

Dead to Me

Gary Campanella

Deeper Dream

There is no moon
It's painted on the sky
Nor are the stars
Any more than deeper dreams
Or tiny little screams
Pleading for the night to end

This desert keeps no secrets
Very long or very strong
And I should know
For I have stood alone
On rocky ragged ledges
My ears into the gale
My eyes into the spin
Of desert skies
I've felt the eyes
And watched the shadows
Just beyond the firelight
Heard the muffled laughter
Seen what I was after
In a momentary shimmer
Bright to blue to black
Felt it slipping back
Like rain or silver sand
Through my shaking hands

Once I climbed a tree
High enough to feel the earth recede
To feel that we're deceived
To feel the foolish play
Of light and wind
On trembling leaves
To see the leaves in autumn
Drop like falling stars
And crash into the earth
And though I was afraid
I lingered on while holding on
Waiting on the sky
Waiting on the ground

In between as in a deeper dream

There is no moon
The stars are small white lies

As in a deeper dream

Tommy, 1958-1997

Mona Lisa's Sister

Not twenty years of seeing
Blue skies in your eyes
Horses on the run
Mountains on the fly

Not twenty years of saving
Honey from the hive
Hands upon your heart
Words to disbelieve

Not twenty years
Not twenty years
And yet the devil dares
To dance alone with you
And yet the angels dare to writhe
And sing in warm desire
When your music rises

Not twenty years of brooding
You were always in disguise

Not twenty years of smiling
And yet your smile
Was sad as summer rain
As hard as sunny days
As fierce as any dragon

Not twenty years of seeing
You weren't the Mona Lisa
You were blonder bolder braver
More mysterious by far

Not twenty years of seeing
You weren't the Mona Lisa
Not the weaker sister
You're riding wild horses now
You're out there on the road

Kris, 1972-1991

Sandra at the End

1.

I think of Sandra on cold November mornings,
The sky steel gray,
The cornfields a stubble of broken stalks.

I think of Sandra unwrapping
The stuffed snake
I gave her once for Christmas.
I think of Sandra's innocence,
And the temptation her smile held then.

2.

Death for Sandra was her princess bedroom, her silk sheets,
Her pillow as soft as her daydreams.
Death was a summer night,
A song by The Doors,
A final fuck with tear-filled eyes.

Death for Sandra was not
The thud of her skull
On the cold wet pavement,

Or the wind toppling an empty can
In an empty alley.

3.

Overdose. DOA.
The end for Sandra was learning
That Eden had a time limit.

Sandra, 1962-1987

Blue Dragonfly

Nick you gave nothing but light
And took none in return
Your eyes looking left
Saw more than I see
Saw deep into trees
And your smile ruled the world

Nick of the land Atlantis
Travelling through our time
You flew the skies on sparrow's wings
And swam the seas with dolphins
You never sang surrender's song
And your smile ruled the world

Nick what miracle lived in you
What mystery in your cry
Your stillness is my gospel still
All across the earth
Down upon my knees
And your smile rules the world

Nick, 1988-2009

Lynda's Snake Poem

1.

I remember you badly
I remember you madly, sadly
On these nights I'm alone
The light in here like a cloud above
These walls that are crumbling to dust
I remember the twilight
When we kissed in the park
I remember the spark
And those strange stone faces looming

I remember you madly
In daydreams
The hours barely moving
The rain washing down the gutters
I remember the Saturday chores
And the television chat
And the daily whining
The nightly dining
Your ending slowly defining

And on those stone still nights
I think of Lynda
Long ago in college
Reading to me her latest poem
Saying *Gary there is no love*

2.

Because I remember you madly
Because I remember you sadly
I sometimes remember those long winter nights
Our eyes melting ice
And the way we kept holding hands

I sometimes remember
The trips to the clinic
And the secrets we shared
The way that we cared
And the trust we took care to develop

I sometimes remember the kissing
The longing for what we were missing

And the plans we tiptoed around

And I sometimes remember alone
Awake in the clear light of morning
Thinking that Lynda was wrong
Saying *Gary there is no love*

3.

