Essence
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Accidentally an Artist

Sunshine and Adagio for Strings nudge me awake.
Later, fingers connected to my arms play Haydn.
Drawings of Mickey Mouse miraculously appear on my paper.
At dinner, the vegetables inspire verse.
I act the part of Lady Macbeth for the dog.
Out of control, my feet dance and dance.
Finally drowsy, I feel accidentally like an artist.

Linda Repetz
like a solitary leaf
  clothed in hues of mourning
in its lonely descent
  through the gray november sky
i have fallen
  to the frigid earth
without a sound,
carried on the cutting winds
  of a season
yet unborn,
to join my brothers in this
lonely oneness;
to forge together:
create the
mulch
that feeds
tomorrow’s spring.

Lisa L. Wood

Thoughts About Two Oak Trees

Two oak trees, a hundred years old, maybe more
Stood side by side along the edge of a field.
Mighty and tall, unbending in even the strongest of winds
They ignored the ice and snow and freezing rain.

Passing by each day on my way to school
I was reminded of something permanent,
something fixed and reliable.
In a world that’s constantly changing
I could always count on them to be there.

Until one day
Someone cut them down, pulled up their roots
and dragged them away.

Even old oak trees are temporary—
only thoughts of them last forever.

Jeffrey Gilbert
Kathryn, Learning to Imitate

The day passed when you thought
the mountains were only in Bethlehem
The silver ring you grabbed at Knoebel's
now hangs on a rusty nail
Passion bleeds blue on yellow paper
The cat is crying at the key
You are biding time, counting
the miles that bring you home.

No longer yearning to be
tall and slender as your shadow.
You have circled the humours,
And I admire your faith in completeness.

Jane M. Slioko

Bill Keiter
Rituas

As traditional chords swelled through the church, they began a slow, solemn procession toward the altar. A shiver electrified her; this was the moment she had waited for. Clutching her father's solid arm, she delighted in the smoothness of silk on her breasts, the light swish that teased her thighs. Sensually chaste, she knew that she was the perfect bride. Hundreds of eyes stared, smiled, cried. Thoughts fluttered like moths: beautiful—in a few hours—young—inevitable—in a few years—till death. In front of her, his brown eyes widened, grew until they swallowed her, the congregants, everything. The tide pulled and she floated.

A low buzz issued from the minister, a insect noise punctuating the languorous odor of flowers. Like a rifle shot, his voice cracked through the haze. "Who gives this woman..." "I do," her father offered cautiously. Stepping toward the young man's smile, a desire rose fresh in her. Sunlight caught the glint underneath the rose-and-baby's breath bouquets. Before anyone in the joyously tranquilized assemblage could stop the action, she slid the knife neatly into his starched chest, her laughter mingling with the church bells.

Pam Rohland-Keeler
Man on a Bench

The river begins and never ends
upon the bench I bend
my crooked body
over the diary
of my brother.

And between the freighters
a century is whittled away
in melancholy phrases
as the full grey body
of my friend
rat
sails just beyond my reach,
beyond the bench,
the rail,
this sidewalk
of a beach.

The river begins and never ends
from left to right it flows.
And so the story goes between
my thumbs, within my hands,
upon my knee, beside
the river running
to the sea.

Kathleen Keenan

my pretty has magazine appeal
my pretty can open any door
cynics live in pretty faces
sleep arctic and can't remember spring.

a bitter joke on this facade
waterproof mascara won't hide the tears
and all the makeup on this planet
will not
fill this mannequin existence.

Wendy Wiersma

Bill Keiter
Night Pacing

Taking rides on autumn
nights with effortless leaves racing
along headlit roads.

I think of Halloween-shufflings about,
as my blind tiny fingers
grip cold metal,
straining to see
beautiful death and to
smell the
moon.

Mariska Bogle
An Extended Definition

Travel is the process of moving from one place to another.

