map making, Mad Libs and Chinese takeout menus.

when i said to Frankie

the Internet poet, that posting poems on the net is a monumental waste of time and talent, and does nothing at all for book sales,

he said he didn't care a thing for sales, and more often than not he traded copies of his books for books by other guys (who i'm sure are also Internet poets.)

he said he wasn't in it for the pay day... he just wanted to share his gift with the world.

let that give him something to think about

the next time the gas bill's due

—*John Yamrus*

While

you wrote on note paper

she carved hard lines in pine

—*R L Raymond*

July 4th Parade

On hot asphalt parade floats are an American obsession. Sweat bunches dad's underwear. Yellow chewing gum is stuck to his shoe. One of the children dashes out of sight.

Mom is barely there. She ignores family to stare: *perky cheerleaders are murder.* Back then she was a siren, before now, in days previous to the PTA.

Football players and police throw cheap candy kids fight over. The band is out of key. Dad wants to go home. Mother slack-shouldered, is bitter.

—*Clifford Brooks*

Loose Ends

All night long sleepless you promised not to cry to drive to downtown

to the family lawyer and tie up loose ends

suddenly you sense his presence so intensely in the car on the driver seat

he used to call his throne you feel as if sitting on top of him his erection deep inside you

like when you saddled him back then in the secluded Horseshoe Bay Park road and

you pull the car to the shoulder rapid heart beat overtakes you sweet elation runs through

your spine down to your torso conspicuously moving forward and backward

—*Manolis*

Cherry Blossom

outside the soft gray sky watched me mournfully, on page 419—which I turned to filled with a haunting feeling of sorrow, somehow knowing soon there would be unsolvable crimes, losses both tragic and unstoppable—a single petal from a cherry blossom clung to unread words, nearly transparent with hope, I guessed, it was like love pink and innocent and bitter before it could be explained, or felt on whispering spring winds, I folded my bookmark absently, tossed the ideas, the foreshadow, the vanity into the ether, it was all meaningless, just a track on loop, a song on repeat and if you don't get it, what I'm getting at, then you've never read it or felt it or denied it, you've never found a helpless pink lifeless thing under overcast skies

—*Thomas Pescatore*

the

thing you've really got to do

is look death square in the eye

and stare that mother down.

—*John Yamrus*

Dream Rider

All night he rides the stationary bicycle, going nowhere except in his mind where all the useless energy is stored. By morning his eyes are like tiny engines and his teeth are stained by electric impulses that glow through his cheeks and lips like ghost lights for false dreams. After the exercise, his room is haunted by the echoes of rusty wheels grinding down the night. No one on his block ever sleeps.

—*Alan Catlin*