



← **TERESKA DRAWS HER HOME** Children's words are not all learned. These made in the mud by years of sorrow will take years to find. In Warsaw, at an institute which cares for some of Europe's thousands of "disturbed" children, a Polish girl named Tereska was asked to make a picture of her home. These terrible scratches are what she drew.

ITALO LEARNS TO READ In Rome there is a home for war-wounded children. Italo, Roman, 11 years old, lives there. He is slowly learning to read by pressing his nose and lips against the rough pages of a book in Braille. He cannot see his eyes because he is blind; he cannot see his fingers, because his arms have been amputated just below the shoulders.

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CHARLES HUGHES

January Evening, 10 P.M.

[From our house]

An inch or so of snow last night. Tonight
The yard shines back cold moonlight at the moon,
And nothing moves – till a young Lab trots in,
Unbalancing the light and darkness. Shadows

Of crisscrossed branches fail in spots to stitch
Their fanciest embroidery on the snow.
Being a dog engrossed, you're not concerned;
Nor that your leash drags at your side, unmanned.

You stop. You stretch, twisting a resolute face
Hard right and up, as if to shed tight skin,
Pure animal certainty. Then off you go,
Down the back walk, then out, then down the alley.

Your life has ill-equipped you for the night.
Cars hurrying, wild creatures from the woods,
With sharper teeth and meaner streaks than yours,
Dead cold: they don't adore you. Then again,

Someone adores you and is looking for you.
He walks. He calls. He thinks (not angrily)
How similar to people dogs can be –
Needing their freedom, needing to be loved.

CONRAD GELLER

Year Down

The last cold light of winter afternoon
lingers past credibility, the day
staggers, and a newly furnished moon
shines uselessly to keep the dark at bay.

It happens every year. No remedy.
Thanksgiving, and the year is shutting down.
Fires and candles will not help, nor tree
tricked out like some ungainly grinning clown

can stay the progress of the dismal time
when, silent and brooding through extended night,
in open field appears an only pine
in mourning, like the Chinese, wearing white.

NED BALBO

Winter Window

A variation on Valéry's "A la vitre d'hiver..."

I rest my head against a freezing window,
its cold touch offering some small relief,
The fogged glass shows a vast sky – empty, blue.
I'm anxious, overwrought. I'm tired of life.

Today's already passing – like belief
that melts back into lost time, distant snow.
Time bears me forward. I don't want to go.
It bleeds away and leaves me only grief.

Go ahead, keep passing – all that is
and ever will be! Mute to my heart's core,
there's nothing I remember anymore,

not even love, and all its painful business...
A silent ghost whose presence no one feels,
I wait for reasons nobody reveals.

CLAUDIA GARY

Atlantic Beach

for Linda

Paint blisters carry cabanas.
Cabanas deliver Atlantic Beach
onto memory's beach – not stepwise
but in waves through sunken castles.

Memory, love, composed alike,
are just at arm's length this evening.

When we would arrive at Atlantic Beach
the air rippled over hot tarmac.
Out on the sand were grain-filled towels,
shovels and pails and sifters.

We rode the waves with mothers and aunts,
goggled, skirted, slathered.

Cabanas smelled of suntan oil,
not sunblock cream – yet here we are.
Blisters that burst at fingertips
were lead-based paint – yet here we are.

Wind from a beach umbrella
escapes to my inland roof tonight

and memory/love, mocking the tide,
whistles and whispers in one warm breath
through naked-pink shells
composing our selves.

ROB GRIFFITH

Kummerspeck

German; excess weight gained from emotional overeating. Literally, grief bacon.

Like a cold white coffin, the fridge is full
of all the things I cannot face, a hoard
of Ziplocked words and jars of frozen tears,
a thousand moldering thoughts now wrapped and stored

in plastic. Grief, cured with salt and marbled thick
with fat, is tucked beneath the envy-steak,
and all the melancholy ham is gray
as freezer rime, as dry as last month's cake.

The Tupperware is full of fear and shame,
the pickle jar of jealousy and brine.
The shelves are nearly full, and soon I'll have
to eat my heart and drink the soured wine.

