Gall/stones paper/cuts (Original writing).

Laurie Lynn. Smith

University of Windsor

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**Name**: LAURIE L. SMITH

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Forward

This is a collection in two parts, independent of each other, yet parallel in structure. Themes relating to past, present and future suggest the arrangement of poems, whether autobiographical, observant, ominous or optimistic, under various headings. These headings, or groupings, in themselves reflect the title of the sections and the general mood or intent of the subsequent poems.

The first section, gall/stones, was written while a student at the University of Windsor, and was published in 1995 as part of the GRANITE series of chapbooks by Scratch n' Sniff Ink. Individual poems, "dream: the jade merlin," "confession," "'graphic process" and "How to Clean a Turtle" have appeared in Wayzgoose, "Human Interest Story" in the Windsor Review, "trees in winter" in Arachne, and "python: a dream" in the Guelph Alumnus.
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the four humours

it is the second century
and we know.
we know more than magic.
At Pergamum the physician
Claudius Galenus
has investigated the colours
of death.
we assume they represent life
as well.

blood is temperament,
red sex and passion,
red heat and emotion, it throbs
in veins webbing within all the flesh,
red, flame red, liver clean.
(we do not yet understand the heart).

this black oil, or tar
is bile, from what are called the
suprarenal glands, which means
they are located just above the kidneys.
black bile carries adrenalin, energy,
when required, but usually it lays
melancholic as sludge.

the white juices in the body
phlegm, mucous, and sweat
keep us calm and even-mannered
but may congeal in the bronchia
if the throat is not cleared often,
and one may choke on one's own tongue.

yellow is less obvious than the others.
this greasy secret, choler, fills a pocket
we have named the gill bladder, hidden behind
the liver, the lifeblood.
yellow is not the sun, or yolks, or pollen.
it is temper, the irascible, the brilliant
anger unboiled, strangled and narcotic.

these offenses churn within the choler,
forming irregular stones;
the body wants an arsenal.
it will die heavily
because they will never be thrown.
for Imogen

if i ride
a cockhorse
to banbury
cross
will there be baubles
and rings, will i see
rainbows and leprechauns
along the way, will there be...
(roadsigns and swindlers
and cobblestone stumbling)
will there be a prince, mommy?
the purging
i let
the shower
scald welts down my back
burning my hair, my feet
as steam
chokes out
lost images

idian streams
screams
of recognition
now
each association
brings me closer
to a reason
and cleanliness.

naked before a misted mirror
i pull my hair dry
rub skin from my neck and face
patting gently
my femininity
crying easily
loving myself into truth
like flesh
i almost see it.

wrapped
warm
modest
in an oversized towel

i leave the bathroom
before the morning fog lifts
off the mirror.
the final insult

we shared, trusted
i believed every word
accepted all of you
but
came to know the taste
of poison -
first taken willingly
until you held my hair
hostage
in cold hands
forcing my face down
and deep
so smothered i struggle
for every breath
and even retching
try to keep my eyes open
while you plunge your values
heartbound
past my now resistant mouth.

i have a weapon!
(yet still voiceless
bent in homage)
i agree
i agree
i agree
until you lose your mind
in your own damned revelation.

having exhausted this point
you withdraw
and my best retort
is to vomit
your drivel.
'graphic process

1) it was
posing
a mating dance
and i responded,
became contained light
reacting yet
latent until

2) you opened me
in the dark, can't look
washed me in some
chemistry.
rolled, turned
agitated
was probably the word
you used
and i was
negative,
black to transparent
degrees of opacity
the lights come back on.

3) left hanging
dust-free, untouched
until dry and
you were ready to
choose
your best shot.

4) such expensive equipment
to cut me down
(cropping - slice away
the unnecessary - make perfect
your composition)
bare amber is enough
to see.

5) scraps, first
testing for contrast,
focus, exposure
then set aside
6) counting counting
   eight by ten
   a timer indicates
   i'm ready

7) floating shallow, easily
   in three baths
   the first - i come alive
   glow, change before your
   eyes
   stirring
   the second is
   you tell me, something to
   halt the process.
   the last feels
   like
   ophelia, face up
   or atwood
   "this is a photograph of me"
   where am i, really?

