

Trouble And Honey

By Jilly Dybka

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The Magician's Tale: *Harpur Palate*

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For Darryl

Honey

The Last Big Bet

When the apocalypse calls and really
there isn't much that can be done, I want
to be playing poker with my family.

We'd play while we wait for nukes to bombard,
as the sedate deck compliantly grants
the King With the Axe, exactly the card

that my mother needs. Anthrax: *I draw one.*
Dirty bombs: *I have to call.* Jet plane bombs:
Raise you two. Bioweapons: *Fold.* Imagine

the night of the apocalypse. There is
nothing that is left to lose: *I am all in.*

Queen of Diamonds

Again the neon lights blinked their will, shone
over the lucky and the luckless out on
Paradise Road. I sleepwalked, not so alone,
inside the marrow of a dream, which I won

with dice and chips. I chased the scent of Chance's
perfume through casino floor and bitter yearnings.
You strode with me, made nodding acquaintances,
and wore the shoes that you bought with your winnings.

It's as if I am thinking of how Fremont
Street looks (just before the dawn) after being
inside the whole night. O Queen of Diamonds, won't
you tender something up your sleeve for me?

Self-Portrait with Roulette Wheel
(after Lucie Brock-Broido)

There, a man pushes the spin button
on the slot machine with the end of his cane.

With you, speaking is unnecessary, even
when we both have the same thought,

so if you were to utter the meaning, the words would fly
out of your mouth like new butterflies

breaking out of their sacks, flitting
away, wing by wing, in a wind the color of neon

across a nicotine sky, the blur
of a weekend in Vegas.

I will go on loving as I love the burn card
and the design on the back of a deck.

As I love the laughable or a big bet
so quiet it is next to prayer.

Ryman Auditorium, Nashville, TN

So in this town all is nimbus rhinestone
Nudie Suits and fading whiskey cologne.
1950's Grand Ole Opry, hey June
Carter and Mr. Johnny Cash, no stress-
ing just yes yes underneath the hick moon
painting Lower Broad, everyone obsess-
ing on love done gone wrong, a tree, a snake,
a man's boots underneath her bed, a moot
marriage, sham union complete with a cake,
hit song, new Cadillac (ain't she a beaut—
just like Miss Kitty Wells, Nashville's Garbo...).

The band reels in the bar before they play
behind Hank Williams, Honky Tonk Hobo,
and the night begins scuffling with the day.

Found Poem: Preston Sturges' Eleven Rules For Box Office Appeal

A pretty girl is better than an ugly one.
A leg is better than an arm.
A bedroom is better than a living room.
An arrival is better than a departure.
A birth is better than a death.
A chase is better than a chat.
A dog is better than a landscape.
A kitten is better than a dog.
A baby is better than a kitten.
A kiss is better than a baby.
A pratfall is better than anything.

Detroit

The loose-jointed skeleton man clack-clacks
a rhythm on his thighbone. 1 2-3,
1 2-3, scuttling under the smokestacks
of the factory. A glad calliope
wheezes in his head—he is one bright thing
in a range of grays. A sack of wobbles.
The skeleton gentleman is marching,
meandering. He steps and he rattles
on the pavement as he leads a parade
of sooty pigeons. They coo and they play.
Skeleton man is a certainty unmade—
he is all cold bones on an April day.

Here Begins the Book of the Tales of Circus Zimba

In April, when flowers should have nodded,
And farmer's draft horses should have plodded
Through fields agreen with rows of growing grain,
The dust bowl came and blew it all away.
I was a writer for the local press.
The paper failed, and though I did my best
To track down work so I could earn my pay,
No luck. So I joined WPA
And that Summer I met up with the Fair
To interview the tribe who traveled there.
To faraway places (some known, some not)
We journeyed jolly -- a motley lot.
America in the 1930's
Was a place to embrace one's destinies
So the 18 freaks who became my friends
Shared with this writer their lives and legends.
We left from Cheatham County, Tennessee,
to start life as one in the heart of Dixie.
I have your ear, so I will take my chance
To share the sideshow's tales of happenstance,
And how the freaks and I are all akin. . . .
And thus, with a magician, I begin.