Travel is
an art
inspiration
interpretation of the new
rediscov­ery of the old
energy
motion
a singing in the blood

Travel is
ear-popping take-off
a road of clouds
sunshine above, rain below
a lonely airport at four a.m.
the sting of Andean wind on my cheeks
heights that dizzy
eye-watering cold

Travel is
chattering Spanish, castanets in my ears
fried bananas, papaya ice cream
a toothless Indian vendor of sweets
crowded Saturday marketplace smells
crunching cobblestones beneath motorcycle wheels
a smile that speaks my language
loving a warm, brown stranger

Travel is
llamas, arch and solitary, on dust-whipped plateaus
a foggy, abandoned Incan city
wood-wind flutes
grim monoliths, centuries old
babies wrapped in color, bounding on their mothers' backs
dark and rowdy nightclubs
roast guinea pig for dinner

Travel is
flights delayed, luggage lost
washing clothes in a hotel sink
a beggar's whine
a legless man crawling along the streets
cold stares from armed guards
children, dirty and torn, slipping breakfast booze
revolution erupting bloody and hot

Travel is
smearry bus windows
yellow lights swimming in the night
postcard memories
anonymity
confusion
a shapeless day
no boundaries
a brief touch

photographs by
Mary Carol Mayrides

Pam Rohland-Keeler
Waves

In the hospital there were pale green walls. A gray-haired woman reading from a picture book. Voices far away in my room. A man who lifted my arm and held out my hand and pulled at my bandages.

In the hospital there were train cars under my pillow. And an engine when you're well enough to come home, a deep voice would say early in the evening. A tank car. A box car. A caboose. I lie under the sheets and spin the wheels. They sing to me. Whirrr, they'd sing. Whirrr. A gondola. Perhaps a flat car. No B-unit. But an engine when I'm well enough to go home.

In the hospital there was a nurse. Roll over. That's a good little soldier, she'd say, her face so dark and thick. For hours I'd lie in bed and watch it, wondering, thinking, asking myself. If I run a finger down it, would the color scrape off? Would it heap up in most pungent piles under my nails, waiting to be picked clean by the gray-haired woman, mumbling and scolding. My goodness, you could grow potatoes under there, there's so much dirt.


I look up. The picture book is sprawled across a gray lap. Green pastel pictures. A train slides down the mountain. Across a great lake. Waves lick the bridge piles. A tank car. A box car. A caboose. Whirrr. Whirrr. If you keep spinning those wheels like that, they'll fall off, says the dark nurse. Then what good're they be? Hafts throw 'em away. A gondola. Perhaps a flat car. And an engine when I'm well enough to go home.

The man who tugged at my bandages. He couldn't save but half the other, he told the gray woman with the picture book. The dark nurse nodded. Was she that way from the sun? Whirrr, and crumbs fell out into a metal baking pan. I have to make a bed, said the gray one, leaving the room. A whole piece of toast lay on the counter. I heard the flap of a sheet unfolding in a room down the hall. They'll take your trains. Right out from under your pillow. You've got to sleep with your hands on them every minute. One each day I get 'til I'm well enough to go home. The nurse says I'm much better, but I shouldn't let him ice cream sit in the sun. Like a man. By a pool. Warm and brown in the sun. Toasting. Toasted. Toast. A whole piece. In my hand. Like a diver. On a platform. High above a tank. In the sun. Toasted. A whole piece. It moves to the edge of the board. Peers over. Prepares to dive. A spring. A leap. Through the air he twists and turns. A summersault. A jackknife. From the side of the tank I watch. The diver strikes the surface of the water. Not a whole piece, she'd said, not a whole one. Rescue fingers dive to his aid. He is being swallowed by the waves. His warm brown body caught in the sharp metal whirling waves. The rescuer clutches at the diver's head. He catches it. He pulls. Safe. No, he's caught in an undertow. The swift, metallic waves suck him in. His rescuer lets go and swims to save his own life. He grasps at the sides of the tank. The sun breaks through the kitchen window. There is an undertow. An undertow. An undertow. In the hospital they take your train cars and throw them in the trash can.

It has no wheels, they say. You can't do nothin' with a car that's lost its wheels. You can't tell them that if you couple it very carefully between two cars that have all their wheels, it'll ride like any other car. You can't tell them. They won't listen.