GAIL WHITE

She Compares Her Lover to Her Cat

While you're away, my love, I stroke instead
of you the dainty panther in my bed,
more exquisite than satin and more sleek
than rain, but sadly unequipped to speak.
You are my information source, my song,
my lover's lexicon – and yet how wrong
about your health, how vexed with all I write,
how testy at an unintended slight!
The panther only purrs – but you, my mate,
how can you be so damned articulate
yet lack the sense to come in when it rains?
If only you had fur and she had brains.

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.

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.

C.B. ANDERSON

Eros Fools Around with Echolalia

after Fred Chappell's "Narcissus and Echo"

Will you consent to have my baby *Maybe*
if I can earn again your trust *rust*
and show that I'm the ever-pleasant *isn't*
inhabitant of sunlit hallways *always*
that lead anon to love's retrieval *evil,*
and reinstatement? Long before *or*
forgotten promises were broken *oaken*
by one who to this day adores *doors*
you, Noah's quintessential patience *agents*
was proven righteous when a dove *of*
bore olive-twigs from rainless islands *silence.*
the sinking deep revealed. And now *Endow*
I drift aboard my frail canoe, *anew*
a vexed disconsolate neurotic *erotic*
afraid he's lost his luscious peach. *speech.*

CONRAD GELLER

Enemies

We must be done with battle. We are old.
The heart-high fantasies that pricked us then,
the fierce, quick kindling, never will again
make such great fire. We languish in the cold
of dark, forgotten cellars ripe with mold.
Our causes gone, we are diminished men.
Our only course to tell the stories when
it was delight to watch the time unfold.

They say that age is wise. That is a lie.
Old tyrants counsel peace because they must.
What seems like careful husbandry is just
a smaller measure from a feeble hand,
and when the mouthing elders standing by
keep still, it is because they do not understand.

GEORGE SZIRTES

Tritina

Every morning they waited for the postman.
They talked and fretted, or would go for a walk,
examine their nails or fetch something from the cupboard.

Even when there was nothing in the cupboard
it filled the time between rising and the postman
whose steps they listened for, recognizing his walk

on the gravel drive. There was nothing but the postman.
There was always the waiting, and the long walk
up the hill. There was always the talking and the cupboard,
as if the postman could walk straight through the cupboard.

GAIL WHITE

On Asperity Street

My deep Southern family
all loved to eat:
Thanksgiving dinners
and barbecued wieners
and fish fries with hushpuppies
in summer's heat.
We were just middle class
but we made both ends meet
and we put on no airs
but we did have our pride,
and nothing to hide
on Asperity Street.

Our patriotism
did not need a push
below Mason-Dixon –
we voted for Nixon,
we voted for Bush
(even W. Bush).
We didn't drive Cadillacs,
didn't wear fur,
but all of us knew
who our ancestors were.
Adultery always
was very discrete
and no one was gay
(or at least didn't say)
and our drunks drank at home
on Asperity Street.

We respected ourselves
when our fortune went smash
and we looked down on people
who couldn't pay cash.

We gave up our steaks
but we still paid the rent
and the government (Yanks)
never gave us a cent.
Whatever our plight
we stood on our own feet.
We looked out for ourselves
and owed nobody thanks,
but formed into ranks
of the Christian and white,
the politically right
and the forces of light
on Asperity Street.

GEORGE SZIRTES

The Thirties

It was the Thirties once again. Shop doors
opened on hunger and long queues for soup,
the poor, clothed by the same half-empty stores,

stood round in doorways in a ragged group;
the unemployed were drunk in railway stations,
rumours of war played on a constant loop.

The Furies were running out of patience
reduced to muttering curses and the lost
were lost in their own preoccupations.

In feral offices, the running cost
of living was calculated down to pence
by those who needed least and owned the most.

Imperial glamour was the last defence.
The cinema played all-out games of doom
on borrowed power. Even our dreams were dense,

crowding us out of every empty room.
We threw each other out for lack of rent.
We were the bust remains of what was boom.

And knowing this, that none of it was meant,
not quite precisely as the world turned out
but as a fanciful presentiment,

was of no consolation. None could doubt
what was happening. The sea was emptiness
out of which light emerged. One distant shout

and it was here, the water's fancy dress
of time as tide, the crowds along the street
jostling to hear a demagogue's address.

Where else was all the troubled world to meet?
Why was the water rushing to the door?
At whose damp walls were the loud waves to beat?

