Candy

Running to the corner store in search
of the penny watermelon slices
which watered the mouth
of my sixth-grade imagination,
I sniff the candy of my youth.
Perhaps it's the same wind
back after twenty years which yanks
that memory back out in front of me.
I don't know why, but I recollect my pants
which never fit,
and Eddie Dinsmore who is dead
and Joe Daly who looked eighty at eleven
and Philip Santucci who got forties and thirties
and who sat next to me that year;
I see the dirty cuffs of my white shirt and
remember looking out the window
in October, watching the trolleys go by,
wishing I were somewhere else.

Earl Lehman

Daddy (Big Two-Hearted Stranger)

My days never
knew you.
You were only
the sound of workshoes pounding
up step after step,
as I lay in my dark room waiting.

You stepped through the doorway
(your shadow fell across
the walls, sealed
the windows)
then bent down
to kiss my eyelids, thinking
I was asleep.

Michele Swigart
Morning Verse

Day’s first light caresses
your parted lips
like a lover’s awakening kiss.
Though the heat of last night’s embrace
still warms our bed,
you have never seemed
more beautiful than now,
gently stirring in my arms.

John Moses
Tim’s Fugue

On vapor-thin sheets throbs a red apple,
your red heart, forcing hot rivers
up and down the length of a bed.
You drowse in wasteland dreams. Outside,
pink and gray tropical birds, headdresses
longer than their furred bodies, crouch on branches
and await a glimpse of almond eyes encased
within the shells of your lids. Moisture drips
like lust from fanned leaf tips. The moon goes
hunting in this smoky jungle, playing its beam
upon pendulous clusters of fruit,
upon the space between your feet.

In some somber restaurant sits the woman,
tweedled and lipsticked like the
goddess of steeds, her attention drawn by a window.
she imagines people she has not yet met,
laughing with them, playing with their children
on the fringes of the shore. A feast
for another stranger is set before her.
She waits for only you, waits as a small-town dusk
settles candles in her face.

Jack Walter

Her Visit

That was sudden,
your coming
to bruise my carpet
with your shuffling feet,
your head of hair
a true autumnal pumpkin
& that body
which is yours
wishing to be
as delicious
as buttered squash
inside a circle of hungry arms.

Jack Lindeman

A.M.

In the morning
I hear the gold clamoring,
the slam of bright things,
the thunder of thought
traveling between silences,
the sleeves descending
to engulf the wrists,
yet no one other than myself
has arisen
except for the shapes of shrieks
abandoning their dream of pain
to the absconded stars.

Jack Lindeman
After Breakfast

After breakfast there are always places where one seems to have to go. After breakfast there is nourishment in one’s thoughts which rapidly seeps down to the legs. Thus the necessity to be gone from the place where one is. Yet one contemplates so many possibilities concerning one’s arrivals while standing absolutely still.

Jack Lindeman
Death on the Clothesline

Their fine china
glistens, transparent
as they
lift tea cups.

black in the closet
the estranged wedding dress
hangs
empty, waiting
to be folded
among tissue papers,
mothballs and

the
sweet sachet
her mother made
to perfume the
satin and lace.

They sit sedately at separate
ends
the table spans satin mahogany
their bed sheets
hang
sullen on the line
she begins to falter
half emptied perfume bottle
has lost its appeal.

Janice E. Cave
Spring Head Cleaning

a pile of yarn
heaped on the floor
with no apparent end or
beginning

my task:
unravel

I pick at a strand
tug gently, and
am met by tension at one end—
I pull at the other end

it unravels a little
but soon . . .
more tension

I drop that strand
and concentrate on another
more knots . . .

how did I ever get so tangled?
how can I undo this mess?

I walk away
but can't get it off my mind

so I go back, tug a little,
think a little,
become more confused, and
walk away again . . .

gradually,
I spend more time
working at it — thinking

patience:
and it slowly unravels
(on its own, it seems)

time —
yes, I have plenty . . .
it took more than a year
to get this tangled up with you

Louise Bausher
"gonna get those bastards"
he said - clenched fists
in rare display of hostility

(I always knew he
got paid for getting
the bad guys)

he fought -
like anteus with strength
from the earth until
lifted like a magician's
volunteer
he was crushed under the
weight of confusion
the weight of the yellowing effect

the bad guys remained
for me to conquer?

oh no
he'd shake his head and
give me that stare that cut
to the hole inside me
where yellowing goes unnoticed
he'd spare me from that struggle
if nothing else

i sigh
    a coward!
leaving him to
wrestle with those
demon-men
alone.

