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## DECEMBER DINNER, MANHATTAN ISLAND

Embossed and tasseled menus offer sole,

Fresh-caught, sautéed with lemon, chives and dill,

For fifteen dollars. I'm not hard to sell.

My mind flies back to offshore Maine: A shrill

Breeze blows; two fishermen are braced until

A wave plows by. One checks the last end-knot

In seven-hundred pounds of ice-caked net.

The day drains into dark, an eerie glow

On bitter spindrift near Three Dory Ridge.

The pair make ready for the longest tow.

The hungry net flares out to form a bridge

With mud-slime ninety fathoms deep, to nidge

Through ancient green dimensions. Spools unwind,

The dragger boat aims high into the wind.

Dan begs the cable not to twist. "All down!"

He cries, his teeth bared in the salty cold.

The trawl will prowl the bottom until dawn.

Five hours on a northerly course, a bold

Approach near the ridge's curse. Jarl can hold

The dragger true if anybody can;

One eye is cocked on weather, one on Dan.

They keep their senses honed on winter, knowing

No one else is out, slipping into troughs

More calm than either side, and always going

For the fissures between storms. Jarl coughs,

A brine-hack, one of fishing's ons-and-offs.

When seas are warm and docile, all the boats

Come plying, trailed by waves of white wing-beats.

The price of fish sinks like a weighted trap.

Now grays will bring a buck a pound or more.

But then it drops to thirty cents like tripe.

If these two drag luck's lap enough before

She rolls away and orders them to shore,

They'll own their boat. Moon dirties comber caps

AS numb lips hover over coffee cups.

The latest catch stinks illing-sweet, no matte

How hard the blowing scours the culling pens.

Afoot in mucus, ice and offal-spatter

On a writhing deck, Dan guts fish, and pins

The rattling tarps, working out his back pains.

A sprawling hillock angle-slaps the bow;

He almost slips. He wipes his spray-stung brow.

Their thoughts are never easy in the bag

They tow. They're after flounder, giant hake,

Gray sole and other flatfish if they're big.

Is this place right? The time? They watch their Wake,

And wonder. Far below did something break?

A different dip and shudder in the pull,

Uneven drag. They don't believe it's full.

They man the winches, play the cable, reel

The snarled mouth of the mesh maw up. They set

Their own jaws, wrestling with the plates of steel

To free them. Spirits start to rise with net;

It isn't ripped! They see enough to whet

Their hopes again. The back half holds its fill!

Enough good ones, maybe they still won't fail.

The struggling sack is pierced with bony fins,

A Single gasping monster hoisted high

To dangle and then burst into the bins

As Jarl yanks on the knot. With sharp know-how

Dan wades the mound, outlandish alien who,

With crystal in his hair and beard, assorts

The flapping gourmet silver from the quartz.

The North Atlantic pickets round their craft,

Hurls foam invective. Jarl shoves in the throttle,

Eyeing shifty winds. Dan shouts from aft,

"Mostly grays! We pay off the Aristotle

Tomorrow!" Pre-dawn brings a bluish mottle,

Bias-lighted clouds. Spume climbs the hull.

But grins crack tension as Dan works the haul.

The biggest part of being best is knowing

When to leave and live for next-time risks,

Now in the wheelhouse they begin renewing

Silent pride in their boat, their skill. Whisks

Of rain accent aloneness. Panel discs

Of light ignite their eyes. I long to rub

Their poor shocked hands and draw them a hot tub.

My husband doesn't know, nor does my brother,

How much I miss them now, how much I pray.

I should have known there couldn't be another

Place for me. My most is in Boothbay.

My plans swirl by in mounting disarray.

Our New York waiter pours our fancy wine;

I watch his hands instead of drinking mine.

He spoons the ritual lemon butter on

My sole as my companion nods and smiles

And I would give up everything I own

To put behind me all the stubborn miles

Between the spot where ocean reconciles

Ambition, love and discontent. I hear

Another diner say the price is dear--

I long to say he only pays a fraction

As he complains that sole should cost much 1ess.

