

POETRY

Log Bridge

(after *Three Children*, Roy C. Nuse)

Three children, each one an open form: hillside
and stream: each child dissolving into the random
other, each thin, uncertain child a blank
enjambment of the species. Two boys
and a girl on a log bridge, and the girl (do
you care about detail?): she is barefoot
and clad, the boys both naked, and she
is between them smaller, holding both
boys' limp fingertips in her small hands,
she herself a female bridge of flesh and fabric
between the aimless males standing on the log bridge
over scumbles of water.

The children do not move forward, although
one boy seems to try, light welling up in his body
like secondhand fire. The other boy, in shade,
shies back from the transitioning girl, who will
believe silence, memorize disorder.

The girl will not let either boy go: she has been
warned, the water crying beneath her feet, the oak
tree mustard with sunlight.

The girl's flesh is articulated with less care than
the fabric of her skirt, her inattentive skin sorting
compressed light into meaning, a fairy tale
of hands and arms pressed out to her companions,
the soles of her feet gripping the log's bark.

The girl interposes: this is her best work, both boys
now attenuated structures pigmented like the water
they stand above, quick little grids of
light blinking out.

Carol Frith

Crescent Bruise

1

She is here in her body, wide awake and sitting
upright, her skin a message someone else
will memorize, little words that shimmer
from the crescent bruise beneath her right breast,
her eyes the color of water splashed on the skin.

How often she has sat here in the orange light:
breasts, stomach, thighs her only story, her skin
unwrapping itself to the sparse unfurnished room.

The posing is an option - hum of moments pressing
on her idle flesh.

I am leaving, she thinks, and absence writes its
message on her belly and her legs. She has found
the simple marvel of the act, her breath a warm
scatter.

Last night, she dreamed a stiff camellia shaking
in the wind, its cold, shed blossoms colored like
her flesh, bruised little messages of decay
latticing the petals.

She daydreams now, her muscles a standard
pleasure: tetany and loss, her breasts like peonies,
a flower she doesn't quite recall but likes the word,
the way it presses her tongue to the roof
of her mouth: *peony*. It writes itself above the nipple
of her injured breast: Apollo's epithet.

Her skin's osmotic to the light.

2

It is sunset somewhere, or perhaps it's dawn,
the world inside her floating like a sea.
Her meaning climbs the underwater light
like a lattice.

Poetry

She tells herself her flesh is a one-dimensional
reparation, names herself *pattern near a doorway*,
withdraws inside the wet networking of her breath
and blood, her skin a border that she cannot cross.

She is a blind fish in her own ocean,
curling and uncurling in a bland sea,
her plump skin tattooed with waterproof
messages, blue ink that spells out *sunset, bruise*
and *breast*.

She presses her tongue against the roof
of her mouth.

Peony, she says. *Peony*.

Carol Frith

With this cup

Spread round about the pungencies
of her wealthy little stove
lie the various Mrs. arts and
the capacities of crystal and live wind:

A chalice of small lemons
centers the table laden with plunder:

English walnuts and pepper,
a biscuit and ice,
an empty vinegar bottle,
a stalk of celery,
a peach

A cup, a moment's grace:

Irredeemably fictional,
as virgin and jewel-bright
as a mouthful of electrical wire
as coriander
as five-hundred-dollar knives

as very old music
and barely reputable wine.

Erica T. Carter

Adam's maiden

She is appallingly homely

boldly common
simple, almost absolute.

In the conjunction of pain
and elastic patience,
the grinding philosophy of familiar devices
a third volume, an acquisition

playing area between probability and surface
facile and fluid
a costly half-witted breakdown.

Challenge the tappet of the ecumenical whole— skin-
perceptiveness
the sphere of feather tops and flat tires
azaleas on the tundra.
movement plain but debonair

Specialist of clean cloth
of penetration
of accomplishment.

A force of melted people
professional
in prim long-sleeved dresses
in the good land of anticipation and construction
the deep confines of courage.

Erica T. Carter

WITCHING HOUR

Not midnight, but twilight.
There's a black dog in the windy woods,
and other things: a clamor
of dogs across the river,
a barred owl calling hunger
and question from the swamp.
A whickering of sparrows settling
to quiet, and me, and a new
quarter moon in a spill of cloud.