8) now
   is the image
   you have.

9) a print, rinsed
   thoroughly
   (all cool, the air, the waters)
   then, so gentle, by the
   edges
   you blow me dry
   like hair.

10) you can be proud
    of this particular
    piece

    i am to be framed. hung.
    looking down at the
    test scraps of myself,
    still damp,
    in the wastebasket.
act

the setting,
here, but similar
to denmark.
i will play ophelia.
as this scene opens
you enter
tragic
triumphant in
your own oblivion.

sinking loveless
but for yourself
i would be those eyes,
lacrimal ponds

witness your soliloquy
from a dark corner
then wrest from you
a poisoned dagger.

later, in another room
of the castle
we shall toast our kings and mothers!
such convenient allies in deception,
fatal determinants.
the goblet is tossed aside,
an insignificant prop.

yet, what was that potion
tasteless sorcery turned
brine as we wallowed
in the spillage
of what might have been a good year?

who held it to your lips, my love,
who touched your lips?
speechless, knowing
even as the final thrust
drew that warm farewell,
the scene was yours.
confession

i vaguely remember
holding your gun,
tasting the barrel
pressed against my lips
you warned me
that it was always loaded
like my poetry

cold words
trigger
trapper decisions
sudden
contortions, convulsions
someone is left
lying

and the chalk lines
trace a motive
or a hasty signature.

temporarily insane
(justified, sanctified)
i was confused by the
explosions, that
breathless pleasure of our death
and the screams come
from deep in the same place.
it all sounds like love
- language you would never use
in daylight.
carpenter ants

carpenter ants can
sprout wings
go searching for
a new supply
if the weather changes.

i thought they ate
2X4's, subfloors so
why are they in my
cheerios
and licking, sticking
to pepsi spilled on
the countertop?

carpenters should be
helpful, invited in
to improve conditions.

they follow any queen
like little gigolos
scatter for dark edges
when discovered.

guests, pests can be
sprayed
or squashed
or dipped in chocolate
magnified in sunlight
fed to spiders
led to tiny round
orange houses
smoked out burned down
or simply tolerated.
attitude

you can use snakes for
woodfill lines and cracks or
weather stripping around doors.
curl them up and plug holes stretch them between trees as a clothesline. tie things.
you can make patterned shoes or purses or whips.

snakes can be eaten.
procedures
before the vivisection

take the pain  bravely
drugged for manageability
then the numbing  wears
and you find yourself
bound like prometheus,
they are
your own mad talons
that clutch and tear
liver and heart
and awareness.

what fault,
what sin,
what fire?

the disease is a
kind of smouldering,
sometimes quiet,
often to the wail
of gehenna.
oral sedative #1 (for trypanophobia)

now i've eaten opium
seen crocodiles writhing like busses
downtown arteries and veins swell
bruising and noxious

intermittent strangers assume
you're as easy as the others
just another routine poke and jab and
strip and slice and gut
it should be so clean and bloodless

there is no heart to attack
there is no god to pray to
there's nothing to be afraid of, dear
there's nothing.
Mrs. Warren

my roommate glowed with luciferin
like lightning bugs caught in a jar,
her amber leather moaned for someone,

   anyone,
   please help me...

the nurses came to change her diaper
in the middle of the night, not caring
to pull the screen, hauling
her compliant nudity onto a commode,
they rolled her leaking and apologetic
to the toilet

"That's okay, Mrs. Warren,
you're a good girl for trying
to hold it for so long."

on less delusional afternoons
she told me stories —
growing up a farmchild, about
riding cows and chasing headless chickens
under the porch, about marrying
john from the next concession over,
raising three kids
and running the grocery store in town.

they propped her dinner on her lap
and came back twenty minutes later
to cut her meat, but

"You're such a good girl, Mrs. Warren,
I see you ate all of
your carrots!"

she sometimes wasn't sure
why she was in the hospital
or how long it had been, but
Mrs. Warren told me she was seventy-nine,
and i could certainly NOT paint her nails
like a whore.
the waiting room
we confer
        with specialists
(like vultures over roadkill)
perhaps arrangements should be made?
        linen
        china
        silverware
        property
        insurance
        cash

we concur
        you're not dying.