Beneath my skin I feel the rising friction,

And tell the man I'm with: "I can't say yes.

I'm sorry, but more time won't help. I guess

The job is not for me, That sounds insane

I'm sure. Good night. I'm going home to Maine."

## AFTERNOON AMONG THE ARTIFACTS

I almost missed it among the flamboyant displays,

almost didn't notice the thing that changed the world.

It's called The Fat Man-- a bulbous unarmed twin

of Nagasaki's Nemesis-- obsoletely catching dust

in an aircraft museum on the fringes of Milwaukee.

Hard to think it a bomb or even a weapon--

more like a time capsule-- maybe filled with swatches

of our century's first third-- a beaded flapper dress,

a megaphone, a rumble seat, a tub for making gin.

All things before my time but no more alien

than this bulging precedent shadowing the floor--

forerunner of smaller packages of streamlined rage.

We went from atomic to hydrogen to nuclear

with sinister interstices filled with equations

that don't translate the same in all languages.

I'm curiously detached. This is simple abstract art,

this huge clumsy egg. It should be seething

with metaphor. It should shout with the voice of Isaiah

above the wails of hell. I'm missing something.

Maybe we stood too close to that first blast.

Maybe it damaged our inner ears and eyes, jarred spaces

in our cortex so we can't relate one thing to another.

A cerebral non sequitur.

I wander among the airplanes, mostly wings of war.

Fifty years of progress in flight. I pause

beneath an ultralight, stare at a lunar lander.

By the time I return to The Fat Man, a kid has scrawled

an obscenity in yellow crayon on its dark bulk.

It won't rub off; it only smears. Maybe Eliot

was too elegant. Maybe the world ends without bang

or whimper, just one final blurted scatological curse.

The Fat Man is supremely indifferent. I try to multiply

thousands of lives by millions of next time, by megatons

of now. How far past kill is overkill? What is now?

When is today-- is it the decade or the afternoon?

Or the last minute?

## TRUMPET MAN

It isn't written. He's raveling this music

out of me. There on the treble periphery

he's making sound and light into one

then blistering the alloy and peeling

solid gold butterflies off the parallax.

I don't know how three ribs and a funnel

can unwind my double helix, gather all

my possibilities in a single premise

beyond jazz or blues or the whole spectrum,

to pour out this delicious cruelty,

its rhythm insinuating against thin membranes,

vibrating pink filaments. Contrapuntal wings

he's freed follow him to the cutting edge

of turquoise, flitter into smoking fragments

then coil back in the bell of his horn

to revel in their experience with fire.

## BEE HIVE BY NIGHT

My honey mills wind down in aftercool

of autumn-staging sunlight's rapid plunge.

All day productive order was the rule,

now workers rest before their first waves lunge

at morning ripeness waiting in the clover.

Moon-time awakens hulking stealth with claws,

just like a Choctaw spirit passing over

sleep-dark weeds and logs on brazen paws.

Old Bruin knows the dynamo is dormant;

he knows he needn't fear sting-barbs or shot.

He raids as if he's cued by an informant,

then wanders off to some deep woodland spot,

my precious topaz beaded on his chin:

His tongue will find it, tell him where he's been.

So he'll be back. He needs no workers' dance

to point him toward his coveted reward.

Once found, his black brain memorized each chance

he took and won. He's proved himself the lord

of night, of fields and salmon streams, wild bees

besides. Now mine, compared, make easy prey.

Each raid, he's also seen my apple trees;

he'll soon gorge twice at my expense. By day

I don't believe old tribal kin return

as bears. By sun I count compounded loss

and load my double-barreled vengeance, burn

with educated scorn for tales that cross

the years. Through hunter's sights his powers pose

against the moon, my aim. He's safe. He knows.

## THE HUNGER MOON

Summer is Sweet on the tongue,

soft on the shoulders as kachina clouds,

unlasting as the corn god's shades of green.

Yesterday when the sun centered on my roof,

the red-tailed hawk reeled around

the hot yellow forcing shut my eyes,

tightening his circle and pouring down

his cries on my doorstep.