Power is on the wind, and faith:
the owls are huddling chicks
through the darkness and ice
by the grace of blood.
Skunk cabbages shoulder up
through the trickling spring:
their striped frog-heads crack
through snow, waiting for the one
fly to hatch which pollinates skunk cabbage.
They are sure it will come, sure
enough to trust everything
to the cold still coming.

Magic. More power than any witch
in Hawthorne could muster.
Round-based as a wine bowl, the quarter
moon tips light into the glowing cloud.
Springwater begins to gleam.
I kneel and swallow, and swallow
again; for now, there is still
more power, more water, and more.

Catherine Carter

MY GEEKS

Though *geeks* were once circus
freaks, biters-off of moles' heads, birds'
heads, rats' heads, the word now means
those who find their lives
in books. Geeks,
nerds, losers, teachers' pets with straight A's, thick glasses
(first pair, age eight), bad haircuts, cheeks pocked,
perhaps, with acne, too thin
or fat or weak, who remember with awe
the day they learned
to read – these are my silver
studs, my fantasy boys, whose bowed faces
and perilous eyes and pauses
before speech call tenderness
into my heart, and other places. I long to read them
Tolkien out loud, to bid them come
to the library's darkest carrels.

These are the boys who argue, for weeks:
could Spiderman defeat Moth-ra? Whose alter
egos are stern elven warriors who never
get wedgies or Indian burns, are never
called queer, never
are queer. Who quiver to the shrieks
of the orcs on their screens (not the girls
in their beds.) Who come to love
footnotes; who have even less
place in the world of faces and facts
than I had, and who will finally desire it as little,
though not yet. Safe from me
behind the gradebook's iron gate,
they are nonetheless sons and lovers
and brothers, these awkward and unkempt,
these entirely geek, these children
of the book and the wire and the liquid screen,
these born of the word and the fire.

Catherine Carter

***Long Scary Titles On Danger With Very Short Poems:
A Mini-Series***

Lost Late at Night in That Strange City, Round and Round
Through Labyrinth Streets Lined with Oil Refineries and Warehouses
That Always Dead-end at the Railway Tracks Which Cut You Off
From the Distant Downtown Lights and a Way Out and This
Happening Three Times

Thank God, you have always been with me.

At a Stoplight In a Bad Neighborhood Sweating for Green,
Checking Locked Locks, Looking Very Un-nervous and Straight Ahead
And Jumping When a Man Appears at the Window Even Though He
Only Wants to Tell You That Your Extra Keys Are Dangling From the Trunk

I remember to say „thank you.“

Near Midnight You Take a Shortcut Main Street to the Interstate Through
the Wrong Town Which Has the Wrong Main Street That Does Not
Go to the Interstate and You Find Yourself On a Straight Road
in the Country and Your Town Is a Scattered Star Cluster
on a Dark Windowscape to Your Left and Outside Glass
So You Know Where You Are Going But Not How To Get There
And Do Not know If This Rattletrap with 180,000 Miles Will Give It Up

I made it.

Your 7-Year-Old Granddaughter Panics (And So Do You But Hide It) When The
Car Breaks Down at 9 P.M. On An Unpeopled Street Downtown
And You See One Filling Station Lighted Long Lonely Blocks Away

Until a Woman Stops With Her Cell Phone, Locks You in Her Car. Then She
Tells That She Stopped Because Her Daughter Was Murdered This Way and She
Herself Was on Her Way Home From a Governor's Meeting
For Families of Victims of Unsolved Crimes
And She Called the Police and Your Daughter and Your Wrecker Service
and Stayed With You 30 Minutes and the Policeman
Took the Next 30 Minutes.
Your Daughter and Your Wrecker Arrived Together

Adrenalin has outlived its usefulness.

Carol Hamilton

Miss Gertrude Stein

I knew nothing of you
except your name -
I knew it was Miss
even though I never knew
until I knew
(and then I wrote it down).