MARK BLAEUER

An Argument for Neutering

So many good dogs in the world,
yet little in the way
of butleresque humanity
to offer them filet.

So many nice cats in the world,
so few maids in the vast
throng of our seething peoplehood
to meow a hymn for Bast.

So many morons in the world,
I wonder at Darwinian
or Providential circumstances
doling out dominion.

KEVIN O'SHEA

In the Dark

1

Under the window tree, there's something back
then gone as he looks there.

The moon's trespassing gives the boy some light
while faking sleep, aware
parents are what visit when it's late.

They check and aren't the ghost.

By lying how the smothered dolls are strewn,
he tricks who knows the most.

2

The gale on vacation can't wash away
the shore's barnacled stories
of shark attacks, in water punching bulkheads,
where boys defend the gory.

Ribs of waves reaching the hot sand were cracked
with wind and foamy arcs,
bobbing who'd put their marrow in it.

Every glare had a shark.

3

Nobody ever locked the cellar door.

The old air shivered flies.

His heart was close to jumping through his neck

when he grasped there's just supplies.

Upstairs, the parents emptied

bottles, preserved here in the dark. A light

switched and they found him seized.

CONRAD GELLER

When You Are Through With Me

When you are through with me I will not pine
Like antique lovers waiting just to die
Of lust undone and passion gone awry.
Since love is neither bane nor anodyne,
We'll make our breach, dividing yours and mine,
Old stubs of pleasure, menus of desire,
Unlovely ashes of a sometime fire
Banked by neglect or smothered by design.

When we do meet, in some odd time and place,
You with yours and I with mine, let's say
The civil thing and keep a civil face
As if all happened in a different way,
As if in fact I did outdo disgrace
To falsify another yesterday.

HENRY KING

Bounds

The airport's full of people going on summer holidays, but the mood is tense. We're late. Two hours' delay, the kind of thing that's bound to happen with cheap flights. Meanwhile, a string quartet – on tour, perhaps – tunes up and plays folk songs to entertain us and kill time.

While we wait, I think how in two months' time I'll be back through here, the British summer long since finished. Nearby, a mother plays with her daughter; two men discuss their late father's funeral. On my own, I string my earphones up, and listen: "Homeward bound,

I wish I was; homeward bound..." Home, where I've been just once before. Last time was eighteen months ago, when a string of lights shone round the Christmas tree. But summer in B.C. will be different, with the sun out till late, and at the beach, productions of Shakespeare's plays –

surprising though I find hearing those plays in Canadian accents. At the furthest bound of the western world, where English is the late-comers' language, I feel an altered sense of time, as if the calendars began in summer, and history's just as long as a piece of string.

Now they've secured the wings with bits of string, or something, and we board. The captain plays apologetic. But the sky's clear, it being summer, and we cross the distances in one smooth bound, arriving just behind our scheduled time. It's early evening here, not yet late,

though with the eight hour difference, it feels late.
I can't make many trips on a shoestring
budget; I don't know when the next time
I'll come will be. However often, this place,
unfamiliar to me, to which I'm bound
by family, is my home, at least for the summer.

When I leave in late summer, I'll be bound here
by a heartstring, stretched taut across the time-zones
as the paper-cup telephones I used to play with.

Adam, Afterwards

The first gift was the garden, although it preceded me.
You could say I was the gift and the garden received me.
Either way, it was entrusted into my care.
The second gift God gave me was the power
of speech: I only had to mouth a creature's name
for it to be so present it seemed to come
in obedience to my call. I also named the plants,
bar two God had already chosen; and the fragrance
of every flower and texture of each fruit
rose to my palate when I spoke of it.

Eve was the third, the first I had to drop hints for,
and the last of all came not from God, but her.
It wasn't because she said it tasted sweet, when
she came home with a piece of fruit half-eaten,
but because she said it had no flavour
I thought it must be safe to accept the offer.
And yes: it melted with every bite, leaving
the taste of nothingness on my tongue.
At first we felt no change. Then I felt ill.
I gagged and retched, but instead of bile,
new words forced their way into my mouth
and through my lips. Disgusted, I spat them out.