The Magician's Tale
For Vanteen The Magician

I. The Early Years

A carnival came to town the same week
I graduated from high school. I told
my mother I was going. The head geek
gave me a midway job. I'd watch the old
magician's melodic hands. (A penny
dose of spectacle for all the farm sons
and housewives.) Then came the Army
and Uncle Sam. The war called the Great One. . . .
I'd hone my ethereal fingerings
off duty with cards or a billiard ball.
Back in the States, I had to pull some strings,
but got through the College of Manual
Dexterity and Prestidigitation.
Poof! I became ZAMTEEN: The Magician.

II. The Circus of the Fantastic Begins

Torchy Rae and I lived in Echo Park.
We purchased old show equipment. I drove
a Yellow taxicab. One day I parked
the cab for good and hit the road. We roved
California with our very own show!
Our act was Super-X, Shrunkn Head and
the Blade Box. For a "donation" we showed
all the crowd how it was done. Rae handled
snakes, and was Atomic Girl. I would light
bright torches from her fingertips or tongue.
Alone, onstage, wrapped in fiery slight
of hand, we were voltaic. And hard stung
by love, I guess you could say. That's the way
I remember her today: young, aflame.

Zebra Man's Tale

For Horace Ridler

I. The Early Years of Omi

Fought against the Kaiser for my High King--
I was an officer by rank and class.
Of my time spent there I won't be speaking.
Not of the trenches, the shells, nor the gas.
Enough's been said about those things that broke
apart the light inside the men who lived.
In England I was just another bloke.
I looked for work. My wife and I survived
day to day with any job I could find.
Then I read a book about Captain Cook
and saw the decorated natives lined
with inks upon their skin. I found my hook.
That's when I opted for the tattoos.
There was not very much I had to lose.

II. A Modern Primitive

Found an old Chinaman with a machine
to make the inkmarks that would always stay.
An ancient gesture: skin and inks and line.
Underlaid the hieroglyphs of the day...
the Union Jack, naked women, a rose.
Piece by piece I became more primitive.
Well, on the outside at least, where it shows.
Become a spectacle--my choice. To live
outside the lines. With every burning weal,
with every needle's buzz, I shod my shell.
My place within this savage race. I feel
I'd seen enough horror to know that well.
Man to "savage:" my grand transformation.
Tattoos: my sharp, gilt, emancipation.

III. Barbaric Beauty

I drifted with small shows, but needed more.
I did not earn enough to make ends meet.
So the late June of 1934
began my inking from my head to feet.
Early that same year, I devised a shrewd
scheme to become A Wonder. My tall task:
scrap my skin for a zebra suit. My crude
tattoos took George Burchett six months to mask.
He worked from breaking day to waning dusk.
My skin was scribed with stripes wide and wild
and I pierced my nose with an ivory tusk.
Into sharpest fangs my teeth were filed.
Jeweled robes and fine boots enriched my plan.
I became *The Great Omi: Zebra Man*.

IV. World Of Tomorrow

The New York World's Fair was in '39.
Me. The Odditorium. On display.
Millions, they gazed on this fine face of mine.
The spiel I gave of how I got this way
was this: deep in Papua New Guinea,
stranded, captured by barbaric natives,
they tattooed my whole body, forcibly.
And pierced my nose and ears with their sharp knives.
I smiled inside, telling this tall tale
of wretchedness. And I'd laugh to the bank
and back. My often scoffed plan did not fail--
I'd come a long way from medals and rank.
Now I'm my own man inside my own skin
and you won't believe the fame I bask in.

The Original Human Blockhead's Tale
for Melvin Burkhart

I. What I had

I lived inside that square of mat and ropes.
I was a kid. It was my life for a while.
Thought I had what it takes. I had big hopes,
had big dreams of the top of the pile.
Muscle, gloves, the fast fist inside—had it.
Legs that held my bob and weave—had those too.
Had a crunch punch like lickety-split
so in time my amateur days were through.
It was ready! set! go! for the pro ring—
bigger crowds, more money, and my big chance.
I sparred and trained and did everything
I could to get ready for the big dance.
Next I'll say how it turned out I suppose.
It has to do with my magical nose.