Twenty dollars, says the man who tugs at my bandages. Twenty dollars. That's not too much, is it? He turns to the deep voice that brings me train cars, one each evening 'til I'm well enough to go home. The deep voice clutches the man's hand in his.

The picture book closes. The deep voice picks me up to carry me out. The door opens. In streams the sun. I scramble to be set down near the trash can. My hand plunges in. Papers part. I pull a tank car from the waste.

The dark nurse waves good-bye. Be a good little soldier, she calls. The tank car has no wheels.

Jack T. Roberts
REACTION

I am all worked out, and feeling pretty down
And when I am without, the thing to do I've found ...
Get yourself a dog and kill it.
Shoot it right between the nose,
Put the blood in a cup and don't spill it,
And put the body in panty hose,
And take it to a building,
At least ten stories high,
And drop that panty-dumpling
On some passerby ...
Laugh like a lunatic,
When the dog is dropping down,
Just then someone behind you
Throws your butt downtown.
You're in the Police station
Shrieking out at will,
Showing hesitation
When the pig gives you a pill.
Just a sedative to calm you down
And the next thing you know.
Your head hits the ground.
Out like a light, and without a fight
This experience was quite all right
Maybe I'll try a cat tomorrow night ...

tom giannelli
Too Late

Directly facing the mirror
she raised her right leg to the bar,
and stretched.
She felt her hamstrings pulling.

Looking in the mirror, at her long neck
and slender body despite her twenty-odd years,
she continued to dream the dream
that she had conceived as a child.

Now she dances for no one.
Always in a darkened room,
to softly sensual music.
To feel her body helps to ease the longing.

A pair of toe shoes five sizes too small,
still hang in the closet.
Underneath the bed, a pair of black slippers,
only two years old, put on twice a week.

Somehow she can still dream.
She can stretch, and grow attuned to her own movements,
and when she goes to the discotheque
people will admire her style and grace.

Karen R. McIntyre

Unobserved

Docile fawn,
in wrinkled sunlight.
Spindle legs askew.

Pants wide-eyed
in dapple green.
Breathe low fawn,
that the hunter may not hear.

Nicola Wood
338-3687

In the morning
I took a dime
From a place
On the floor
Beside his bed—
And I imagined
That I could take
Back my call
That brought me there
The night before.

Chris Ventimiglia

Lying alone in my bed
Staring through the black lace covering my
window into the night
My thoughts tumble down without grace in
mourning
They stumble one over the other
Seeking comfort in their closeness
But they break when they touch
And I am left shattered.

Lisa Goodman

Mary Carol Mayrides
what will i do for affection now?
  i will crawl to the ceiling and howl
  like a fox in a cyclone
  encompassed in a mirrored box
  i will explode the ocean
  until seashells are found in the mountains
  i might go to hell and succumb to a dragon
  but i will not die.

Donna Lodeski

(for younger people)

On a brisk and breezy day
I watch the dandelions blow away
And wonder if their solo flight
Will see them traveling through the night.

No map to guide them as they fly
Across the fields beneath the sky.
One journey each is all they dare
But none seem worried, none seem to care.

Each one descends to its home in the earth
Where it sleeps through the winter
  and in springtime gives birth
To a sweet yellow flower that will blossom and die
And be carried away when a breeze rushes by.

Jeffrey Gilbert
Nightfall

Be quiet and listen
Above our commotion
The full moon has risen.

Chris Ventimiglia

Finality

Forever into the days of
timelessness
bereaved of form.

Started shaking
because into that
we all go

Eventually.

Nicola Wood
Without warning comes a seizure of reason
And swiftly dissolving resolve
Hardens to begin the cycle

Juliet Dickson Nace

My world is filled up with the edges
of other people's time.

In pursuing ourselves we have lost
the ability to Belong.

Juliet Dickson Nace
To fathom the depths of your deep dark head
Through midnight eyes
That have drowned a hundred men.
To embrace you at the waist
And with my kiss
Bend your black cat’s body
To the ground

mark swisher