But I wonder what happened
That day in the rain
And I wonder what happened in March
And the mysteries in your veins
When the veil was instantly drawn
And your tower went tumbling down
And why I gazed at the far horizon
While you went tumbling down

I can't say
I don't know
I remember it badly
Because I remember it madly
Sadly on these nights I'm alone
Badly as I sleepwalk the days
With so much broken in so many ways
And so many answers to question

And so I think about Lynda
Writing her poems on my arms
Sitting up nights in her bed
Her jeans full of holes like the years
Saying *Gary there is no love*

Naomi, 1962-2009

Swamp People

I dreamed you and I lost
In a Mississippi marsh,
Sloshing and stumbling
Through swamps and tangled vines,
There were snakes in the trees
And clouds of mosquitoes

I was your guide
But led the way by listening
To what you suggested,
And we walked slowly,
In heat, in humidity,
Deeper and deeper on meandering paths,
Cutting and hacking each step,
Half lost, searching for passage
To wide open space

We found people living
In wrecked cars and broken shacks,
Dogs barked at us,
And because more than once
I spied the glint of a shotgun
Poised in the underbrush,
I took detours and turns
You did not understand,
And led us down paths
That seemed a mistake

Later we found friends
And we drank water from tin can cups,
Sat on logs around smoky fires,
Stretched blankets and tarpaulins
Between trees for walls,
And were tempted to stop
When someone, maybe you, said
*To live our lives in such a place
Would make us free from wants,
And truth would somehow find us*

But things fell apart there
And eagles called,
And we walked on with an eye

On deep blue skies,
And the further we went
The further we wanted to go

And the more I miss you now

Scott, 1963-2009

Forgiveness

Forgive me if I see you in a garden
Your hair a little shorter
Your smile more naïve
It's just a vision
From a dream
From many years ago

Forgive me if I look away divided
My mind detached adrift
Like Dante in the forest
It's just a little déjà vu
That's happening again

Forgive me if I'm seeing someone else
Thinking I see you
It's just the weather
Clouds will clear
In blue sky I'll see you

And forgive me if I hesitate
Or act like something's wrong
It's just my stubborn disbelief
Fighting with my faith

I'll be waiting for so long

Lilly, 1959-1978

Near Miss

Debbie has blond hair, straight and dirty
She believes in her family
But her parents are rich and divorced.
She used to sleep with everybody but now she's born again.

Mick is cynical.
Back in school it was dope and drink to his rescue.
He hangs on to what's good.
He sidesteps what's bad.
He's never happy but sometimes psyched.

Debbie's off having an abortion.
Mick's the man.

Unnamed, 1999

To Susie, Here and Gone

With only night to darken stone and lonely
Remnants of timework temples, sandstone teeth
Grit and ground a yellow rose. Red rose gone.
You came before with Lisa pretty,
And a name and a past to make me cry to
Laugh at schoolyard days and monkey bar dust,
Cloudy empty grinning crystal dreaming.
Limestone temples fade away, yellow roses
Die with red just now forgotten today.
I grew in hours to want to smell your rose.
I tried but my slow death came crashing down,
My black rhythms pound beneath the flutes.

With *I'll be back* the legendary lie
You left, a cat, I forgot to say goodbye.

Susie, 1964-1998

The Watch

The day we buried my great grandmother Jackson
It was raining. Funerals were still eerie
For me then, so it seemed I knew it would.
I was sixteen and stayed in the back
And felt nothing strong (though I tried)
But a vague sense of something stopped-
Something that was there, and was no more.
She had lingered long at the edge of death-
A stroke some years earlier
Had left her an invalid, but she was never
Very senile and I remember thinking once,
When she gave me a watch for my birthday,
That her forever moving jaw muscle, which she had lost
Control of and which made her seem always
Wanting to say something, embarrassed her.
Her daughter, my grandmother, had just remarried
But still cared for her constantly those years.
At the wake she look relieved, tired
But relieved, everyone said so and it was true
But I still remember, and I remember it hurt,
When I looked up and saw my always smiling
Grandmother staring- I was wishing she would talk,
Or even cry, but she only stared.

It was hardest I think on my mother
Seeing her mother
Who was seeing her mother, cold,
And my mother, her daughter, soon
To file the divorce papers.
Mom just talked to her aunts and uncles.
I knew about the divorce of course,
The eldest son and all, and I'll never
Forget sitting at the wake that morning
In the back on those folding metal chairs
With my father.
I was watching my grandmother stare
And dad interrupted, *Gary,*
Your mother is a strong woman.
And my eyes moved in slow motion
From my grandmother, passed the coffin,
To my mother talking to my aunts and uncles,
I know I mumbled, suddenly overwhelmed-

And there was so much more I wanted to say,
And my jaw moved, but nothing would come out.

Arita McGillicuddy-Hess-Jackson, 1899-1976

LIFE + 20

PAYING HOMAGE TO 20 CENTURIES OF MISSING THE POINT
HE WORE RATS' TEETH TIED WITH TWIST TIES'
TO GOLD CHAINS ROUND HIS THICK BLACK NECK
HE WORE IRON CHAINS CLAMPED TIGHT AS A COFFIN
HE WORE HUMAN CHAINS - THE BOYZ IN FOR THE BASH
SIGNING A SOLEMN ALMOST SACRED BON VOYAGE SO REAL
I SAW LONELY WOMEN PACING WINDOW'S WALKS
I SAW VIKINGS RELEASE THEIR FLOWERED BURNING COMRADE
DRAGONHEADED SHIPBOARD TO THE OPEN SEA

I SAW MYSELF THE VICTIM'S BROTHER
WAIT LIKE SALT AND PEPPER
ON THE LAST SUPPER'S CRACKED CEDAR TABLE

David, 1968-1991

Rana,

I swear I knew you in Troy,
Where you danced the seven veils
Beneath the Arab stars,
With emeralds in your hair
And that single fold bracelet you wear.