What were they – 'good' and 'evil'? Nothing answered
when I called them. Worse, my strange cries scared
the other animals away. Before,
anything absent had only been elsewhere.
Now we had words for things we'd never seen,
and they revealed a world we'd never known.
When we were sent away, I think we were meant
to find out what those words referred to. We haven't;
but sometimes I think I've glimpsed them, in the shadows,
tangled together – the way God must have spied us
as He walked through the garden the day we chose
to make love secretly, behind the trees.

BRIAN STANLEY

Loon

How laughable it was to claim this land
for crown or cross, to think the seaborne peal
of progress or the apostolic brand
would bring its vast intransigence to heel.
No garden this, no paradise foretold,
an older, colder place than scripted hell,
immune to musketman and raven scold
and heedless of the prelapsarian spell.

Thus laughter was what hailed the new breed,
a spectral parody of human mirth,
and then a call of hollowness and need
as ancient as the caverns of the earth,
but still it seemed, to all who paddled forth,
a ululating arrow pointing north.

LESLIE MONSOUR

Summer Again

The ink-drop bumblebee invades
 The squashes, bloom by bloom,
Amid the beans that weave in braids
 And dangle from their loom.

The lizard, livening its bones,
 Pretends that it can print
Its belly on the blazing stones
 Beside the cooling mint,

Where cabbage butterflies perform
 A papery ballet
And dodge the garden hose's warm,
 Rainbow-illuminated spray.

The scene, familiar and brief,
 Age after age returns –
As green returns to summer leaf,
 Before the forest burns.

LOIS WILLIAMS

Seahorse

Of all the tanks in the aquarium
yours pulls the crowd. We gather in half-light
to watch your fabricated ocean, wait
to see the gravel move and you become
the prototypal horse and brother swum
to us upright from another field. Sleight
performer, dangler hiding in plain sight,
what happens in your spiny cranium?

You move with such intention that I cry,
for you are ancient, private, and my gaze
(too much the interloper's) steals from you
analogies – foal, yearling, reason why
we have to stop polluting – while you graze
the planted sea grass, blink as horses do.

ROBERT BOUCHERON

Safety Matches

My babies all lie sleeping
Inside a cardboard pyx,
Their thirty-four red nightcaps
Set tight on wooden sticks.

Their coverlet is printed
With diamonds white and blue.
It slides back to reveal them,
Immaculate and true.

I take one out to wake it
By striking it on the head.
It smiles for me a moment,
Then shrivels and is dead.

BRIAN STANLEY

All Is Best

In memory of G.H.S.

The day is hot and summer sounds belie
the ritual words that sever ghost from man.
For now this vaulted crowd becomes a clan
(they also mourn who only stand and sigh)
acknowledging in sober dress and tie
the last patrician. Music fills the span
and no departure from the tasteful plan
offends the ear or disconcerts the eye –
all brightness left outside, all grief confined.
In gloom among the solemn and polite
assembled for a parting act of grace
I ask, though more to hope than faith inclined,
that sightless Milton usher him through night
to blind Cecilia's luminous embrace.

Mogul Sunset

The shrink, like all the others, is a quack
who thinks he has me pegged and pigeonholed,
that early childhood deprivation, lack

of love, caused my compulsion to enfold,
decreed in adulthood I'd manifest
an infant need by what I'd seize and hold.

It's true each acquisition spurred my quest
for more, as every gain revealed a void,
but I hoped one day, sated, I would rest

with assets fixed and round about deployed,
take stock, indulge in pleasant reckoning
and revel in fulfilment, unemployed.

A prison has its own concentric rings,
though few of us present a risk of flight:
white-collar felons, po-faced, puttering

or watching amber fade away to night,
when I will shed what's left, return to birth,
in sleep reclaim as my remaining right

the idle plenitude I lost, my worth.

KIM BRIDGFORD

Misery Loves Company

Misery is having a party tonight.
Bent-Out-of-Shape is there, and so is Malice.
Everybody's looking for a fight.

Whose marriage has fallen? Whose field has blight?
Gossip prances in between Bitter and Jealous.
Misery is having a party tonight.

The hors d'oeuvres are laced with bile and plight,
And the wine that is served is Napa Salacious.
Everybody's looking for a fight.

Misery is married to Just-Served-You-Right;
The children are bitchy, each argument specious.
Misery is having a party tonight.

Come in, and sit down. You're a welcome sight.
Lust swings through the door, and hits on Curvaceous.
And everybody's looking for a fight.