dark wings disperse.
for Lenore

now i lay me (just down to sleep)
possible, only because (pray what lord?)
someone is there (this is my will, here is the house key)
and if i should die (i will come to you in your dreams
and tell you everything)

and if i should not die
you will wake me.
the surgery as I saw it

you are swarmed
asked to take off the nail polish
all jewellery,
even the elastic in your hair
and they sedate you.

there were green walls, ugly
orange curtains, and hazy
waiting.

smiling-eyed masks come
and vaguely roll you down
to surgery through a narrow
place, square lights are the
floor your eyes are pulled
across, and grey faces bend
reassurance
along the way.

in my fugue I sprang up,
made them STOP, wait,
listen to my final delirious
instructions,
does everyone understand?
this is my will.
the masks all nod.

another scene, two pleasant
green females rouse me and I
flounder onto the next table.
they weren't talking about me,
so I made my memory circle the
room, note more, more green
and lights, chrome everywhere
I thought it was much smaller
than I expected
and over my left shoulder
a male mask was injecting something
into a tube, and I had some cognisance

a plastic cup went on my face
and the females joyfully
checked with me, that it was
my gall bladder, right?
and then, laurie, how old are
you, just breathe naturally, do
you have any kids,
yes, two
STOP! NO! I have to get to my kids
I screamed and struggled with the
plastic on my face, with the
green nurses pressing me crying
into black.

(i don't know how
much black, there
were no dreams,
there were no
voices or lights
or stars or gods.
there was no time
and for that time,
I was not.)

my own screaming woke me, still pulling
at the mask, still fighting for control
even as a familiar face coaxed me
from the undeath, convinced me it
was over, and I live.
semi-private coverage

i share a room
the door is often left
open
i have places
in my own abdomen
things we call guts

i haven't even seen
but these masked professionals have
fondled and torn
and felt my blood
which i assume is warm and gushing
as epidermis sliced open meat

or curtains ripped shuddering along
the rings across the rails
wanting to scream, shocked by the
pain of waking
startled by the intrusion,
unexcused, procedures are
administered
like in any emergency

remember to put on clean underwear
every morning
the nurses

uniform
like snow
covering
ture, the earth.
gulls pick painfully
at the near dead

smiling how-are-we-todays

roll over and keep talking
sheets change, shifts change
they get
your name right by the
third morning

cackle from above

icebergs and avalanches
tower, descend
alter the landscape
with their deception
allude to a greater power

then go laughing down the hall.
demerol dreams
roller coaster scene from the sublime

terror sounds strangled
from fire or
under water or space mountain
roller coaster trusting technology,
the expertise of disney.
but your body defies gravity confined to a seat in a tube flying
through some black replica of infinity oblivious to your own
brother next to you not recognizing his screams or your own as
meteorites and laser beams dead on cut off narrowly narrowly
stop this stop! the ride mother! get me down

and then you remember another ride when you were the mother
and some stranger's kid in the car behind you cried and
called you Mamma Mamma I don't like this make it stop please help
me! and you hold on tight to your own kids half-turned in your
seat to help that other little boy digging his nails into your
arm even after the ride is over you're still chanting
we'll be okay, honey,
we'll be okay
it'll all be over soon.
behemoth: a nightmare

behemoths with mandibles
moonbacked
drool-like stars in my own mirror
we compared houses, arrangements
and staggered up six flights -
my glass of warm wine
unspilling
curtains drawn over
the observation deck

grey people below wanting answers
skyward they had so many
voices i couldn't hear
and only wanted to know
which way to the big city
i was saved i was saved
and brought down.

there was a crumbling twenty
in with the condolence cards, we eat tonight
but one had obviously been pilfered
at the post office
and i refuse to take her calls.

they seem like such a nice couple.
malibu husband

when your husband laughs behind you
because he knows another lie
you live inside the underhell
and noise is bleeding by like
dark and water flashing
nightmares so you
dream you'll go to hollywood
and meet your t.v. idol
face to face you'll
set up housekeeping
live in chains and lace.
the night he takes you from
the parody you lip-synch
your lines and he delivers
yet another.