I want to tell you
you are a bird
a crow
an unreasonable crow
who makes me look
when I don't want to.
You make me look
until I see the absence of beauty.
Until I see beauty in the absence of.
Yes, an unreasonable crow
with a silly light making you
beautiful.

"A rowboat with one oar," my husband says
when I read you aloud.
Somehow I hear you whisper
"If you were a woman
you would need only one."

Unreasonable crow with the sun on your neck,
my oiled body wants to hang
on a wall in your salon. Manet?
Maybe Picasso, a naughty trinity
with their hands bathed in the smell
of cigarettes and vodka
as they let the light play
distort, distortion unto death.
I meant depth. I meant depth.

Betsy Johnson-Miller

Girls

Many mothers have girls.
Many bring them to breasts.

Some mothers give girls to white-shoed nurses.
Some girls have lawyers
as storks.

Many girls resemble their mothers, usually around the eyes.

This girl discovered her mother lives in South Dakota.
But this girl has no idea if her mother still has both breasts.

That mother did not want to see this girl.

This girl has her own girl.

This mother finds flesh

and breath in this room is invisible but it does not go
unnoticed.

Betsy Johnson-Miller

Studying Psychiatry

I wanted to help so I cut my hair.
I wanted to help so I gave away my mini-skirts
to befriend the insane.

What did I know about science?
I'm still afraid of the dark,
blowing on a small fire until it ignites.

My mother took up a stick
to strike her daughter
and someone was watching.

I ordered the Ativan
for the delirious man
and broke the heartbreak to his wife.

One day I found myself in the last hall,
the one stripped of furniture, concrete
and hosed down.

A young woman my age walked over to me
and said *"I'm glad you're here.*
We have clothes on today
and I feel like talking."

Connie Donovan

A Woman's Body, Remembering

A hot coin spoke from one side,
a dog of a backache sniped.
The legs were pillars of Samson,
and the head, a swarm of gnats.
Why then, do I miss you,
Aunt Flo, Little Visitor,
Ragtime Sally, Queen's X,
you who have taken yourself away,
tightlipped, silent?

Poetry

Sometimes I lie in bed calling to you
from the second half of my life.
Remember me?
Remember my useful body?
You came to me, made me
a worker of the world each month,
told me—you comforting clock,
scenic calendar page,
baby maker/trouble maker,
cascade of moon juice,
Rorschach quilt—
that I was all right.

I would curl into you for five days,
go sit in my little hut,
without men, without kitchen duty,
curl nights into you,
be an embryo of the moon.

I would begin with ocher clay,
move on to the true flush of poppies,
and finally, would-be baby pink,
all these colors in health—
on a canvas of winning landscape.
This would be folded in linen,
handled only with clean hands,
laid in a cedar trunk,
brought out on feast days
to show my daughters-in-law:
“This is the stuff of your original husband.
Now go and paint your own.”

Today, my body remote as an elevated railway,
like soap, like the horizon,
my body wishes to remember.

God’s bound to be a woman sometimes,
to think up this bright paint between the legs.
Where else is flowing blood the picture of health,
a lovely joke about the future?

Jan Epton Seale

Transport

Ruth carries
always a small bottle of
nitroglycerin; and tissues, wads of
tissues; two Tums (for calcium, she tells me),
Tic-Tacs in a little plastic box that snaps; often several
Smith Brothers Lemon Licorice Throat Drops. Pocket portage:
pajamas to robe to sweater. Mornings, beneath her pillows, I find
these nested, plus, a butterscotch ball; her bedside flashlight; for under
her breast where it itches, baby powder—Giant-sized with Cornstarch—though
the list for her daughter said *small*, so Ruth could manage it better prone, in the dark.
Maybe I can just dump some on the sheet and roll in it, she says.