He is back with the dawn.

Down and down he hurls his keening

like splinters of cold. That hawk

is a prophet of the hunger moon--

the time of no more corn--

a time when the deer goes far,

making no tracks to a place no man finds.

And before he sleeps, the bear

eats bark and small things that crawl.

None of us will starve, not even the hawk.

For me, famine is of the spirit

while the body fuels on dried fare

and sweets that come in jars.

The wings are first to wither,

then the deep singing.

Someday I will folow the hawk.

I will climb past wilding mounds

of dead-gold buckwheat. My foot

will rattle shards of ancient lava,

Startling a lizard into range

of talon and beak.

I will face the she-wind

angering in the cinder cones, prying

at broken shadows of the sacred peaks.

There in the secret heights I will master

the proper maintenance of wings.

## CIRCUS MAN

Ma warned me, said there'd always be three rings

that meant more than the one he wore-- that is,

if I should ever get him to that stage.

But I fell into step with prancing boots,

the big drumbeats, the trombones' sassy slides.

Parading colors, rhinestones, epaulets

enticed me like his grace and daring eyes.

His elephants do two-steps on command

while jealous tigers roar from rolling cages.

He'd never lay a whip on animals

or me-- just gives the word and we obey--

I guess that's love. He married me, all right,

in center ring in Syracuse. Oh Ma,

I wanted you to come but you refused.

I always knew the big top was illusion,

the sweaty, gritty side was no surprise.

The tears I've cried have mostly been for you

who said you didn't want me hurt. But Ma,

I understand. I found your old scrapbook

before I left-- the pictures of a girl

up On a horse behind a costumed rider--

it wasn't Pa your arms were wrapped around.

I saw your smile-- the one you lost before

we ever met. It makes me sad to think

your dream went wrong-- for everybody needs

some sequins with their sawdust. Make mine red.

I'll take my lion tamer and his flaws,

take midnight trains to one-track towns because

I share the laughter in between the frowns.

## THE STAR SALESMAN

I'm native to this territory's scene

Like mini-calculators, cabs and booze.

I sprawl the king-size hotel bed and stare,

My all-wool alter ego hangs alert,

Fresh pressed and waiting for the morning's cue.

My forty dollar name-designer tie

Most likely has a spot that must be sponged

Before I sleep. My Gucci shoes are shined

For each rehearsed approach. But there's no role

For sweet success tomorrow. Or next week.

A dozen times a month I play this lead--

Instead of hotdogs, dine on haute cuisine.

The bottom line is (How I hate that line!)

Our customers aren't clapping for our number.

However primped and powdered or threadbare

They make it sound, their script says NO, a word

Of lead and ice that lodges in soft parts

Beneath my vest, attacking gourmet spoils.

(I'm sure you note the comic undertones

That permeate this neo-classic farce.)

Still, I provide expected locomotion

For this fine costume to complete the plot,

To make the entrance and escort the client

To lunch, silk lining iridescing wit,

Lapels well-tailored with sincerity,

Pants creased with confidence. Bright anecdotes

Emerge from pockets, practiced protocol

And uptown jokes, a little charge card magic--

Then when the show plays out, the wound-up mime

Propels the props to yesterday's airport.

And there this woven retinue, almost

Adept enough to give its own performance

Will go inanimate back in the plane,

At last unfolding in home's terminal

To wait in line in Ma Bell's crowded alley,

And from the slept-in depths yield change enough

To call-- report the bust to amateur

Directors of these high-camp one-act flops--

And maybe learn I don't still head the cast.

## Haiku

Face down in snow

the fallen tombstone

buries the family name.

## Limerick

My boyfriend's devoted to crows.

He taught one to bring me a rose.

And he taught it to talk--

I'm impressed but I balk

When it tells me to take off my clothes!

## SPACE QUEST - Hymn to the American Desert

Come traveler,

be rid of recycled air and weighted shoes,

(though you may want a heat shield by day).

Come out on earth's sueded curve

blown beige and bare, let light scour

civilization from your eyes

enough for you to enter the lavender

and cerulean fourth dimension foyer.