II. The Cutman Was My Friend

In all, I had 6 professional bouts.
So that was my entire pro career.
Had a winning record—or thereabouts
(I like to keep that a little unclear!)
So back to my nose. It was busted. Bad.
The doctors took lots of pieces of bone
out of my nose. And they told me I had
to quit boxing—but I'd already known.
I made up a crazy vaudeville skit
that I clowned whenever they came to town.
Did a muscle act that was a big hit;
at the same time I could smile and frown.
So I decided to join the sideshow.
Thanks to boxing I had a new way to go.

III. The Anatomical Blunder

I joined the sideshow in 1930.
And I plan to be here for many years.
I've always been a ham. What you can see
onstage. There is the woman with 3 ears.
And Bill Durks, the man that has 2 noses.
I got him together with the woman
with alligator skin. I sent roses
for their wedding. Then there was the Dog Man
and a lot of other acts. I did 5
myself. The Human Skeleton for one.
It's my nose that made them say Why? Alive?
on the sign outside though. That sure was fun.
I'll tell you of my most famous of acts
and I'll try to stick to all of the facts.

IV. Hammer and Nail

So you need a big 5-inch roofing nail
and an appropriately impressive
hammer. It's got to be big too. You wail
on that nail—bang bang bang—you have to drive
it up your nostril! Did I mention that?
That's how I became the Human Blockhead.
Had 2 wives and I fed my family fat.
It is like what the 3-legged man once said:
beats jobbery and robbery haha.
I don't plan to retire 'til 94,
then I will have fun being a grandpa.
I sure do like the sound of that encore.
I've made my life with a hammer and nail
and a busted nose that I do impale.

I have married a crow

The bird died in my hands, then was OK.
The bird smelled like outside. I was inside.
The bird flew off. I was a tree. I prayed
to the Crow Soul. Feathers. Beak. The bird died,

then flew off. Into the smoke. To turquoise
sky. Wing-easy flier. Beak-breaking sky.
I was a tree. Crow-joker in disguise.
Navigator-prankster. Raucous kooky

Crow Soul. He flew away. I was a tree.
Crow Soul smelled like sky. Go tell his brothers.
Crow Soul died in my hands. Then he was free.
Thank you morning sun and thank you feathers.

Palindromic Sestina

A woodpecker, with its racecar solos,
says hah hah hah against the level noon.
I scan the knit-ink trees with my kook-eye
until I find the peep. Aha.
I can see just what a radar sees:
a blip of a bird on the bark. All a

pop pop in the branches, all a
tat tat in the tree, its loop spool solos
do God. The woodpecker never even sees
his sylvan civic deed in the late petal noon.
Yet the tendered net of recognition says aha
through my brow-orb eye.

Now drawn inward, the deified eye
wondered now, at a
bird-rib. The flesh self. The aha
of alive. The bird's dew-wed solos
shine in the crass arc of noon
sun. What the drab bard sees.

The soul, a fool aloof, sees
through the nimble wow-eye,
and woos the redder noon.
Don't nod. Be as careful as a
tenet in these woods. Bird solos
each air an aria. They sing we few. Here. Aha.

With the dual laud of aha
and oh, the soul, I and I, sees
The Messenger. Sweet solos
fill the ear and the mum-eye
speaks. A woodpecker plays at a
reviver this tilt-lit noon.

Tennessee November noon
in the woods and the seer frees, aha.
We are as noose-soon as a
raw war. Until then, the spry soul sees
what the mirror-rim eye
will borrow or rob. A fog of solos.

Endless woodsy noon solos,
they breathe impeccable time, all a eye.
Aha, the igniting I sees.

Psilocybin Mushrooms Sprout at the Arizona Community College

Memo to school maintenance personnel:
given our recent inclement weather,
there's been an unprecedented upswell
in fungi on the grounds, and in particular
the psilocybin mushroom (see attached).
As this fungus is a psychoactive
it must be immediately dispatched.
Psilocybin mushrooms are attractive
nuisances for the students and they pose
a health danger. Any personnel caught
with these psychedelic mushrooms may lose
their position so please give it some thought
before you give in to your temptation.
Thank you for your kind cooperation.

Dock Ellis Pitches A No Hitter While On LSD

The ball's big—like lobbing a volleyball.
And the batter's box is so far away.
Tiny ball, red ball, white ball, rainbow ball.
I didn't think I had to play today.
The batters are whiffing in slow motion
because the strike zone is seven miles wide.
The catcher is wavy like the ocean.
Before my release, have to time the tide.
Straight bat, bendy bat, big bat, little bat.
Feels like I'm pitching inside of a dream.
I'm flying as high as an acrobat;
my fingers feel every stitch in the seam.
I wonder what all the fuss is about?
I am just trying to get the guy out.