you run down malibu and eat at
spago dressed in sleazy black
and bracelets on your ankles,
trip the waiters who are
waiting for their
break just like you
and what's her name
who sipped back a soda at the
drugstore made it big
in pharmaceuticals, now i think
she's dead, but she was a blonde,
for sure.
spin, spin around on swivelstools
hair webbing in the spotlight.

when your tragic superhero gets
bad reviews
he'll do the glamorous thing
and blow it all right out there
on the beach. leave you
in the wash, the tide, the wake
you wake you wake.
dream: gold fish

there was something about the water,
shallowgreen and cold
fish swarmed
carp dancing as dolphins
and one fat golden ryukin
played, rolled puppy-like
in my lap
wanting its fins ruffled
and belly tickled
my lovely pet.

i join in the horizon of our elements
fascinated by your daring.
python: a dream  (in memory of Togo)

we hugged, as pets will
allow, then wrapped and carried away
he struck
quite unprovoked and undeserved,
i thought, but
it was a small bite
his head undoing like a
brass zipper
probably some gentle, curved teeth
extended for my fingers,
or a piece of arm,   thigh

he must need the mice, now.
they only feed, i'm told,
every three weeks
and being wild-caught, will
prefer live,
although he may eventually
acquire a taste for dead.
the feeders are named
pinks (almost foetal), fuzzies,
hoppers, and full-grown, those
scooped by handful from the
deep-freeze, the larger ones
thumped by the tail
on a countertop to
defrost. snakes want
warm kill, room temperature 86°F.

a small bite, only insulting
in that i saw the mark, and feared
for my own young.
i tried to grasp behind the wedge-head
he withered as some sort of numbing venom
seeped from those fine, orderly scales
behind vestigial limbs.
he may have hissed and i know his
flagellant tongue
was surveying, recognizing.
but the twisting resistance of this
coordinated muscle kept poisoning me with
his juice and squirting warm pee
to slicken his escape as i wrestled the expansions
and worked against   and with his contractions
stuffing the angry reptile into a convenient
grocery bag, concerning myself, still,
with the availability of oxygen.
dream - verbatim

i don't know how it happened i was still married
kissing and loving another man (i saw his face
high cheek-bones long blond hair
i may have called him david) my husband waited
in bed then lovingly showed me his gums
bleeding from root canals and multiple extractions
and i said oh yah look at this sucked back my tongue
spit out the lining of my mouth like a jelly-fish
the muscle blob came to life on my shoulder reminding me
of a miscarriage placental a small man o' war
as it did tricks crawling silently down my arm
turned inside out in my hand smiling rested quietly
on the bed between us he said i think maybe you should
put it back i went to the bathroom to get it wet and
comfortable enough to slide into place then it jumped
out of my hand and crawled under the vanity
as i examined my naked orifice in the mirror another layer
of secondary pinker diaphragm came loose drooled down
my chin and fell to the carpet went crawling
with the first mouth as i grabbed for it the live thing
oozed through my fingers like jello-skins in dishwasher
i remember laughing panic quickly stuffed the remains in my
hollow face in desperation i wrestled with the bigger tongue
and tried to rinse off the germs from the bathroom floor
it too dissolved in my hands so i thought cold water
this only hardened my mouth into shale chips of broken crab
shells brown translucent and jagged silently crying yet
calm i gathered the pieces of my lost voice
found a basket big enough to hide them in then
carried the basket into my mother's living room
motioned for my husband to follow me back into the bathroom
showing him the shards of my broken voice (somehow) said
i think we have a problem
on the way to the hospital i remember dreading stitches
in my mouth hoping it would all grow back
considered the positive effects (i couldn't offend anyone)
icc cream would sting such tender flesh
the doctor said it would take some time to heal
i thought there were prosthetic devices for mutes?
yes said the doctor however they're not quite developed yet
but... but how will i communicate in the meantime?
in the meantime said the doctor you're a writer. write.
dream: the jade merlin

my friend hailed me, i waited
until she caught up
and together we plowed
through shattering floes and
knee-deep slush
we made our way at daybreak
up the good end of the street
to a place where there used to be
a park, with ball diamonds
but in this dream
i saw the back of ice
storm-coated rushmores
and i was curious.