Read the coded map of the night walkers

and the sidewinder's graven intaglio

like shadows of a spiral galaxy. Leave

footprints on granulated layers of always

where ocotillos comet their reds across solar wind.

Find a flowering century plant rising like Venus,

riding a vertebra of the planet's arched chine,

offering salvers of beaded gold to the jealous sun.

Climb to the sculpted apogee built of itself

without a spine except for cactus,

borrowed bones and hoarded powder

from other millenia's seas. Follow

Hogarth's curve downward, sunsetward

to the perigee valley, clinging to the rim

of the possible, just this side

of sapphire's incisive edge.

Come wade an ocean of light,

sail its flood before the nearest moon steals

its roar, before blossoming cosmos withdraw

fuchsia rays, and the skink surrenders its warmth

to the owl. Let the weightless part of you

stalk coyote and badger through orbiting night

and obsidian reflection, keeping tethered

to rhythms only your blood remembers.

Track Orion through creosote bush and saguaro,

share his potluck until the life star

returns to silence dark's movers and shakers

with nails of morning, tonnage of light.

And soon, if you come naked and alone enough,

you can exchange all your learning for truth.

## SONNET FOR HIS NAMESAKE (DuPage River, Illinois)

Some nights when fog crawls up the river's flanks,

A Sleepy mallard sudden-turns its head

AS cycling waves soft-smack the muddy banks

Recalling rhythms of an age long dead.

The water holds old songs in many keys:

Stacatto notes from flying hoofs and paws

Or dancing moccasins and tune-slapped knees,

The drumming, humming steeped in every clause

Of time. Tonight a Frenchman called DuPazhe

Inspects his traps for beaver, muskrat, mink;

He moves with shade and bough for camouflage,

Then squints at streetlights, lingers at the brink

Of bubbling passage, doffs his hood at fame,

And disappears once more, leaving just his name.

## CUTTING A FINGER ON OBSIDIAN to Georgia O'Keeffe

Searching,

plodding in sand-filled shoes

through shimmers of heat,

we never met.

Yet I knew you, Georgia,

in veinous ways--

in behind-the-eyes ways

where light strikes

mirrors in the secret vaults

of knowing.

Exclaiming aloud and alone

when the desert showed me its bones,

its spiny life-- still and green

or sidewinding,

I knew you.

We passed at angles on the parallax

of light out on Hogarth's curve

blown beige and almost bare--

palimpsest for colors and shapes,

some knee-skinning, some cheek-soft,

seeping in and out of each other

under the mallet of light.

You are willful and wild

as a spirit hawk. You are

lava glass trapping fire

beneath conchoidal wrinkles.

You are hands brushes eyes

no longer peeling light,

feeling its pulse,

shedding it like snakeskin

to dry and iridesce on canvas--

but still living

where I know you.

## CIRCUS MAN

Ma warned me, said there'd always be three rings

that meant more than the one he wore-- that is,

if I should ever get him to that stage.

But I fell into step with prancing boots,

the big drumbeats, the trombones' sassy slides.

Parading colors, rhinestones. epaulets

enticed me like his grace and daring eyes.

His elephants do two-steps on command

while jealous tigers roar from rolling cages.

He'd never lay a whip on animals

or me-- just gives the word and we obey--

I guess that's love. He married me, all right,

in center ring in Syracuse. Oh Ma,

I wanted you to come but you refused.

I always knew the big top was illusion,

the sweaty, gritty side was no surprise.

The tears I've cried have mostly been for you

who said you didn't want me hurt. But Ma,

I understand. I found your old scrapbook

before I left-- the pictures of a girl

up on a horse behind a costumed rider--

it wasn't Pa your arms were wrapped around.

I saw your smile-- the one you lost before

we ever met. It makes me sad to think

your dream went wrong-- for everybody needs

some sequins with their sawdust. Make mine red.

I'll take my lion tamer and his flaws,

take midnight trains to one-track towns because

I share the laughter in between the frowns.