The Reanimation of Ted Williams' Frozen Head

It is almost imperceptible -- the twinkle of ice rime thawing
in an interior steel room filled with exaggerated gases,
near a regal super-neuro-unificator machine.

Everything is silent but for a discontinuous tinkling,
which means the enfolding of the field begins,
which is a prognostication of the heft of the bat,

which means science is in the catbird seat,
conquering the poke and stir of ashes,
so the scientists all incant: *whosoever*

liveth and believeth in me shall never die.
The super-neuro-unificator goes “ding”
and Ted Williams' head twitches, and

Ted Williams' head opens his eyes,
and the scientists all step forward,
and the scientists peer down

like Zeuses. They ask: *tell us how*
it was, when the air was good,
and tell us about baseball

and green grass Sundays of
left field. Please do
begin.

Trouble

Two On, Two Out

I can do better than that and I'm fat!

That's what you said when he went down swinging
With two on and two out at his at bat.

Crap. The Tigers aren't doing anything.

That was the summer of my senior year.

Each Saturday in the bleachers with you,

In the sun, drinking that cheap bleacher beer.

15 years and I still don't have a clue.

They found you dead in your dad's Cadillac—

You had gassed yourself inside the garage.

Whenever I see a game I flashback

To those hot Tiger Stadium teenage

Terminal afternoons. You're there, you're loud

I can almost pick you out of the crowd.

Memphis, 1976

Girls wrestle in white panties at Graceland
for the benefit of the King of Rock and Roll:
C'mon girls, ya'll get rough with each other.
Good Dr. Nick has given enough pills
to make The King a bloated wisp of what
he was. Christmastime. And his fans

have trapped him in his mansion. Fans
flock to see decorations at Graceland.
The gaudy tourists know not what
lies behind the locked door. Elvis,
imperial on the lounge, popping pills
as the young girls romp with one another.

Some think Elvis lost it when his mother
Gladys died. Grief, wiggling its hips, fans
his fetishes. There are not enough pills
not enough Cadillacs parked at Graceland
to fill the cavern in Elvis Presley.
He has become a Vegas shade of what

he used to be. He tries to forget what
it was like to be that younger, other,
Ann-Margret-screwing Elvis.
The icon who could cause the fans
to faint, to climb over the wall at Graceland.
Now it is the couch and the 25 pills

a day. Amphetamines, downers,
painkillers—Elvis gladly takes whatever
Dr. Nick will give. Holed up in Graceland
cleaning his guns, one after another,
he shoots the TV. A King is no fan
of Robert Goulet. O Elvis,

drug-addled and swollen Elvis,
abandon the girls in their underwear, pills
on your tongue, heavy pinky rings. Your fans
would cry *Elvis! Elvis!* instead of *What's
wrong with the King?* They'd embrace each other
while waiting in the rain outside Graceland.

You lay in the pill-womb of Graceland
while fate fanned your fame, Elvis.
What America adores she devours. And so she looks for another.

The Man With A Hook

I. The Saturday Afternoon Monster Movie Host

Moo ha ha ha the movie is about
to begin. But first my pretties I must
tell you a little tale. A man broke out
of the insane asylum. He was just
your average maniac with a hook for
a hand. A couple at Lover's Lane heard
the news on the radio, locked the door,
and kept necking, ignoring the hazard.
Then they heard scratching on top of the car.
Metal upon metal, a screechy sound.
The teenagers were overcome with fear—
the driver jerked the car into gear and
when he dropped his date off they took a look:
dangling from the car door: a bloody hook.

II. The Actual Story

Lost my hand in an auto accident.
Pianist. Psych Ward. Unreality.
Stopped taking my meds. Again my torment.
Crescendos of ripened insanity.
I think it was May. Broke free of that place.
Became just another kook on the street.
Hook for a hand but never a menace.
My brain was simply dysfunctional meat.
Wandered into Lover's Lane. Had to tell.
You know, the secret government plot
to put alien implants in us all.
Instead, I lost my hook. Some idiot
teenager tore it out of my stump. Lost
that damn right hand all over again.