we entered through a crevice to
a secret valley
frozen green, sunrising goldenred
yet west, the glisten of slick
mountains, emerald melting,
and awe
ahhh. was the only word.

on the east wall of this valley
was methuselah, or moses
clutching tablets, chiseled in the style
of michelangelo,
chilled breath hovering,
a halo for the morning.
on the west, a jade merlin,
jade green as rivers in early spring
contrast the brilliant bergs
- and the frost wept down his robes.

now i called my children
we slipped and clawed the glacier,
scaling the folds of merlin's gown,
needing to reach his face and see the valley
from his advantage.

i wanted pictures, someone
get my camera, quick, the film,
the film, i fumbled in the cold,
my fingers stiffly trying to open the
back and load the
damn,
wrong size get me some scissors,
hurry, moses is dying and the light is
harsh.
i pulled the film out of the spool
and cut it lengthwise, all along
to make it narrower, constantly
marking the dissolution of the mountains

with all our hands tangled in panic,
we somehow wind the film and stuff it into
the camera and i move alone about the
rocks, i move flat and low
for perspective, getting the shots
in time, just time before the vision
rained itself to waking,
waking
unsure if any of them will turn out.
recovery
scar

that first shower
post-op, they said
let the bandages fall
it will be easier,
less painful

the cleansing so
desired
hair freshened, eyes
pressed clear
bedsweat washed
away
and warm, warm
newness

let the tape soften
and gauze
saturate still without tears
and the looking,
the
observational, clinical
approach, the dry
unreal.

how can this be?
this zipper,
this steel centipede
piercing
a good bloodless pound
of my flesh
and yet, impossibly numb.

i accept well, more intrigued
than anything -
how can this be?
how is my skin melded
sealing my secret
interior, sealing my fate?
how does this hardware
keep me together?

i accept well, heal
well, they say
until
the first man uses the term
"mutilation".
Leonard

Leonard was bound
not to kill.
he had tried at 3 a.m.
wild and howling,
affected by something
highly contagious
until the drugs and orderlies
could bring him down.

they wore gloves and masks
to handle him,
posted signs in the hall
outside his room, and
whispered.

Leonard, moaning
came to life
i watched his agony, first
from an incommunicable distance
then daily edging,
closer.

intrigued by this monster,
some virile simian
tethered to the chrome
railings of his cage,
turbulent with pain,
but then in his sleep,
possibly a prince.

if a kiss might wake him,
if a cure could be found

i may untie one hand.
mick and the stones have left the building

the infection swelled
painfully, and i massaged,
using the butterfly stroke
they taught us in lamaze classes
-remembered candle-blowing.
with each cramp or twinge
i grimaced, or sang lullabies to
calm "mick and the boys",

 teasin' my roommate, told her
the stones were on tour,
but she was seventy-nine,
and didn't get it.

every day she asked me
when i was having the baby.

every day i explained about the stones.
she still thought mickey was a nice name
for a boy, only what if it's a girl?

after i had
it, she was disappointed
for me, because the nurses
didn't bring the baby to our room,
but she thought i was lucky
to get my figure back right away.
sweetpeas

there were arrangements
of extravagant roses,
and carnations
delivered to the desk.
cards dictated, signed
by a florist,
and they were lovely.

i awoke from a demerol dream
saw first a handful of magenta
sweetpeas in blue tupperware.
my little brother grinned
and i knew i'd
get well soon.
watering

just watering flowers
i think of my mother
retiring every evening
to her own private park
i think it's about colour
reassure.
we heliotropes,
sunchildren
must water flowers.

it was my birthday. i've
begun to lie
and trace the spider
veins, finding new ones,
itsy-bitsy.

these mothermarks
soil the back of my hands
and i plunge my nails
into the remedial garden,
the drowning weeds
relent.

my daughter-
spring. she will bloom
and yes, i have been
replaced as she recites
the names of these
annuals.
Rubies and Arrowheads

"I pick 'tones" at Jasper
- just three years old at the time,
I gave granite to the man next door and
it's still on his shelf
after all these years.

As adolescents, my brother and I wrestled
a boulder from a stream,
at the foot of Mount Edith Cavell.
It followed us home,
and is much smaller in the garden.