Beth Davis
Muskellunge Weather

It's a gray river first, then a day near the end of the year and the water so cold and dark my eyes begin to surface from way inside.

I'm uncertain of this place.

The shore's crowded with stones like old skulls. It stinks of old fish.

There's a wooden boat half-sunk and a low sky that promises nothing . . .

I think of the muskellunge. They are inside the muscles of icy currents, they will break the world in half with their long heads, their rows of wicked teeth.

They will feed on twenty-inch wall-eyed pike. They are perfect for such a day.

Harry Humes
For truth one must grovel.

One must grovel against penises of roots. While learning how moles liberate themselves from their forgotten eyes.

Jack Lindeman

Postcard

to a Friend

En Route to Hell

1966 / M.C. ESCHER / ORKELLIEMET IV
Krackelius IV

Utrecht, a V. Meuleplein / Repeteren d. Utrecht / Holland
Dolores

A tear slowly millimetered its way down Tommy's cheek as he sat on his bed. He didn't bother to consider whether it was childish for a twenty-six year old man to cry. He sighed again as he looked at one of the pictures he was holding. To a casual observer, the pictures seemed of little significance. Most of them showed a happy little girl with short brown hair (and skirt to match) running and jumping and sitting and standing and doing a zillion and one other things that little happy girls are prone to do. Occasionally one of the pictures contained a happy little brown haired boy with bare feet and deep tanned brown skin doing the same things as the girl. In fact, about the only difference between the two was their size; the girl seemed to be almost twice as big as the boy, although their ages were not very far apart, not quite two years. The boy, of course, was Tommy, and the girl was his first cousin, Dolores. It was probably just a coincidence that he had come across these old pictures on this particular day. This was the twentieth anniversary of her death. These pictures of her and him romping together at the old place, the farm, brought back all those painful memories that he thought he had forgotten. Twenty years is such a long time, he told himself, a damn long time. But it just didn't seem possible that two entire decades had gone by since that terrible day. He allowed all those memories to come slipping back, one by one. It was painful, but he wanted to remember. He wanted to remember exactly what had happened that day . . . .

The big green car rumbled slowly up the rocky hill to the old farmhouse. The two big dogs, Tippie and Mickie, barked and carried on uncontrollably as the car came to a stop at the top of the hill. Little six-year-old Tommy bounded out of the car and was promptly knocked down by the two big friendly beasts. They were licking his face, his hands, his bare legs, and sniffing him all over as he tried to scold them, but found he couldn't because he was giggling too much. Then they left him and ran to attack his parents, who had just gotten out of the car. Meanwhile, the relatives came running from the house and the barn to see what all the commotion was about and then when they saw, to greet the newly arrived visitors. Tommy had just finished transferring the dog saliva from his face to his shirt sleeve when he was picked up and showered with a volley of human kisses and hugs. One such
embrace was given to him by 
his first cousin Dolores, who 
didn't like it any more than he 
did but did it anyway because 
it was expected. As the grown-
ups began to move toward the 
house, Tommy announced 
loudly that Dolores and he de-
sired to remain outside to play. 
When they were alone, Dolores, 
not quite eight years old, 
asked Tommy about school 
and other things in his young 
life. After answering “OK” to 
all her questions, he said, “Let's 
do somethin’!”

“Wanna play Hide and Go 
Seek?” she asked.

“Yeah!” exclaimed Tommy, 
who thought that anything 
would be more exciting than 
answering his cousin's dumb 
questions.

“OK,” she said, “you be it 
and I'll hide!”

“Why do I have to be It 
first? Why don’t you be It 
first?” said Tommy indignantly.

“Because you’re only six 
and I said so!” retorted Dolores.

Well, Tommy couldn’t argue 
with logic like that, so he hid 
eyes and Dolores ran off to 
hide.