No big deal
But your mark is on my skin,
I put it there myself I think
(it's kind of veiled to me)
But I feel like Marc Antony
With the sea and intrigue between us,
Before our voyage to Ephesus.

The sea seems to be the key
These
Days
A simple mystery
(gravity is haunting me)
If my feet get wet I drown.

No big deal
But I tonight I thought of you,
Dreamed of you, and your unmarked skin,
And your silk strong arms
Holding things together worlds and lives apart.

Dreamed of you as Rapunzel
Locked in a tower,
With your hair
Too short for escape
And your wit too sly to rely
On the dull self-serving yearning
Of boys who'll never be king.

Dreamed about your pharaoh eyes,
The deepest eyes I know,
Eyes that hold my sway and swagger,
Make me stupid,
Eyes that Dante must have dreamed of,
Eyes that ruined Troy,
Eyes that fall on me

And cancel gravity.

Rana, 1964-1998

She has the light

she has the light
she dances seven veils
her gaze attracts my smile
and speaks in rhythms
I can feel
I have known
I can fall asleep with
her voice is in my forest
and sways like a breeze
in the tops of trees

Antonieta, 1974-2003

News of Your Leaving

The neighborhood was out late
That windless autumn night
But not for you
Out on the street
Standing under trees
Under the buzzing wires
Under a billion stars
We talked about the other news
The TV news
Like husbands and wives and parents
Back to back
The kids playing hide and seek
Over and over
Disputing details
The defiance pantomime
Over and over
The mosquitoes biting

We talked
Halfway through the night
Then filed into our honeycomb hives
A little lost and a little indifferent
Until my wife and I were left alone
Standing on the corner
Waiting for our man
You
Lou
The street emptying
The wires buzzing
The streetlight beaming
Down down down through the trees

Lou, 1942-2013

I am your shadow
Cast on the ground
Cast on the muddy shore
Cast on the salt-filled sea
By a low fast-turning erne

Try to pin me down
You might
Try to pull me up
You can't
For I will pass through you
Following you
Holding you up to the light

The sun will rise
And so will I
The sun will set
And I'll be gone

I am your shadow
Holding you up to the light

After your day in the sun
You'll wonder what I have become
After you go to bed
You'll wonder what I had said
That gave you deeper dreams
Like snow in late December
But you won't quite remember
For I was never there
Never in your sight
No more real than light

I am your shadow
Holding you up to the light

Irma, 1920-2003 & Helen, 1917-2006

What I Wanted to Hear

One Morning After
You were gone
When I got up the sun
Was out but it soon
Went in - clouds camped
Out for the day so yesterday's
Snow had no luster
This morning - but a
Fine walking day it was
No wind
And I was feeling new born
Not nearly so alone
As yesterday so I walked -
A squirrel spread eagle
On the side of an oak
Bitched and squawked to
'cause winter was coming /
Know I know I answered
But we're all fattened
And sleep will be nice
Even the huge crow
That flew just above me
In my airspace
Pine to pine across my path
As they always seem
To fly on gray days
Could not bother me -
Beneath his matted
Breast of black feathers
Lay his wishbone -
Wishbones of crow -
I found a snowball on
The ground and I threw
It at a library - it stuck
Against the wall and I
Knew someone would think
That whoever threw it there
Was the one who made it but
We live on assumptions and
Knowing it are no worse for it -
The snow on the evergreen
In front of me lay like

A Christmas card picture -
I felt like Scrooge the morning
After so I daydreamed
About telling you this
Like you were alive
I was excited and your
Reaction - laughing mostly -
Was just what I wanted to hear

Tim, 1956-2013

The Fisherman

When I see
Sunlight reflect off a lake
Or an old volcano rising
From the forest floor
Or a lone fisherman
Canoeing
It now will spark
Inside me feelings
More than thoughts
And these may drive
Me wild with wonder
About the top
Of that mountain
Or holding that sun
Near my heart
Or maybe, mostly, with
What that fisherman knows.

But I learned quickly
That a photo
Of this scene
Does not capture it
And not only because
I'm framing openness
But also because
A part of the scene
Is missing – you –
You are not there –
And so to capture
That wonder I
Must not move –
I must be still
I must let the wonder
Capture me.