Ruth resists
bathing and changes of
her *Cuddl* thermal bottoms.
Her daughters have abandoned all
hope of showers. Ruth hasn't said No (No
is not how she does it), but any bath-manipulations
hunker down her jaw, dead-weight her round-bellied body,
and, given her bathroom, it would take me *and* her night lady both
to step her up over the tub and lower her down onto the rubber seat of
the stool, and one of us to get in there to hoist her back to standing. The
main in-charge daughter tells me they're backing off on personal hygiene, but
could I perhaps dampen her hair with a washcloth, then give it a touch with the
curling iron. When I suggest to Ruth perhaps the dirty clothes for her pajamas after a
week, she says, *Why I've never been so clean.*

Ruth desires
horseradish mustard,
pickle relish, ginger sauce.
She hills these little pick-me-ups
around the edges of her Meals on Wheels,
the mounds of Swiss steak and carrots, rrrrrred
to mush in the new little chopper—her dentures lost
two months ago, the night her husband of sixty years died.
More maple syrup on your oatmeal, more honey in your tea.
Yes, oh yes. Sweets and the local newspaper. Much is a blur,
but print, squinched at through just the right part of her bifocals, fills
her morning. She reads me random headlines while I iron: Man Charged
With Cow Neglect, and random phrases: finally a cure for the common cold.
We both agree we are not going to follow the story about the baby abused at his
daycare. And greeting cards: Ruth has dozens for every occasion. For years she's
been the Sunshine person for her D.A.R. I say, We might be able to go to their luncheons.
Oh no, she says, finally I have an excuse.

Poetry

Ruth worries
about her daughters:
driving at night, using a
riding mower. Things men
do that aren't safe for women.
Be careful, she tells them. Do you
think you should try that? Her daughters,
nearing sixty, look heavenward. *And* she worries
about catching something: pneumonia or flu, regards
me with suspicion if I cough or sneeze. Her daughters
worry about her feet: poor circulation. For Christmas she
got a little foot whirlpool. Could I toothbrush her toes? And
what horny nails she has, yellowed with white spots and threat-
ening to curl in upon themselves. I check my own as though early
detection might improve my chances. *But* the night lady and I worry
about Ruth on the stairs. Ruth, how about using the portable toilet in the
dining room? Her walker does not change direction. Five perilous journeys
on my watch. Going up: me behind her, with a tight grab on her waist—fall forward
if you start to go. Descending, when she starts to list, we sit side by side, and come down
on our rears. Ruth on recent falls: *My body goes where it will.*

Ruth fears
Tuesdays and
Thursday afternoons
when she must be in her
house alone. All right you're
all set: your nitro's in your pocket,
your lap blanket's right here, your book
with everybody's numbers, your lifeline's on,
the remote, this little tub of fudge. I'll leave the
kitchen light. Would you like Anne Murray or Miss
Read? Remember all you have to do is push the red
button with the X if you want to stop the tape. Ruth claims
she cannot figure anything out, she never could. I say, Oh that's
just what women do when there's a man to fix things, but if you had
to, and you were willing to stand there in the cold and puzzle out how
this little gizmo hooks up over that little whatsit...in order to free this, you're
going to have to do that...eventually you'd get it. But she never lets that through.
I put on my coat and make my final entry in the log. See you tomorrow morning.
Have a nice evening, she says, and don't you worry about me.

Ginnah Howard

My Grandmother 1947

A bib-apron over a house dress, she turns sheets
through her Maytag's rubber ringers to coil to the lined
basket below, to hang between her house and Egbert's
or on rainy days to pin taut on the lines in her whitewashed
basement, no dirt left in any corner to harbor mold.

Her back straight, she closes the steel press of her mangle,
her right hand guiding the sprinkled-down sheet through
the top, while the fingers of her left draw it flat and hard
from below.

She surveys her shelves, arms akimbo tallies the totals
to compare with her back-fence neighbors: tomatoes,
green beans, mincemeat, pears; the clamp of each jar
snapped down on its red ring by her practiced thumb.

While my mother runs up ensembles on her Featherweight:
skirts that swirl and one-shouldered tops, my grandmother
weaves rugs from the mounds of ripped rag balls, throwing
the shuttle back and forth, as her black lace-up shoes
pedal to raise and lower the sheds.

When she mops beneath her roomers' beds (Melba, Delphia,
Mr. Reilly), I lean into her linen closet, touch the rounded rows
of towels, wonder at the folds of crocheted dresser scarves.