I wear rubies, from my marriage
but the appraiser said they're not real stones -
wear them, anyway, for good luck
and money. "If you're born in July and you
wear your birthstone, you will always have money," he said.
I rub them.

One day I went to Cape Cod, alone
with the kids. It was a long way to go
so I picked up a black and white stone in Pennsylvania
and a round orange one in Provincetown, as proof.

Now, on every trip, I find a stone, or rather,
it finds me.

The beige nugget from Mammoth Cave is a smooth piece
of Earth's gut.
Quebec City gave me an arrowhead on
the Plains of Abraham and
I invented a history.
In the Haunted Wood of Cavendish, I spoke with
Maud Montgomery, and she said, "Here, carry this one.
It's for when you need to write."

I keep them all (but the rubies)
in my backpack, unlabelled.
They are a game of naming and remembering;
they are my St. Christophers, my fuel, and
my independence.

My body grew stones from calcium
and I carried them
heavy, like my backpack,
sharp and lodged in pockets
burdening me, on occasion,
but the alternatives seemed unacceptable.
Stones should be in a jar, on a shelf, like the first one...
I carried them until the weight was too much.
There had to be an excavation.
I was mined with lights and tools and sharp objects
in my sleep, and I asked for those jewels.
This was a place I'd never been and
it would be good to hold the stones and rub them,
be independent of these deposits.
But there is a rule regarding tissues.
We are not allowed to know our own productions.

I ran away to Cape Breton
as far as possible, touching earth
and I picked smooth, white quartz from the beach at Dunvegan,
skipped a fistful onto the ocean, wishing well,
keeping just one specimen as further proof.
oyster stone

what was the pearl
but an offence;
what is a poem
but fondling?
unclench, and
present the jewel.
paper/cuts
paper/cuts

scissor cuts
paper burns
rock breaks,
scissor cuts
short-cuts
paper cuts,
snippets
sun burns
en lights,
painful enlight-enment
poi son i vy ac ne ra zor blades just
paper cuts are shallow fast and often bloodless
pain belated is a sting, red, burn, electric
minor irritants these bee stings flea bites dog names
yet
I FEEL THE SHOCK BETWEEN MY LEGS!

so, then...
paper cuts

it's never intentional,
sunburns enlighten now;
blades seem an impossibility
but accidents do happen

bloodless, curt, clean,
at the speed of bee-sting,
careless self-reproach the suffering
dull, continual
spangled skinjuries
rosy-bottomed poison ivy or
fleabites on ankles, raw, sweaty pennies
from too-tight new shoes, but oh, with your
mature curly hair
they look so nice and they will shine
in your eyes, shine like a spanking or shine
like a black eye,

steak we never had
to waste on bruises, only ice and iodine.
skinned knees will scab and you pick
til they pinken
(the ritual shrinking of scars is always pink)
and poems, poems once you know the organics,
by the time the white cells gather -
you'll have forgotten what you need
to add to the grocery list.
pedigree
Pedigree

Does it matter, origin?
Here, now, tomorrow,
we stand on guard,
since great-great-great,
the geographer, led England
across the prairies, surveyed
potential, exhausted his spirit
in a Saskatchewan void
and named himself
a town, became a footnote.

Or the Lutherans,
hosting a congregation in
their living room until
the church was built, German clean
and worthy. Grandmother baked
pfeffernusse, called us Liebchen,
which was also the name of her canary.

Or the clan, spinster aunts making an effort
beyond Walkers, Mairs, MacDonalds,
found a second cousin of James the First,
and were quite satisfied, justified.
They wrote everything down,
in case someone thought it important.

My concessions, yes, English, very:
the attitude, the literature,
the rumour of subtle affiliation
with Stratford on Avon.
Burns and bagpipes move me, but not
unexpectedly
and I make weiner schnitzel and tortes,
and have a dachshund, but the church
gave up on me when I was eleven,
I've never been to Scotland, and I find
Chaucer difficult.