“And no peeking!” she 
shouted back to him.

Tommy counted slowly to 
100 which, by the way, was the 
only way he knew how to 
count to 100. When he at last 
reached his goal, he shouted, 
“Ready or not, here I come!”

Tommy uncovered his eyes 
and slowly looked around the 
yard. He decided to explore 
around the barn first. He en-
tered the area where the hay 
was kept, and climbed up the 
wooden ladder to the loft.

This was a favorite hiding place 
because it was dark, but after 
allowing his eyes to adjust to 
the darkness, Tommy saw that 
his cousin was not there. He 
ran outside again and then 
started to make his way around 
the outside of the barn. The 
first thing he came to was the 
doghouse, but Dolores was 
not in it, as were hardly ever 
the dogs. Then he went 
around the corner of the barn 
to the grapevine. Dolores was 
not hidden among its leaves. 
He continued to the woodpile. 
Nothing there. An old white 
refrigerator was next to the 
woodpile. It had been put 
there as a convenience for 
his uncle, who kept bottles of 
beer in it. It was disconnected, 
of course, but acted as an in-
sulator for the beer. Dolores 
was not hiding behind it, so 
Tommy moved to the old 
black car which, like the re-
frigerator, had been abandon-

Is Dolores in there?”
“No, she’s not.”
“Are you sure she’s not in 
there?”
“Yes, I’m sure.”
“Positive?”

“YES! Now go run along!”

Tommy walked slowly back 
toward the barn. He was get-
ing tired of being It, and so 
decided to give up. Standing in 
the middle of the yard, he 
shouted as loud as he could, 
“Come out come out wherever-
eyou are! I give up.” He 
repeated this again after wait-
ing a while, but no Dolores 
could be seen. After shouting it a third time, Tommy was 
mad because Dolores would 
not come out. “All right then! 
Twofoursixeighten I quit!” he 
shouted, and stomped off 
toward the farmhouse. The 
back door slammed as the 
young boy walked into the 
kitchen. His aunt was at the 
sink, just finishing washing the 
dinner dishes.

“Where’s your cousin?”
“Outside. I’m mad at her!”
“Already?” exclaimed his 
aunt with mock surprise. Then 
she shook her head and chuck-
led to herself. “Kids . . .”

Tommy had been curled up, 
asleep on the sofa for several 
hours when his mother woke 
him.

“Come on, get up!” she said, 
“It’s time for supper.”

Tommy blinked, yawned, 
and stretched, all at the same 
time. Then he washed up. A
few minutes later he was sitting at the dinner table. The seat next to him, where Dolores customarily sat, was vacant. He asked his mother (through a yawn) where Dolores was. She told him she didn’t know, but assured him that Dolores would show up in a few minutes. A few minutes later, though, everyone had shown up except Dolores. The grownups became concerned when they saw that she wasn’t there, and asked who had seen her last. It was concluded that Tommy had been the last person to see her. So he related to the grownups the game that he and she had played, and how she hadn’t come out when he had given up. The grownups looked at each other strangely when Tommy concluded his story, then most of them got up and went outside to look for Dolores. Tommy wanted to go along, but his mother told him to sit down and eat his supper before he ran off and got lost too. His grandmother had prepared his favorite dish, macaroni and cheese, but he just stared at it and pushed it slowly around on his plate with his fork, nibbling at it occasionally.

Hours passed. The food on the dinner table remained uneaten and turned cold. Tommy had been confined to the upstairs bedroom while most of the others were out searching for Dolores. It had gotten dark and, with his face pressed against the window pane in the bedroom, Tommy could see the flashlights of the searchers slicing up the darkness, and he could hear their calls, and the barking of the dogs. When Dolores had not immediately been found, the police were called in to help, and a few of the neighbors were out in the darkness, searching also.

Once in a while a sob would escape from Tommy and his breath would produce a little circle of steam on the window pane. His eyes were wet and now and then a tear would escape and travel down his cheeks. He was crying slowly, silently, feeling somehow that he was responsible for all that was transpiring.

Part of another hour went by when suddenly a shouting arose from the direction of the barn. Tommy watched intently as flashlight beams came bouncing along from every direction and converged at a point he could not see, behind the barn.