In walk Small-Minded, Cold-Blooded, and Hate.
Martinis are handed to Sterling and Cautious.
Misery is having a party tonight,
And everybody's looking for a fight.

LESLIE MONSOUR

Forbidding Fruit

Resigned to wheelchair life, too weak to stand,
She swore her body had become her hearse.
The family stopped eating from her hand
The day she put her mortgage in reverse.
Likewise, her mood regressed from foul to worse:
Restricted diet, ill-prepared and bland,
The mortifying mop-ups by the nurse –
She killed a kind word with a reprimand.

Still, fleeting joy could take her by surprise,
As when she bit into that Bartlett pear:
Sweet recognition danced across her eyes,
Glad juice spilled down her cheek into her hair.
She held the bitten fruit out like a prize
That none, not one of them, wanted to share.

BRIAN STANLEY

Op. posth.

One cello more to swell the string quartet
to five unfretted fingers on a hand
and carve, with three parts joy and two regret,
a monument, lace-delicate and grand.

One cello more to spite the Viennese,
their self-regard, their smug *Gemütlichkeit*:
"Herr Schubert can be counted on to please
but greatness never grows from work so slight."

One cello more to solo after death
before new candles light the music room,
intoning into silence, soft as breath,
five pizzicato notes – ta dum, *Te Deum*.

STEWART SANDERSON

Doggerland

Perhaps they gathered on a hill
and watched their valleys fill with water,
lamenting, in their doggerel,
a drowned son or a missing daughter
carried out to sea by waves
which swept away their mother's grave.

Or maybe they had left by then,
compelled to choose between two coasts
across which they had often been
on foot. Each way, their dripping ghosts
return to us, infrequently,
caught in the gleaming nets which we

haul up out of their sunken realm.
Amidst the dying mackerel, flints
glitter, still sharp. Air overwhelms
the lumps of ancient woodland sent
us by the Earthshaker, to prove
his power, and his capricious love.

CHRIS O'CARROLL

Romeo & Juliet

Although they had been (well, you've got to be) carefully taught to
Hate all of the people their relatives thought that they ought to,
At first sight they fell hard. They played passionate, eloquent scenes,
Then they died for their star-crossed love – silly, impetuous teens.

Some scholars insist we can't rate them authentically "tragic"
Because they were done in by chance, not fate's classic bad magic.
But still, they've acquired a mystique that few couples can equal.
And how many love affairs since theirs have written their sequel?

If you were born, say, white or black, Muslim, Christian or Jew,
Such that someone's been brought up to hate you because you are you,
And your heart strays to some place your tribe would prefer it not go,
Then you know what those kids from Verona paid dearly to know –

That the yes of two souls tells more truth than the no of two factions,
That hatred and love can be equally fatal attractions.

Brothers Wright

Hail, Wilbur! Hail, Orville! The Wrights got it right.
They learned how to steer, and our species took flight.
Now the portliest wight is a wind-wafted sprite
Who can soar like a kite to a fabulous height.

We can't blame the Wrights for the Geist of the Zeit –
For in-flight cuisine that is unfit to bite,
For seating that packs us sardine-ishly tight,
Or detritus heaped up by the hijackers' spite.

Those brothers from Dayton we cannot indict
For slights at the airport security site,
Where uniformed personnel seem to delight
In pat-downs that strike us as quite impolite.

Air travel today is a nightmarish rite,
But those two are in no wise at fault for our plight.
Which is why I write *Hail!* Which is why I invite
You to join me in hailing. The Wrights got flight right.

LOIS WILLIAMS

The Coat

Some nights when I can't sleep I think of Paul
at Pittsburgh's 24-hour Cleaners, who
the first time I went in regarded me
a friend – the coat I'd brought him doing all
the introductions: broken blue suede coat
a friend had gifted me, her illnesses
too numerous to bother dressing for.
Paul said he hadn't cleaned a coat like that
since Jimmy Carter won the White House, said
whoever left you this was living large,
said he could tell a garment's provenance
by how it draped: this coat was sapphire bred
with steel, its split lapels two fighting fish;
suede aphrodisiac, a deep blue wish.

GEORGE SZIRTES

The Voices

One voice was picking itself off the floor,
another was ringing bells at the front door,
a third was shouting nonsense. There were more.