## HERALDRY

The cold clansmen beseeched couchant northerlies

to rise and face them,

willing a frontal assault from the wolf-wind

to keep their hungry scent from the king's deer.

They had to be fast. There was a death penalty

for venison eaters, a slower one for those

past aiming true at browsing briskets. Daily,

more elders went slack like soiled draperies

piled in corners. No fabric was noble or whole,

no color. And only bellies were rampant.

Across escutcheons of hunters

the wind pried in bar sinister crevices

of castle and hovel. It spiraled

around the borders of dark forest,

carving its bearings with dirks of ice

and sometimes on its own bias

offering a stag on morning's white field.

Yes, child, the crest you ordered

is elegant on mauve paper-- splendid spread

cf gilded antlers and poised hoofs, regality

balanced with a lean and bare-fanged entity--

panther, perhaps-- embossed with more truth

than you were designed for.

## FORGETTING A MAN NAMED CLIFFORD WOODS

I think of Cliff while watching lightning split

The tallest pines astride the ridge, then hit

The vine-choked thicket edge with rolling fire.

Old brush flares up, rain hisses, makes a spire

Of smoke, a claim. I hear it pop and spit,

Prepared to smolder all day in the pit

Of logs and limbs. I pray the burn will quit.

Wide streams protect me, yet when I retire

I think of Cliff.

Each summer conjures well-aimed storms to slit

My battered woods. I search for any bit

Of green returning near charred wounds while liar-

Like I hail new life as something to desire.

All winter when my likeness seems to fit

I think of Cliff.

## I REMEMBER SHAD

He said he couldn't write the essay I assigned on patriotism,

the boy with Choctaw eyes and saddle-colored skin

whose big brogans kept my 60's classroom tracked

with barnyard smells. His name was Luther Shadbush

and he lived on the edges of anger, sometimes at me.

"You think I'm gonna gush about rights and opportunity

and how I wish I had more lives to give this country?"

He struggled to keep his words clean and his hands unclenched.

"But Shad, don't you feel anything for America?"

"Yeah. A hankerin' to do up New York, maybe even Chicago

before I split for Canada,"

He sent me a letter when he shipped out for Vietnam:

"You know I'm not much good at writing stuff

but I don't want you to think I let myself get herded off

like a stupid sheep not caring about anything and no attachments.

It finally sunk in I'm part of this land, going a long way back.

Sort of like a needle on a lodgepole pine. I know the limbs

are full of blight and the trunk's got borers

but it's still the tallest, Straightest tree in the forest.

And it's my tree. Guess I can't help wanting to hold on to it.

I don't see nothing better anywhere else,

don't see other kinds propping up falling trees

without taking the lame tree's land in the process,

The lodgepole pine don't operate that way.

Maybe if enough needles hang tight and do

what we're Supposed to do even if we don't like it,

our tree will get well and put out some new branches.

Bigger and better ones. I guess that's hope.

So that's what I aim to do. Maybe that's loyalty.

And if I die doing it, somebody ought to know

I'm not leaving bitter, and I'm glad to be part

of this old tree. I guess that's pride,

And maybe all of it together is that word

you wanted us to write about last year in school, Remember?"

I remember, Shad. I remember as I read your name

between reflections on the shiny new monument,

remember the medals you won before you finally fell

all the way to the forest floor,

one more needle to nurture the roots

of the lodgepole pine.

## DEAR SENECA:

Our old asthmatic mentor, you discuss

So many things we're guilty of today.

With elegant simplicity you jab

Our faults, incise them, hold them to the light

Before we know we're cut. Without a pause,

Without a blink to minimize your stare

You zap your logic automatically

To circuits in our brains that trigger nods.

Bizarre beliefs, affected speech, eccentric foods,

Cosmetic fads-- "It stems from serious

Affliction of the spirit," you forewarned.

Declaring "passion for the defect for

Its own sake" as the ultimate conceit,

The height of ostentation, you describe

The skewed esthetics/ethics of our times:

Contorted fashions, gross musicians, toys

That turn the stomach, drugs, abortion, porn--

But modern egos snort at ancient truth.