Full Moon

in dark houses in every town

what if repeats into a chant
and the lovesick put their things away

the luckless worry threadbare thoughts
another day has skidded by

everything seems an afterthought
the rhythm is all wrong tonight

in dark houses in every town
another day has skidded by

what if repeats into a chant
the luckless worry threadbare thoughts

and the lovesick put their things away

Prison Dentist

finger-deep
carnage, fresh
and bottomless

the prison dentist mines
decay.

the prisoner's tongue
atop the nude wound
gums leach

throbbing below spit-
gauze

the wonder of
your own
compassion nuzzles

in raw socket
jawbone sickness,
gnaw-ache,

the wreckage of
dependable decline.

(all uncontrolled probing)
—that meat-hole—
pulse steady,

soaked bloody
salt mouth blooms.

suffering. not even
your own suffering.
balloon-needle heart.

Bop: Parkinson's

I circle around his illness, because
my father used to be daddy, but now
he is old. We talk about the weather.
His sickbed body is a small mirror,
a bauble too fragile to be a toy.
Been hot up here, and a stormy summer.

Then he says *I love you.*

The shock of the words is born inside me.
12 amps without a fuse. The Milky Way
becomes complete and all the wild horses
on every plain pause at rest. He must be
cashing out his till. Tying up loose ends.
How long did it take him to muster the
will to say those words, lying there in bed?
A little mouse replies: *I love you too.*

Then he says *I'm proud of you.*

Thanks, dad, the little mouse replies again.
Once he was Buddha behind the counter:
*no one is ever gonna tell you you've
suffered enough, kiddo* not looking up
from his marked-up racing form.
See you Christmas, I lie, and say goodbye.

Then he says goodbye.

Rip's Drive-In

(after The Dancing by Gerald Stern)

In all the fly-ridden diners, with all their grease-coated steel walls and coffee stains and hard-boiled eggs and spoons I have never seen a black and white TV with a coat hanger for an antenna nor heard Ernie Harwell call a Tigers game the way I did behind the counter on Joy Road, nor pour coffee as much as I did then, the globe of my coffee pot all sloshing, the ballgame droning on, my mother smoking at the counter, my father flipping burgers on the grill, (doing the short-order dance of small steps and flat feet), the sound of the burgers sizzling, cars tires on rain, everything a machine, the customers eating and drinking, all of us just being and working, as if we were really living, showing us that the world would never stop—in 1975—in Dearborn, radiant industrial Dearborn, hometown of Henry Ford, thousands of miles away from the other grime—Hanoi and Chu Chi—oh Buddha of compassion, oh wild Earth.

The Retired Vietnam Munitions Loader Attempts To Open A Can of Biscuits

Gary approaching the can
just a can of biscuits he tells himself
I can do this all I have to do is open the can

that damn can of biscuits is gonna
explode open get my hands when I peel the
pop wrapper

he leaves a note *honey please open*
near the can the note says
I just can't

City Park

The Handiwork Woman sits on a bench
crocheting skulls under a tree. First one,
then another. She hangs each on a branch.
Near her feet, a tidy mound of skullbone,
yarn, and chance events. Handiwork Woman
pauses, fixes a jawbone for a compass.
The trees lose their seeds at once and seven
desiccated squirrels scamper on the grass.
Handiwork Woman does not flinch. She hums,
crocheting bleached skulls under a tree.
Bloody dogs bleed war. The muzzlebeast foams.
Slaughter rises, degree upon degree.
But Handiwork Woman does not stumble.
There are infinite skulls to assemble.

Once upon a time

when crows flocked to the illuminated clouds
of dreams, gold jingled
with midnight and the cooled sky sustained
this wildness. But soon
came the reign of the Evil King, and his dazed kingdom
had nursed far too long

on bad tidings presented as medicine, to be taken
as the eye accepts a magic trick,
gladly. And so, in the beds of the kingdom, the troubled sleepers
were as tight buds,
and even their dreaming could not unfurl the worries
pressed upon them

by the Evil King. For his heart was a dark labyrinth.
For he was drunk
on his inheritances, and so the hearts of his Evil Court
did become intoxicated
also on this syrupy poison, and so the heart
of the Evil King quickened

at the chance to spread its sickness.
And did quicken at the chance
to spread war and fright. And so the people
of the kingdom became
sorely afraid, and so the dreams of
the troubled sleepers shuddered.