The voice of the old woman on the stairs,
the voice of Goldilocks and the Three Bears,
the voice of the man minding his own affairs.

The voice that held itself like a frail glass,
the voices on the train that we watched pass,
the breaking voice at the back of the class.

It was the night. A crowd of voices. Streets
with dogs and poor, the barks and brays and bleats,
reiterations, cries, endless repeats.

We heard the voices speaking very low,
familiar voices that we didn't know,
the voice that stuck, the voice that once let go.

Let go, the voice said. Letting go is best.
Stray lines, the overheard, the voice addressed,
and so into the night with all the rest.

CLAUDIA GARY

Royal Hotline, 1987

The Princess is believed to have suffered from bulimia nervosa, [which] afflicts millions of American women. –"Di's Private Battle," People Magazine, August 3, 1992

Soon, Princess Di, you'll lend this thing your name,
crowning a hushed disease with regal grace.
Beauty salons will buzz; women will claim
to know you. But for now I stuff my face
and then go toss my cookies at the throne
in secret. Are we sisters, who have yet
to learn this malady is fashion's clone?
And meanwhile, where's my image? I forget.

Maybe I left it by the forced-air dryer
tucked in a magazine, or by the sink
where a woman's hands massaged my scalp for hire.
Wait, here's a doctor's number. Do you think
he'll help close the two decades, plus or minus,
that I've been kneeling like Your Royal Highness?

Antiseptic

Her father dabbed peroxide on her foot
and watched it bubble where there'd been a splinter,
reminding him of something he had learned
from training in the Air Force. "It's surprising,"
he said, "but you will never be without
an antiseptic: your very own urine."

Her mother shouted from the next room, "Hey!
Don't tell her things like that!" and the girl sensed
new light, but couldn't say just what it was
or whether it was pretty. Pretty meant
so much to Mother: pretty furniture,
sculpture and bric-a-brac beside the window

to cast unusual shadows. Pretty, too,
were glimmers of the 59th Street Bridge
as seen from Sutton Place in bumpy-textured
new paintings by an alcoholic aunt.
But what was wedged below the prettiness,
and how far down? Was it buried too deep

to tweeze it out and cleanse the wound? She soon
would find an elixir captured between
décor and rough landscape, between alluring
reflections of an old bridge on the oil-
slicked surface of a long-polluted river
and fish you mustn't eat, swimming below.

KIM BRIDGFORD

Speaking Truth to Power

First, they thanked her for her honesty.
They liked that she was passionate, sincere.
She found old files. She reported, as her duty.
Yet little things began to bother her.

Their wings were bland and gray: and like a shadow,
There they were, officious, writing down
Her violation of Rule 1b. Ditto
D, and f, and constantly rewritten.

She thought that it must be her imagination.
She tried to work.

Then, they began to scare her.

They showed up at her meetings and her office.
They smiled, and told her to do much more with less.
They moved her to a remote, secure location
All by herself. And then they took her chair.

Trains

We used to count the cars in trains;
We used to have no enemies.
We thought we'd learn what this life means.

One day, we'd know how *this* explains
The *that* of life. Like histories,
We used to count the cars in trains –

Graffiti, livestock, various grains –
Objectified the moving haze.
We thought we'd learn what this life means.

The sky-cup brims, and over-rains,
The colors in hyperboles.
We used to count the cars in trains.

Now all seems different like the scenes
Of archetypes, mythologies.
We thought we'd learn what this life means.

Add one and one and one: just ones.
The notion of a larger arc will tease.
We used to count the cars in trains.
We thought we'd learn what this life means.

BRIAN STANLEY

Genesis

Shuffling seaward comes the brute,
sullen, banished, destitute.

Heavy-browed, he scans the stars,
carnal Venus, angry Mars,
while the ocean's rippled sheet,
which begat him, licks his feet.

That realm glitters out of reach,
this one left him on the beach:
upward awe and outward dread
mark the limits of his tread.

Suddenly the clouds converge,
pulsing with a sentient surge,
and a flicker lights his face,
adding *sapiens* to his race.

Thunder, sharp and echoless,
penetrates his barrel chest,
driving out in summoned tears
all the prehistoric years.

Rapt, he kneels on midnight sands,
cupping seashells in his hands,
as the droplets become rain
and cognition floods his brain.