We puff and posture in our own defense.

Equivocation fades to vanity

Each time you hose it down with lucid force.

My counter-commentaries seem pale crumbs

Of what you noted nineteen hundred years

Ago. The thing is, what you say, once said,

Is obvious and so damned ordinary

It's easy to forget nobody speared

Its nucleus before, and few have since.

If I, with centuries of wisdom's stores

To raid, can mount no stunning argument,

I pity poor Lucilius. No man

Can breathe beneath perfection's weight.

No wonder his replies were never found;

You left him without anything to say!

Perhaps he was a literary ploy

For letters/essays planned for publication.

A sweet device, your: "You will want to know--"

Or "You have asked me--" serves a writer well.

Humility was lacking when you said

The correspondence would make him immortal.

It should be easy to dismiss your worth.

The fullsome jowls and chins your sculptors show

Belie the celebrated spartan diet.

Except when you feared poison, you ate well.

Your wealth and power turned three emperors

Against you. Yours was not a stoic life.

Yet all invalidation is disarmed,

For you admit you weren't a true adherent.

No stoic but a brilliant moderate, and thus

I let your words suffice: "to want"

(Expect of you) "simply what is enough."

I ponder how serene the world would be

If no one trespassed premises like that.

## OLD WIVES THE TALES COME FROM

Crocheting string doilies, dresser scarves, antimacassars

no one wants, filling boxes, filling huge cotton prints,

sleeves sloping like tents, hooks unfastened

back of the neck, they string out

death in rocking chairs.

Daily they fatten to fill their final boxes, paying

out advice no one needs, paying

out the slow twine, enlarging the old designs,

Straining fifty-odd years of wifery

for a mite to impress the young ones

tightening against their webs and cardboard,

closing in with the last lid.

Frayed sheaths

used awhile by knife-voiced kin

who own everything in focus

outside the net of squares and wheels.

On humid suburban evenings, on some deserted

concrete patio, they group like toadstools,

picking at the threads of the days' patterns,

unraveling their mouths,

honing their only weapons.

## KING TUTANKHAMUN: ONCE THERE WAS A BOY WHO LOVED TO WHISTLE

## I REMEMBER SHAD

He led the "Hell no, I won't go" part of my classroom,

the boy with saddle-colored skin and big brogans

tracking in barnyard smells. He spent his last term

Sparring with grammar and spelling, living on the edge

of anger, Sometimes aimed at me like arrows flying

from his Choctaw eyes, His name was Luther Shadbush

and I kept him after school again when he refused

to write the essay I assigned on patriotism.

"You think I'm gonna gush about rights and opportunity

and how I wish I had more lives to give this country?"

He struggled to clean his words and unclench his big hands,

"Don't you feel anything for America, Shad?"

"Sure. I got a big urge to paint New York before

I split for Canada."

But there were later words. He sent me this letter

when he shipped out for Vietnam:

"You know I'm not much at writing stuff

but I don't want you to think I let myself get herded off

like a Stupid sheep not caring about anything

or remembering anything you tried to tell me. Finally

it did sink in. I'm part of this land, going a long way

back, Sort of like a needle on a lodgepole pine. I know

the limbs are blighted and the trunk's got borer's

but it's still the tallest, straightest tree in the forest,

And it's my tree. Guess I can't help wanting to hold on

to it. I don't see nothing better anywhere else,

don't see other kinds propping up falling trees

without taking the lame tree's land in the process.

The lodgepole pine don't operate that way.

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Bigger and better ones, I guess that's hope.

So that's what I aim to do. Maybe that's loyalty.

And if I die doing it, somebody ought to know

I'm not leaving bitter, and I'm glad to be part

of this old tree. I guess that's pride.

And maybe all of it together is that word

you wanted us to write about last year in school.

Remember?"

I remember, Shad. I remember as I read your name

between reflections on the shiny new monument,

remember the medals you won before you finally fell

all the way to the forest floor,

one more needle to nurture the roots

of the lodgepole pine,

## THE SPIRAL GALAXY

My mother used to dress up and go off

in soft fabrics I thought felt like sky,

fanning out, smelling of moonlight

as she walked by me.