For since the dreams of the sleeping kingdom
did not now hold even one
golden thread or one embroidered canopy,
the Queen of the Dream Crows
did speak, *Caw!* for the Queen was a
wise Queen and a generous Queen

and she wanted her flock to prosper.

*The people of the kingdom do suffer.
The dreams of this sleeping kingdom,
we must restore. We must restore
their peaceful sleep and again we can gather
our dream treasure. Caw!*

And so at great speed the Queen
ordered her flock to fly.
And so the flock arrived at the
hidden-yet-glittering storehouse
of the Dream Crows. With the care
of a drought-stricken bird,

each crow pecked up one bright and shiny
mirror. And with them
they flew. Each crow to the troubled kingdom.
Back to the Evil King.
Each crow flew above the sorrowful
dreams of the sleepers.

And oh, the night-birds gathered
at the palace of the Evil King.
And oh, the night-birds placed
the mirrors around the Evil King.
Caw! spoke the Queen, *let us wait
to see him awaken; he will see*

the truth of his wicked heart in our mirrors.
Caw! And it came to pass
that in the morning the Evil King traveled
back from the land of dreams.
And the Dream Crows shook
their blue-black feathers.

But oh, the Evil King's heart was as a shriveled pea,
and much too small
for him to see. And oh, the hearts of the
birds, their own good hearts,
fell. And yet there was not one sound.

My flock – Caw! then spoke the Queen,

*let us, ourselves, sleep. The work of the day
is carried by the kingdom,
so let us try again to-night. Caw!*

And while the Dream Crows slept,
the drivers of the kingdom drove their cars.
The writers of the kingdom

filled their books. The musicians of the kingdom
hung their music in the air.

And while the Dream Crows slept, it was as if
the people of the kingdom
woke from a long journey in the land of dreams.
So that when, in the night,

when the crows flocked to the illuminated clouds
of dreams, they found gold again jingled
with the midnight and again the cooled sky.

At first, scattered bits of glitter but
becoming once again tightly-woven.

Caw! the Queen of the Dream Crows

did speak, for the Queen was a wise Queen
and a good Queen. *The Evil King could not see
his own evil heart. But as when dreams bestow
unto sleepers bits of treasure to use
during their work of the day, in our mirrors
the people of the kingdom surely saw the truth*

*of the Evil King's heart, and this was also
a treasure unto them. In all amongst you,
can any one bird tell me, in amongst all the stories
from amongst all the lands,
has there ever been an Evil King who ruled forever?
Keep this in your heart. Caw!*

(For my sister, Intissar, and for Dr. Clarissa Pinkola Estés)

Poem by an American

I.

For a time that September,
our cities of comas
were tender and united.
(We who name bombs.)

II.

A day that clouded the concrete.
Then we staggered infant-hearted,
through days that could even sink epiphanies.
We have broken the dreaming.

III.

The quick pearl of summer, now
vague and done. Little autumn,
little autumn; a faint mourner you are.

IV.

Reason is now a kaleidoscope here,
this death trip is spellbound roulette.
It taps and grasps while no solemn voice prevails.
Ruin wins each dim bet.

V.

I lay leaden
all day, and
pray this world
that's all in hell
gets petaled; Erik,
you are a man in
a war, bent and
hemmed by the
red-stick-and-grab.
Perhaps your
foot has missed, because
only bullets meet
disaster whole? Or
your hand is rendered
to the ground below
... so vertebrate. You are
a seed inert, riding inside
your machine-tiger's belly.
Erik, Erik, Erik,
Iraq, Iraq, Iraq,
safe, safe, safe,
pray, pray, pray.
Against this rude era,
all I have is this wrecked-
noun-morse-code, featherlight.

VI.

a man is riding
a man is riding inside a machine
a man is riding inside a machine in a war

a man is digging
a man is digging inside a road
a man is digging inside a road in a war

is is digging
is is riding
machine machine war

VII.