Dawn at last brings cloudless calm
and a gentle breeze as balm
to the figure standing tall,
newly risen from his fall.

Striding inland goes the brute,
surly, earthbound, resolute.

The Ledger

The argument gets in the way,
fills up the room and blights the day,
prompting a mental résumé
of partner Jill by partner Jay:
her lotion, cream and scent array;
her wanting to "touch up" his grey;
her view of Mozart as passé;
her dancing to "YMCA";
her notion that his boss is gay.

But sound accounting must survey
both sides, see what the credits weigh:
her gamine grin; her killer sway
of hips when strutting to portray
a vamp who'd lead a man astray
(his mum would use the word "sashay");
her tap of heels across parquet;
her serious look while she'll essay
a dress bought for that thing in May,
as though about to try ballet;
her gift for childish, antic play.

There's more to list in Column A:
the kindness which turns none away;
the heart which never would betray
a friend, or let a bigot bray;
the eyes which cannot hide dismay –
and now the faintest, fleeting ray
tells him no longer to delay,
to call the balance black and pay,
to show his feet aren't made of clay,
to pour her glass of chardonnay
and, scotch in hand, at last to say
his *mea culpa*: "Sorry. Stay."

MARCUS BALES

The Trolls

Hear the drudges and the trolls –
Flagrant trolls!
What a world of bull and lies their zealotry unrolls!
How they blather blather blather
Out in cyberspace tonight
Where they're worked up in a lather
While the rational would rather
Get the facts and get them right;
Sending post, post, post,
As if who could post the most
Of their tin-eared fabulation in this shallowest of shoals
By the trolls, tolls, trolls, trolls,
Trolls, trolls, trolls –
As if volume were the value of the trolls.

Hear the yellow stay-home trolls –
Verbal trolls!
What a world of cowardice a chicken-hawk unrolls!
How they boast of their deferment
And the jobs to which it led
At a time when their demur meant
That some kid without preferment
Went to risk his life instead.
Wrapped in crucifix and flag –
Real Americans would gag –
They try to cheat opponents out of going to the polls
Oh the trolls, tolls, trolls, trolls,
Trolls, trolls, trolls –
By the slimy nickel-dimey little trolls!

How they slither from their holes
Slimy trolls!
And what a gush of gross self-aggrandizing little goals
How their racist views are coded

As a struggle for states' rights,
They're patrolling locked and loaded
As the safety-net's eroded
Except for wealthy whites.
How they screed across the screen
Apoplectic in their spleen
In an angry flush of selfish shit from puppet-socky souls:
From the trolls, trolls, trolls, trolls,
Trolls, trolls, trolls,
All the needy greedy grunting of the trolls.

CHARLES HUGHES

Monday Is Pizza Night

A teenage Pakistani boy is missing
His legs. He lost them when a U.S. drone
Fired missiles at a little bus stop crowd.
The bus was how he got to school, but now
The trip's too much. He'd hoped to be a doctor.

A pizza place just blocks from home, our favorite.
An older woman is vomiting out front –
Into a trash can – while her husband bends
To comfort her, left hand on her left elbow,
His right at work to quiet both her shoulders.

"She didn't take her pills," her husband says.
The restaurant owner, unconsolated, seems not
To listen. "Vertigo from Parkinson's,
They think; they're doing tests." The teenage boy
Screams in the night with burning, missing legs.

Evening, six-thirty. A late August sun
Keeps pumping heat and light – the way a heart,
To no apparent purpose, can pump blood
After the brain is irretrievably dead –
As if life had a will and its own reasons –

As if a larger life than what we know
Had biased every life toward living on
(Maybe why love is the great good) – as if
Life, in the end, could really turn untragic
And weekly pizzas not go unforgiven.

CONTRIBUTORS

Charles Hughes is the author of the poetry collection, *Cave Art* (Wiseblood Books, 2014). His poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *America*, *The Anglican Theological Review*, *The Christian Century*, *Iron Horse Literary Review*, *The Rotary Dial*, *The Sewanee Theological Review*, *Think Journal*, and elsewhere. He worked as a lawyer for thirty-three years before his retirement and lives with his wife in the Chicago area. "January Evening, 10 P.M." is reprinted by permission of Wiseblood Books; all rights reserved.

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