So
we stand on guard; does it matter?
The pedigree is mixed, the nose is
typically Canadian
cold, healthy; I don't like to feel
as if I must apologize for not being
fashionably diverse.
There is little to explain with
a name like Smith.
a canadian christmas

wrappings torn away
face of cool -
recognition
"road warrior" hockey pads
strapped on anxiously
sized

-and then the opponent
must suit up
straps tightly bind
kneebacks and ankles.
now, fall forward,
assess.

later, they arm
and take it
outside -
sticks and stones.

from grandpa's legendary
cowpucks, to
high-tech wheeled plastic,
the artillery
is always being tested
down every canadian street,
see this little military.

the lines are drawn;
he shoots,
he saves.
DOLL HOUSE

Perky Polly Pocket
pigtailed, perched precariously
on the edge of miniature.
Alice-like she marvels at
her creature comforts, plastic pets
and bright little furniture,
glass jewel accessories,
EVEN A SING-ALONG CASSETTE!

she wears a pinky-polka-dot dress
and licks a tiny lollipop, AND
Sweet Polly has an optional,
even smaller baby
sister, doll buggy, nursery.
she has kitchenware with teensy
painted food and bitty blankets in
ALL THREE BEDROOMS - hers, hers and hers

(sometimes a Ninja Warrior comes
to play the daddy but
HE'S TOO BIG
for the living-room chair
so has to stay outside)

and what are little girls made of now?
still stuffed in pockets or
lost between the bed and the wall or
swallowed by the dog,
sugar and spice.
trees in winter

she pointed out the birds' nests
never realizing that in full
bloom, trees were so familial.
we take for granted what
goes on behind leaves and curtains.

i saw a man touch his daughter, and
froze within my own rage, making
reasons for his hands
or my willing blindness.

she wore a pale green skirt
like curtains, leaves
and only in bare winter can we see
the heaviness in those branches,
only by climbing deep into the woods
find broken shells.
cold war

didn't understand why it was called a cold war in late summer, but we had regular drills; very loud, "special" alarms, different from the firebell - a frightful clanging, and because the school had no basement each class had its own place in the corridor, where we were to sit against the wall and tuck our heads between our legs, maybe pray. I was always under the portrait of the queen, but somehow never felt protected, and usually cried.

we were shown pictures and taught the sound of bomber planes, a high-pitched whining, falling lower, lower just before the hit - and we were trained to run for home or the nearest ditch, cover our heads until we heard the all-clear siren.

this happened once, at lunch time. I was in grade one and not quite home, when I recognized the wail of the russians overhead and I panicked, though I remembered the routine, ducked into a culvert along the sidestreet, right over the sewer, the lowest place,

and I covered my head and I waited, sobbing and hungry, until the old man in the corner house noticed me and went to get my mother, who laughed in front of him, but scolded me once we got home because I was so ridiculous, and because I was late for lunch.
wallflower
they must have been laughing at my
reading pose, "wallflower" was what the other kids called me,
my face teary behind The Black Stallion, insisting
they leave me alone.
pop and chips laid out, desks dragged to the far end
of the room and records stacked preferentially,
like the pretty girls, who were
all acting much older than eleven.
i was asked, in turn, by the geeks and
smaller boys, said no, even to Kevin, my love.
it was sinful, this rock and roll, these Beatles,
and i told the teacher i was not allowed to listen
to that kind of music at home; i was not allowed
to dance.
the system

it is a shame when flowers
are protected by jurisdiction;
certain necessary pleasures become suspect.
a teacher fears a student and the child
damaged in the schoolyard is no longer
consoled. tears continue, dandelions
find their way in asphalt.
no one learns the name for hyacinth.
red arrow

billings, montana. i was a real cowgirl in my new
shirt: yellow, with brown fake-suede, white fringe and pearl
snaps, how do i remember that?
brown jeans, too, as i recollect...

long hair and an ugly black stretchy head-band cuz those were
what we wore back then. wanted a stetson. like my brothers'.

trailer camp over-looked a drive-in theatre. i think a james bond
was playin' that night; i just remember a scene with a chase down
a ski slope. never watch james bond, but should try to track
that one down, i guess...
no sound, anyway, from where we were parked, but we could watch
it for free.

i was more interested in the horse.
one big old bay quarter horse hangin' over the fence near our
trailer. i called him red arrow cuz he was red and he kinda had
a white blaze that looked like an arrow, and i thought it sounded
real western.