Soon all the lights came out from around the side of the barn and they all moved slowly toward the house. When Tommy heard the back door open and the people come in, he ran to the hallway and stood at the top of the stairs in the dark. He could hear the voices of the people in the kitchen below. Apparently one of the neighbors had found Dolores’ hiding place, and he related his discovery to the other searchers, and the old ones, who had remained in the house: “... I must have passed by there half a dozen times, looking for the girl. Finally it dawned on me to look inside. So I pulled open the door of the refrigerator and there she was, sitting on a case of beer: dead.”

Tommy turned and ran back into the bedroom. Blinded by his tears, he threw himself onto the large bed and screamed into the pillow. Burying his face even deeper into the pillow he screamed again, and again, as long and as hard as he could. His whole body trembled and the bed shook as he sobbed and cried into the pillow. His small frail body continued to twitch as he exhausted himself and fell into a deep, comforting sleep.

Tommy sobbed uncontrollably and the tears flowed down his face in rivulets as he sat on the bed. Quickly he put the pictures back into the envelope whence they came, and dried his eyes with a tissue. Twenty years had passed by since that day and yet the memories that he recalled seemed as fresh as if it had occurred the day before. Tommy placed the envelope into the drawer where he had found it, and closed the drawer slowly. Then he got undressed for bed. As he lay there, he thought again about that last day with his cousin. “If only there was some way I could go back,” he thought. “If only I could be there again with her. I could have opened the door. I could have saved her. Oh how I wish I could go back again, to that day,” he pondered as sleep slowly began to overtake him. “If only I could be there again... if only I could go back...”

Tommy dozed peacefully. He had had a busy day and sleep was a welcome relief. His bed vibrated rhythmically. The constant, steady motion of
his bed soothed and relaxed him. He stretched out and sighed. The vibrations felt good. But slowly a thought started to creep into his half-conscious mind. “Where are the vibrations coming from?” he asked himself. Another part of his mind told him to relax and fall asleep, but that nagging question refused to go away. “Why is my bed vibrating?” he asked himself again. The more he thought about it, the less sense it seemed to make. “Beds simply do not vibrate,” he thought. He decided to rouse himself and find out exactly what was going on. He opened his eyes. The bright daylight hurt. He shut his eyes quickly and then slowly felt around himself with his hands. Instead of the smooth, cool bedsheet, he felt coarse, hard material. Instead of his soft white pillow, he felt nothing at all. He sat up and opened his eyes again. In a split second a hundred trees flashed before his eyes. These were followed by a hundred more, and then even more. He looked around. He was in the back seat of a car—a big green car—and it was moving at a fast pace down the highway in the middle of a forest. There were hundreds of trees flying past on both sides of the road. Still half dazed from his awakening, Tommy blinked his eyes and blurted out, “What...where...” The high-pitched voice that came out of his mouth startled him. Then the female passenger in the front seat turned around and smiled at him.

“Well, it's about time you woke up, you little sleepyhead. We're almost there,” she said.

“Mother!” exclaimed Tommy. Again his voice surprised him. Then he looked down at himself, but there wasn’t much to see. His little brown legs stuck out of a pair of little blue shorts. He looked at his tiny little hands and small skinny arms. He was six years old! He opened his mouth to say something, but then stopped himself. He looked at the back of his mother’s head, then at the driver of the car, his father. “They look so young!” he thought. Then he looked out the car window again. The trees! He recognized the trees! He was going to the old place, the farm! “This must be the day!” he thought. “I'm being given the chance to save Dolores's life!” He didn't know how it happened or why it happened, but there he was, six years old again and on his way to the old place. He sat back in the car seat and smiled. He watched the trees go by. He felt the vibrations under his body.

Soon they arrived at the farmhouse at the top of the hill. The dogs greeted Tommy in their customary fashion, as did the beaming relatives. When Tommy saw Dolores he almost cried out but kept it back. He gave her an extra long hug, which genuinely surprised her. After they had been alone for a while, Dolores suggested that they play Hide and Go Seek. “OK,” said Tommy slowly. “I'll be it first.” He hid his eyes. “No fair peeking!” shouted Dolores as she ran off.