Always dressed and corseted. Always I thought of her as old.
(She was only fifty then, ten years younger than I am now.)
There, when I came home from school; there, when my mother
went on dates with Joe or Judge. She had lost two husbands
to appendicitis, a son to World War Two, a farm to the Depression.
But what I know is her tall brick house on Dixie, her holiday
Fostoria: the flash of rainbows on the white, white cloth.

Ginnah Howard

WING WALK

"Women are seeking freedom. Freedom in the skies!"
-journalist and amateur pilot, Marjory Brown, 1930

clotheslines and children blur with chickens
through greased propeller blades
that slice the air
heavy with fumes
the biplane tears the field
trampling stalks of dead dry weeds
at the nape of her neck the knot comes loose
freeing tendrils of ash brown hair
blown taut at her temples
following the line of her scarf the horizon

dips her heart beats
to the hum of her favorite part
the leaving
in defiance of gravity

soaring
to where fields are quiltwork patches
that blanket the dirt
the river the road just paths
back

the goggles this time come off
reaching for a cross bar
lifting her body by her fingertips
she crawls out onto the wing
for a brief bright moment stands
triumphant
in shredded chiffon that sucks at her breasts

against a deaf sky

Elisabeth Harrahy

NEBRASKA

not tonight I say
too much whiskey
my stomach is upset
in this cheap hotel
with spanish talk outside
the middle of nebraska
a sweaty june
oh come on baby
take your clothes off for me
i say not tonight
please not tonight
he says let me look at you
I sit up
slip the fuschia satin over my head
on top he says
you can be on top
and not puke
i say not tonight
please not tonight
get on top he says
so i do
it is easy
to stare at cheap art
how the details
rise
and fall
rise
and fall
i am numb
when he flips me
over on my belly
tears apart my legs
thrusts deep to my navel
i think
is this rape
i feel like i am raping you he says
thrusting harder
i slam into the headboard
palm first
god i feel like i am raping you

Poetry

he says breathless
i do not breathe only focus
on the crispness of these sheets
crunching cheap plastic
as if the maid knew
who was coming

when he is asleep
i slide out to pee
splash water on my face
stare at the place my eyes should be
nothing there
skin on bones
a drop of blood runs down my leg
and escapes

Elisabeth Harrahy

HESITANT
(Bizonytalan)

We come here
with
hesitant steps,
and we leave
here with
hesitant steps.
Only while here
do we strut
confidently
in the wrong
direction.

Katalin Mezey
translated by Paul Sohar

LIKE RUSTY KNIVES
(Akar a rozsdas keseket)

Using dentures, eyeglasses,
and a few old rags
I rig up my mother
every morning.
Between her skeletal
legs I tuck a diaper,
I pull socks and the carpet
slippers on her feet. Then,
holding on to each other by both hands,
we shuffle out to the living room.
She, the champion of independence,
who never depended on anyone;
I, the champion of liberty,
who escaped her as a teenage,
because I could not put up
with her rigid ways.
Folks who knew us then
would be surprised to see us now.
We are like rusty knives
God rubs together
in order to sharpen us.

Katalin Mezey
translated by **Paul Sohar**

AIR

Buckling our seatbelts before take-off,
I turn to my mother: "I'm almost anorexic.
I could really do it, go all the way."
The plane lifts its nose, the wheels curling
into the packed belly underneath.
I want to tell her how I love the feeling
of an empty stomach, how absence carves
into my body like a meat hook into a carcass,
and how good it feels to be so light—hanging, dangling
like this plane in flight. We sit in silence, suspended in air,
in this vessel with windows, where we watch
what appear to be clouds. All we see is white,
dense and bare as bone.

Courtney E. Putnam

ENVOI

I bring my friend in the hospice a rose.
Heart-red, it lies on pale tissue,
petals closed, stem end sliced
aslant. I slip it in a bud vase

filled to the lip with warm water, lean it
toward her on her tray. It defines
my time with her in this no-man's land
I need to enter, mined with ending

unexploded. Are words safe?
rose? vase? Earl Grey?
We try
snowdrops coming—her daughter's letter—

leaf through grandchild photos. One petal
opens its silken palm. As if through rain
the hard land shimmers in our voices.

Ann Silsbee

Poetry