I am a rant. So well hear
this zero moment, under
laws abandoned, under
maniac king, under
dour heaven, for you
are there Erik, in that everliving
raw ruckus, heat sick and
overburdened amid the privatized
explosive devices and the damn
ashen tasks. Here, fine damn slogans
always blink and repeat. The barons
of black-water-boarding lie glib and
the televisions sweat their endless spin.
I am a sponge and I am
a target-rich environment.
Grab a hammer, and shine
a tribute over here.

VIII.

Veins wracked

in some secret hour - hush -
none comment, none deem scorners,
none say *detainee* against the

bankrupt machine. My country
is an idea undone. Do you not
hear the humerus click? The

chain aches and the
night gets bent. There is no
golden key for the hood's

hungry mouth.

IX.

O liars,
O greed-fingered thrashers of dread,
what you have wrecked!

I carry a clockfull of fear
for all that's unfolding.
I'm lonesome for absolute poetry.

City Bus

Bone Maker Woman sits and licks her lips
as Bone Maker Woman knits scapulas.
In the next seat, a jumble of bone chips,
monochrome yarn and 10 mandibulas.

A mason jar half-full of fate is close by,
lays on its side and sloshes in time with
the bumps. Bone Maker sings a lullaby.
She knows the passengers have lost their faith.

Each of the riders has a nosebleed.
Bone Maker Woman fancies her knitting.
The crone sprinkles the bones with fetid seeds,
and stacks them. The Bus Driver is giggling.

Now Bone Maker Woman sits and she knits
sienna-stained ribcages. One rib, two,
three ribs. The Bone Maker has no limits.
Her knitting of bones will never be through.

The city bus hugs the varicose road
but the manhole lids, they shake and rumble
from beneath the street. Fat sewer rats explode
from the gutters, oozing as they ramble.

The front sign on the bus reads *epitaph*.
Midnight bugs creep on the backs of the seats
and riders become faded photographs.
Bone Maker Woman's lullaby repeats:

more war; more war, Bone Maker Woman sings.
A variation of her many songs.

Obstacles I Have Faced in Life and How I Have Overcome Them

I become a scar under the sour moon. It stitches
a seam across the fallow sky but something
is missing, even as an omen. Worse than zero,
my belly craves a new curve but now,
no more ruses. The surgeon stitches
stitches the red crescent but it is more sun
than moon. The surgeon says, she says,
*the moan beneath the severed nerve
never ceases.* I reply, *remove me, muses,*
now. I am an amnesiac. Here I am some sort of sunrise,
mirrors and neurons glittering, waking.

Walking Through the Orchard of Forgetfulness
(after Tsvetaeva's Some Ancestor of Mine)

Maybe a friend was once unkind, or even a plagiarist in addition. Who can tell, now that implacable Time has scoured memories to nibs? Dark, scowling, bow-legged Time is the one who leaves me in the pear orchard, removing my hands. (But, I am the one responsible for my fate.) Proud of the workers watching the clock, Time fiddles with his pocket watch and bites into a pear. He is always inspecting, blurring, the memory. Not a tender mentor. He is fond of his calendar, the days, the years, and all the new mewling babies being born. . . I think Time may also be a taskmaster; my formal overlord. His soul is not worth one hair strand of gold, so he whistles past the graveyard in the night. Though perhaps he shambles through the orchards like a ruined woman. I suddenly wonder: did he even leave me in the pear orchard?

Wartime Terzanelle

The easy heat of your skin
upon my skin is a word
unspoken. And unwritten.
Like the song of a night bird
this moment is sweet and strong.
Upon my skin is a bright word
wrought from the birdsong
of your body's languid ease.
This moment is sweet and strong,
an impermanent reprise,
and I rest in the relief
of your body's languid ease.
Our peace: certain as a thief.
These are days of absurd war,
and I rest in the relief
of you. I always need more...
the easy heat of your skin.
These are days of absurd war
unspoken. And unwritten.

Lost Things

Some things are just lost for good. That idea
after dinner. Your cat when you were ten.
Gone, all gone away, raindrops in the sea.
As time unravels, the lost things sweeten
with simplicity, heighten with yearning,
or are quickly dismissed. Sometimes the lost
whisper wisdom. A belated warning:
please do not take this for granted. The cost
is a warm lover dressing at sunrise,
a goldfinch carefully tending her song.
The cost is a stream of careless goodbyes
spent for each surprising, certain leaving.