And once it has me
Then I can fight it
Or fondle it
Close my eyes
To it or doubt it
Or wander across the earth with it
For as long as

I don't leave it
It won't leave me.

It's like us.

It was part of me
Before I knew it touched you.

And I can deny
The wonder now
But as long as
I don't leave it
It will take me to you
When I want to be taken.

That's what I know
And that's what I would tell you
But when I wander to the edge
Of a certain lake
I wonder
If you know different now
And if you could be
That fisherman for me
And if you are not
If I could be
That fisherman for you.

Bart, 1937-2011

The Ghosts of New England

I remember walking home
In the gathering chill
Of the year's first frost.
I was ten years old, and cold,
And happy alone by the woods,
By the fox and raccoon and moles,
Out where we lived then,
Out passed the suburbs,
Where the winding two-laner
Barely held cars from Boston streets.

I was walking along the guardrail,
A practiced skill,
Hopping and balancing from post to cable to post,
My sneakers worn soft as moccasins,
With a sideways eye on wind-whipped leaves,
On pumpkins carved, perched on porches like gargoyles,
And a steady ear cocked to the eerie source
Of wind chimes and dog barks.

Along the road I edged in failing light,
Halloween was in the trees,
In the smell of the leaves,
In the eyes of ghosts
Alive in the shadows,
Peering out from in between
The fading day and dark,
From granite caves in woods like these,
From upper attic eaves and cobwebbed cellars.
Feeding on wind and water,
On those lifeless, leafless trees,
On the smell of winter on autumn nights,
Walking me home in the gathering chill.

* * *

Adventuring,
I left the roadside, plunged into the woods,
Discovered a graveyard forgotten,
Two centuries old, the headstones broken,
Knocked over so there was no way to know
If I trod on earth or grave.
There were field mice in plain view, a rare sight,
And a wet leaf swamp smell on dry ground.
Overhead through leafless black trees
Broken high clouds glowed orange,
Flowed northeast towards Maine
And the deep white woods I'd been to once.
There were no planes or distant voices
Yet I was not a boy afraid, yet I
Was weirdly secure in the cooling twilight,
In the strange clearing, in the dark woods.
The names on the stones held wonder
And the ghosts,
The ghosts were there.
They knew it as I somehow knew it,
They breathed in the earth and the air
And the trees in the circle around them,
And the circle breathed in them.
And I a young explorer approached
With the careless respect of a boy
To coax them out of hiding,
Almost,
To coax the ghosts to show themselves,
To meet me face to face,
Someday, though not that day,
For it was getting dark
And I was just a boy, alone and late for dinner.

* * *

Later by years I found them again,
In Boston.
They edged near my vision and touch near trees or water
Near twilight or dawn or sometimes more sadly more lost
In alleyways or doorways or dumpsters,
With the homeless, with the crazy,
After business suits speed walking by.
They followed me home from bus stops
And crept through windows left open.
I was busy, I had no time to console them, then,
But I sensed they knew me,
Sensed they forgave me,
Sensed they knew that someday
I would find some way
To pause, and listen,
And meet them face to face.

Later still they found me out West,
Beset though I was by dust devil ghosts,
The lockjawed ghosts of the Southwest deserts,
Humorless ghosts that permit no errors,
Hungry ghosts of sun rays and sand,
Ghosts that melt in water,
Ghosts that can be *fooled*;
They found me resting, weary, counting hours,
The ghosts from my past by a Joshua tree,
Waiting it seemed for a lull in the wind,
Calm as the eye of a hurricane,
Smelling of twilight and mulch.
They were barely with me, made of memory
But more real like an old family photo
Of people you never knew,
With faces you've always known.

* * *

Today I am grown they're almost lost
They're the smell of the rain
Or the eye of a crow,
They're hiding in the upturned leaves
Of a white birch on a moonless night.
Today I wait for them special, as I must,
Ignored too long in my dark kitchen.

Today I am grown
And the ghosts lie in wait as heron,
Lie like fate for old believers,
Lie ready for the Easter sunrise, cold,
Down by the river, geese drifting north again.
They're deep in the North Woods of Maine
Where I walk trailless, creekside, careful,
Searching the underbrush, hopping and balancing
From rock to mud to rock.
Practiced and prepared,
A freeze-dried dinner, an old compass,
My boot soles worn as in greeting,
As in memory, out here passed the roads,
The homes, the trails even.
Today I seek them alone in myself,
Conjured almost as the breath I exhale
Mingles with the unspoiled air
Mingles with the lingering vision
Of a ten year old cold in the dusk.

The ghosts.
The ghosts of New England.
With tri-corner hats or buckskin breeches,
Now as then,
Taking the long way home.

Me, 1959-