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KEVIN O'SHEA

Sandy Ridge Church

No church was near. Folks met in barns before
the hay was stacked and gave to have one built.
Hewers ripped by the shin, and gorged on chores,
till winter flew blankets and kept the wilt.
Singing through fields, they gathered by the brook.
Fast trout shied at their feet
as reverends plunged them till their bodies shook.

The church was walled from rocks that snagged
the plows in fields of wheat.
Bread drove the hands, in spurts of power roped,
to mix the lime and last the days to chisel.
From scaffold-planks, the valley's backing scope
flew over grains and made the barnsides little.

War in Amish Townships

The army moved behind the hills and wore
the grass to dust through rows of cherry orchards.
They camped near empty taverns where the roads
were crossed and generals knew the marching tortured.
Cannons woke the men and smolder flowed
through grains that hid the enemy
now guarding property cut between pickets.
Sergeants entered homes and told the husbands
that their young corn and tangled berry thickets
would feed the troops. The peach orchard was manned
by sons of age and not at war.
At noon the Amish stayed indoors.
Long hurrahs swelled the pike and ripened news
to charge a wall that plowed-up rocks would mend.
It stopped the lead before the sun-grinned crews,
returning cheers with echoed fire to lend.

MICHAEL PRIOR

The Materials at Hand

It is the small things, too, that recall our start,
The lint-strewn tokens that dovetail a heart's
Poor joinery: a pirated CD of Radiohead,
A deerstalker cap, a photo taken in bed.

Such small pieces are a puzzle's stencilled trace
Before the saw descends and carves the grace
Of an assembly greater than what was known
Complete, but later, itself an absence shown.

W.F. LANTRY

Perceptions

Beyond the fallen trunk, whose dappled bark
still clothes the supple wood, where climbing roots
support five-fingered ivy as it turns
each leaf in new directions so the light
is caught again and held, where ostrich ferns
recurve each frond to vertical, their shoots
unroll themselves from spiral fiddleheads.

Beneath the canopy, which overspreads
this storm-replenished stream, if we look down
we may see surface ripples, winding out
in patterns. If we readjust our sight
to focus on the drifts of yearling trout,
we first notice their shadows on the brown
gravel beneath their fins. Sometimes these signs

are all we see: our vision recombines
their silhouettes with what we'd known before,
those rings, their fins, these currents and the wave
curling downstream from rapids, where the bright
droplets reflecting sun nearly engrave
a different pattern in our minds: a shore
remade above the storm flood's watermark.

dl mattila

Charms

Variations on ancient Anglo-Saxon metrical charms

A Drink Against the Devil's Temptations

Gather the tuftyhorn, cropleek, and fennel,
bishopwort blooms, leaf-stalk and nettle.
Immerse them in ale and holy-hole water,
medicinal draught, an ailing man's fodder.
Before each sip of the sinewy stew,
ensure an enchantment is paired with the brew
by intoning three times where the stricken lies ill:
All Powerful God intercede, make him well.

(B. L. Royal 12.D.XVII, fol. 125v-126r)

Remedy for a Toothache

In the city of Alexandria
rests the body of Apollonia,
mild-maiden and martyr whose teeth were extracted,
upon whom dark forces of fate were enacted.
In invoking her name with All Blesseds and Saints,
we summon The Lord to alleviate pain.

We beseech thee, Almighty, to comfort our own,
in whom festering seeds of the wicked are sown.
Free this toothache, O Lord, from the teeth of thy servant
by binding this charm to the head of the patient:
In the name of The Father, St. Blaise pray for him.
Grant release from the torment, the wicked within.

(B. L. Royal 12.B.XXV, fol. 61r.)

For Persistent Pain in the Joints

Where the devil delights,
an angel alights
and The Lord makes free:
in His name – the remedy. Amen.

(B.L. Harley 585, fol. 183r.)

BURT MYERS

Threnody at Daybreak

The hoarfrost trims the fenceposts.
She muses at the window, watches while
the chipmunks maze the woodpile
as black tea steeps and pumpernickel toasts.

She sets a single place, yawns,
still focused on a backyard deep in shade,
then uncaps the marmalade.
Red finches jounce the feeder, seed the lawn;

the oaks surrender dry leaves.
Soon she's done, downs a final wedge of bread.
The rake is in the boatshed,
she thinks. But where are his gardening gloves?

She washes her few dishes
as sunlight climbs across the gabled roof,
then, the kitchen clean enough,
tromps to the mudroom for her galoshes.