Tommy counted to 100, then shouted, “Ready or not, here I come!” He looked around the familiar yard, then walked to the barn. He climbed up to the hayloft for a few minutes, then climbed back down the ladder. He ran to the empty doghouse and peeked in for a second. Then, rounding the corner of the barn, he glanced at the grapevine and stumbled up over the woodpile. He had broken out into a sweat. His palms were moist as he stood there beside the old refrigerator, looking at the empty space behind it. Then he moved to the front of the refrigerator. His hand was trembling slightly as he reached for the handle. He paused, then pulled. The hinges creaked as the door slowly opened...

His cousin, sitting on a case of beer, leaped out when the light of day entered the small cubical.

“Well, that didn’t take long,” she said, laughing. “OK, I’ll be it this time!”

Tommy wasn’t laughing. “Dolores,” he said. “I want you to promise me something.”

“What?” she asked.

“I want you to promise me that you’ll never go in there again.”

“Why not? It’s a good hiding place! You’re just mad because you didn’t think of going in there to hide!”

“No, that’s not the reason. It’s dangerous. You could get trapped in there.”

“Don’t be stupid. You can’t get trapped in an old refrigerator.”
“Yes you can. Yes you can. Please listen to me.”
“I don’t have to listen to you. Besides, you’re wrong anyway.”
“I’m not wrong.
“OK. I’ll prove you’re wrong. Get in the refrigerator; I’ll close the door and then you’ll see how easy it is to get out again.”
“OK, I’ll get in; but only to show you that I’m right about what I said.”
Tommy climbed onto the case of beer. Dolores pushed the door shut.
“OK! C’mon out!” she shouted.
Tommy stood on the beer bottles and pushed hard against the door.
“I can’t open it!” he shouted.
“You can too! You can too open it!” said Dolores. “You just won’t do it because then that’ll prove I’m right!”
“No, I really can’t open it! It’s stuck. It’s completely dark in here. Open it up!”
“I will not! You can just open it up yourself, Mister Smarty-pants!”
“Dolores! Please, open up the door! Dolores! Dolores!
Two tiny little six-year-old fists pounded desperately against the dark refrigerator door.
The back door slammed as the young girl walked into the kitchen. Her mother was at the sink, just finishing washing the dinner dishes.
“What are you up to?” the woman asked, smiling at her.
“I’m going to take a nap; I’m tired,” she answered.
“Where’s your cousin?”
“Outside. I’m mad at him!”
“Already?” exclaimed her mother with mock surprise. Then she shook her head and chuckled to herself. “Kids…”
**Rats**

They leave barns and farm cats behind,
cross alfalfa and corn fields
and come to the white houses,
small places of birds and chipmunks.

Faces on porches hear them rustling leaves
near new holes or maybe see the small eyes
steady as nail heads.
Even when they are sitting still
they seem to propagate themselves
until the very air crawls with their shapes.

They are trapped, grow smarter.
The open ends of box traps turn Pavlovian,
ring with invitations.
But they resist being lured by only hunger.

Their eyes, their hump-backed movements
turn up in the cries of children.

Nothing holds them.
Their iron jaws clamp bird or tin can.

They are the wet rotting places of the world.

A plan must be made, the faces say,
against the holes.
The faces go on talking,
The rats keep to themselves.

And the stars gather above everything like gunsights.

_Harry Humes_
The Room

Even at night, there was the small lamp,  
and the dogs, and the way we held our coffee.  
Even then, in the corners, ceilings, the walls,  
we never told the stories restless on our breath.  

By day we felt our way  
along the quaking light, and brought the crisp roots  
to the deep window and ate there  
in the late afternoon shadows.

*It has no face,* we said of the world.

Staring out across the motion of fields  
or constellations, you remembered  
only a manwhistling toward you in the dark;  
I, only so many bright clothes . . .

There was a turtle yesterday,  
and the clouds came beating from the west.  
We spoke of walking,  
of the way water seemed almost an answer,  
and of the withered columbine.

But back in the room,  
we were slow to turn up the lamp,  

to stare at the windows like warnings  
of silence where eyes suddenly turned inward for ballast  
while the heavens rocketed away.

Our blood dreamt of forever.