She pinned a diamond starburst

on royal blue or black, close to her heart.

I'd get sent to my room for touching things

she had on. Only Orion ever knew I got out

of bed when the maid began to snore, drawn

to the magnetic field of my mother's closet.

I'd wrap her sleeves and hems around me,

a caterpillar making a cocoon, and quiet as.

By feel, I knew the shade of each dress,

every measure of her room and the night

it held. Sometimes I saw a mirrored glint

on top of her highboy--her favorite bauble,

my wishing star. If I could close my fingers

on it once, all its magic would pass to me.

Standing on a chair I couldn't reach it.

One night she changed her mind, rehung

a dress, pin still in place, and put on

something newer. For the first time,

I couldn't wait for her to leave. My blood

swarmed hot in my head, drained down suddenly;

I felt myself floating to the floor.

In Children's Hospital, the maid sat

on my bed erasing crossword puzzle squares.

The motion made me sicker.

When I got home on Saturday, the jewel

was no longer accessible nor my magic theory.

Later I saw a picture in a book-- the explosion

of a supernova in a spiral galaxy. It pleased me

to decide that's what became of her in the end

when she stopped coming home at all. Sometimes

I still think she's up there-- flaring brooch

on black silk breast, pirouetting

in the eye of luminosity, radiating sparks.

Now and then I go to the library and look;

I know the page by heart. I gravitate

to anything with arms that could sweep me in.

## THE ALWAYS CHILD

He handed her the pieces of the cup,

water rolling out of his eyes.

Silently he stood over the trash

where she put the shards, his tears tapping

on the sack lining the basket.

"Tt's all right," she said. "You still have

a mug with Snoopy's picture on it."

His silence turned to a moan. She took off

his glasses and wiped them on her skirt.

Tears clung to the stubble on his chin.

"Come on," she said. "It's time to shave.

She put her knee across his lap to stop

his wiggling. The sound of the razor

always bothered him. As soon as she let him up

he darted to the bedroom and hurled himself

on a toy, a poodle stitched with loops of yarn.

His fingers twisted into the fuzz. He began

licking the face which no longer had eyes.

"Don't do that, Danny." Her voice

had no inflection. If she allowed herself

a different pitch or change of tone she might scream.

She waited for him to settle down

before mopping the kitchen. The telephone rang.

A man asked her to participate in a survey.

"Do you have children living at home?"

When she answered, he asked the boy's age.

"Forty-eight," she said, closing her eyes.

The man laughed nervously. "But seriously, ma'am, we--"

"Yes," she said. "It's serious."

She hung up quietly and looked at the clock.

"It's time for your shot, Danny."

A low growl almost like a gargle began

in his throat. He shook his head hard.

"You know if you don't have it, you'll swell

and hurt worse." She filled the syringe slowly.

"Doctor" and "clinic" were words Danny could say

plainly. He could only mumble "Mother."

She approached him with the needle. His fingers

raced to his head. Before she could stop him

he handed her a fistful of curly gray hair.

## EMILY, EMILY

"Like a panther in the glove," she wrote,

probably after the latest letter containing

her returned pages. But Dickinson's mentor

was merely dull-witted, not cruel.

Whitely expectant, I open my manuscript

with your critique. All my blood drains

somewhere and I wonder that my dress

is not soaked incarnadine. You've turned

and twisted me skinless, yet still you want

"a painful revelation in the modern idiom."

You dream of her, that other one,

at night by your cold hearth, and sigh

into your sherry when you see my like name

among the pile of poems you must read.

You burn to ignite ghost fire-- you in her

batiste milieu, or her Amherstness in yours,

believing you understand her

as a lover should.

Your passions don't mesh, professor,

defender of the form, the faith, the fifth.

You aren't an overthrower. You've never

grasped the wildcat in tight quarters.

Your perception is skewed but I come

for other reasons you are blind to.

Already widely published while I live

is not enough.

My most painful revelation will surprise you.