The Sunday Visits

He has his girls each Sunday afternoon.
Their mother cracks the door and sighs “hello,”
then scowls. “You’re drinking?” “No,” he says, “hell no.”
The girls are breaking up at some cartoon.

She goes to get them ready, makes him wait,
then leaves them to him with familiar kisses.
He pulls them close, engulfed by all he misses.
“Just have them home by seven. Don’t be late.”

They’ll see a movie down on Clinton Street,
the shabby second-run house by the pier.
He sneaks in dimestore candy, Cokes, a beer,
then sinks, between them, heavy in his seat.

JANE BLANCHARD

The Blue Dolphin

The hotel's dining room is far from full
at seven-thirty; those who venture in
are seated at the tables by the windows.
These spots are always taken, even in
the middle of a rainy week in May.
Tonight a woman sits alone at one,
while couples occupy the other five.
All customers are middle-aged or older,
except the honeymooners sharing smiles
and secrets over fresh mixed salad greens.
A businessman, intent on telling his
companion how he closed his latest deal,
forgets to stir his sherried seafood bisque.
One husband fiddles with his phone; his wife,
resigned to such, stares past his lowered gaze
and smooths the linen napkin on her lap;
both hope the sirloins, rare, will soon appear.
Another pair discuss their children, grown
and gone, as they have coffee and dessert,
this time some key lime pie and crème brûlée.
Two ancients eat but half of what is served
so they may take the rest away in boxes:
seared salmon, mashed potatoes, and green beans.
The single woman nibbles on a roll,
thumbs through a magazine, and sips champagne
while waiting on a chicken provolone.
The waiter, an old hand here, keeps his eyes
on everyone and everything at once.
The waitress, hired last week, is new enough
to comment on the several porpoises
breaking the surface of the stormy surf.
A freighter suddenly looms large and then
grows small while heading for a distant port.
Soon after, faster, comes the gambling boat

on yet another run to where the fun
can start and last at least three miles off shore.
Just as the boat speeds by the final set
of channel markers, clouds open to pour
a rainbow to the ocean, but the boat
still hurries toward the dim horizon so
that eager passengers can try their luck
at slots or wheels or cards or dice beyond
the pot of gold no lucky fool will find.

SETH BRAVER

Photo of the Artist as a Greek Sage

“If we feel we should seek what we don’t know, we shall be less helpless, better, and braver than if we feel there is no knowing, no use seeking.”

– Socrates (Plato, Meno, 86b)

I wrote and laughed, though I presume that I
Had seen it written on the slate before.
Presume, I write, unable to rely
On memory, unable evermore
To be that unrecapturable boy
Whose chalky fingers in the photograph
Forever touch, with philosophic joy,
The talismanic word, his epitaph.

Like Theseus’ ship that one by one
Had all its planks replaced and so became
Insensibly a new phenomenon,
The boy has vanished underneath his name.
He laughed and yielded me his quiet breath –
That far less helpless, better, braver Seth.

GAIL WHITE

What the Children Said

Children have told me twice
that I look like a witch.
They can see the too-long nose
that I only see
in a three-way mirror,
the mark of my wicked kind.

Hush hush, the grown people say,
not to hurt my feelings,
but I want to say
Of course I'm a witch, my dears,
and tonight in bed you will turn
into spotted frogs,
and I, like a cat,
will eat your long green fingers.

Domestic Incident

I hear my neighbor smashing his guitar
against the wall. He's done it once before
when in a rage. This time he can't afford
to get another. They're expensive things.
And yet he loved that wooden box with strings
more than his wife. (Their daughters sit afraid
and wordless under his bizarre tirade.)
Should I call 911, report a case
of spouse abuse? He hasn't touched her face
or body, simply bellows that she keeps
him from his writing, hovers while he sleeps...
She wouldn't thank me. She remains unmoved,
shelters her little girls and simply waits
while he destroys the only thing he loved
rather than strike the woman that he hates.

Rosalind, Later

It seems to me now
I was happiest in Arden,
teasing him, boy with a boy,
equal with equal.
Even though I was relieved
to be back in girl's clothes,
and thrilled to be married,
lover with lover,
I still miss the greenwood.
He was so charmingly stupid
in bygone days.
Now he's too dignified
ever to admit I'm the smart one.
Celia would say that a wife
must lose her illusions.
It's true I suppose, but I wish
he would still let me tease him.
Each night I tell my daughters
tales of the greenwood.
I'm hoping they'll run away young.

CONTRIBUTORS

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