And we were slow and afraid  
to breathe the fatal arrangement of gravity.

*Harry Humes*
The Turtle

Re-enters the world from mud,
slowly raises first an eye
to the right slant of air,
then a clawed foot,
takes its first real breath in months,
emerges to this April where I am walking
by blood-root and hepatica.

Watching it,
my moves grow slower, calmer,
stop as a needle on true North
as the slow compass of its eye
heaves the season’s carapace,
turns dirt warm and balmy
with cabbage and blackbird.

In one wrinkled step,
pre-history clears a log and vanishes.

I stand up, numbed by so long on the ground
and walk into the day
emerging like trout from shadows.

All the next day long in the warm air
I hold the woman close to the new grass,
and think of the greedy fire of beaked stars,
of flesh vanishing into heartwood,
of how we love with such a brutal slowness.

Harry Humes
taxidermy

owls stare out in
their deadness
and lizards moan
endless
silent
moans.
eagles, giant and symbolic,
caught, frozen
in mid-flight
wings outstretched
towards the sky
small birds
(cardinals i suppose)
stand,
proudly erect
on small pedestals
of barked logs.
i wonder if they know they are dead
and are sitting now
a biological showing of commonplace wonders
having died in vain
to display what men
could see alive
do they know they are not dinosaurs?

and i
sitting opposite the dead zoo
am on exhibit also
(the hunger artist)
   as people
   alive and moving
   pass by
unaware of such
minor atrocities

Beth Davis
The Marketplace

I sat in a three-sided corner
with my knees to my chest and a blank look
and watched the merchants, the peddlers from town
selling out to simple-minded customers.

But even as I watched,
I could see myself being sifted through their hands.

I was a fish in a round bowl
no place to hide
swimming in the sterile water
waiting to sleep.

Kathryn Burak
I long for life the way it once would be
Before I split and surfaced to the sun
My pearl escaping, rolling endlessly
While I lay bleached and begging to be gone.

Oh selfish sea send back my treasured time
To fold my faded listless leaves again
Caress that inner cavity sublime
With times that were and years that could have been.

Rosemarie Sloat

---

Bone

When nothing remains
and life is but a dry, discarded bone
picked clean and left untouched by even dogs,
may some miracle shake my mind awake
and let me die dreaming
of these fields and woods.

Earl Lehman
Autumn

1. Trees stand without disguise: dark, wet woodlimbs reaching for grey.
2. I saw slow geese paddle toward the sun. No sound - black line pushing white space.

Michele Swigart

Naked Branches

The leaves are gone and naked branches sway and moan and crack but they are numb and I am not and you are gone.

Earl Lehman
a pair of glasses

living with a fishbowl
over my head
i see the world
distorted through
glass with flaws
and curvatures of texture.

my window pane
is cracked in spider webs
and raindrops run
in disjointed zigzagged
paths across
this travesty —
my life.

outside
winter trees bend over with snow
why do the big stong ones
break so much easier
than the small weak ones?

icicles hang long and
drip slowly away
like sanity that
melts into deep brown earth

there is a coldness here
akin to this alienated me
as i too
disappear, without loud
clamour and noise,

as white winter makes
almost unnoticed transitions
into spring.

Beth Davis
A Morality Play (Angel #1)

I live from exhaustion
to exhaustion, sleeping even as I move.
I search for bread and sugar; salvation
for a poor old sinner is easier than I think.
Holy God,
it is He who taunts by apparitions,
by flakes of dreams, seeking refuge
around my neck.

An angel comes down to meet me one day
on clouds like ladder rungs, the sacred
hammer in her hands. It is the Revelation.
The world rises up to meet her.
Peacocks parade their stained glass
plumes, and hawks soar to rest
on the throne of the Savior.

A wave of her powdery-white palm
and I am Morpheus ascending. My tormentors
wrinkle to raisins as I praise my angel’s
timely arrival. Bowing like a puppet,
I leave for a full
hot vision of day.

Jack Walter
Gardener

Combing the ground
the bamboo scrapes
an ancient chant
scratching the belly of
the upper crust
gleaning crumbs
dreaming
the man explores
the shores of distant continents
an invisible bird
seeking himself.

Earl Lehman
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