i loved that horse. he loved me too, i'm sure. we took lots of
pictures, me fondling that huge horse head, rubbing his forehead,
braiding his harsh, black mane, feeling his hot strong shoulders
and then the delicacy of his throat, feeling the draw of his
heavy breath and his deep, passive eye.
twelve, almost thirteen, i had whined and begged a lot, like most
girls my age, still never got to have riding lessons, never got
a horse, no matter how many birthday candles i blew out, but,

red arrow, all night, carried me: i'd waited in my musty bunk til
everyone was sleepin', then i
climbed the wire fence and straddled his hard back; never
imagined how wide i'd have to spread my legs to ride such an
awesome thing, never knew how high it would be, how parasitic,
the way you lay flat the first time, clutch the mane and wrap
your legs tight, desperately trying to feel the pace; even the
first slow walk wants to roll you over one shoulder or the other,
and
you're back there, you're behind that huge neck, that
friendly head and you can't really see his eyes to anticipate
the moves, or maintain trust; bareback, you are following, and he
is unbridled...

red arrow, all night, carried me.
the fargo poem

everyone's talkin' 'bout fargo, 
lately, 
and i was there, once, 

and i get the joke.

five kids, eighteen-foot 
shamrock, me sneaking kotex from 
my sister for the first time, 
mother going through menopause, 
dad saw yellowstone, wanted to 
drive straight through, be home 
by morning...

fargo is grey. 
fargo is flat and raining 
and grey.
Wasaga - the Haunted Warehouse

as if it is not dreadful enough, to be so exposed on a beach, most of your skin and embarassments scrutinized by a saturday afternoon of youth who lack the generosity of hindsight, to know that someday, they too will look like this, except you lack their nerve to have your own body pierced by total strangers, or injected with colourful icons of courage or beauty, but then, the annoying loudspeaker begins its continuous taunt: THIS IS "SCARES AND DARES" WE CHALLENGE ANYONE TO what, ride a bungee from six stories high, screaming profanities all the way down, and swinging, dangling in a brief leather harness for the amusement of others? or ENTER THE BLACK HOLE, A TOUGH PHYSICAL JOURNEY no, this is not for the claustrophobic, you'll sweat and whimper, confined in a sewer pipe, like the time you were eleven, and dennis tried pulling you out by the ankles, but your back and knees were wedged, and he had to run to get your parents; your hands and shins were scraped for weeks and now YOU'LL HAVE TO CLIMB, CRAWL, SQUEEZE, SQUIRM, WORM AND TWIST YOUR WAY THROUGH COMPLETE AND TOTAL DARKNESS the announcer asks if you are one of the truly brave souls, willing to pay good money for the privilege of surviving, you'll get a certificate to show all your friends and your children will be so proud but DO YOU HAVE WHAT IT TAKES OR WILL YOU END UP ON THE WIMP LIST? you need this for yourself, you need to be hanging loose like lily-coloured guts, to manage somehow the slow ascent and give the command to drop like those elevator dreams then fly like a child's fantasy, all the time screaming for mamma or the ground... WELL OVER 1500 PEOPLE HAVE CHICKENED OUT. ARE YOU A COWARD, OR A SURVIVOR? oh, the blissful water licks at sandcastles, little footprints forget shore, wade into the cool, away from baking bodies, go chase a plastic dolphin, lose bottom, struggle, screaming daddy! daddy! hel... hel...
the swirling green that one afternoon, over thirty years ago, 
the sensation of being saved
THERE IS A WAY OUT! IF THERE'S SOMETHING BETWEEN YOU
AND THE NEXT RED LIGHT YOU TRULY DO NOT WANT TO PASS,
the gulls swooping and creaking like broken hinges,
lunging at you for breadcrumbs, multiplying and provoking,
your body feeling picked at, smaller
you want to wave your arms and
JUST SCREAM THE MAGIC WORD:
NIGHTMARES! AND SOMETHING WILL COME OUT AND GRAB YOU
AND GUIDE YOU THROUGH THE CURTAINS TO THE NEAREST EXIT,
run away, publicly disgraced, your cowardice
announced over the loudspeaker, you throw yourself
willingly into invisible hands,
RIGHT INTO THE CHICKEN COOP!
hastily pray for the first time in years
because now you know you can no longer
take the pain.
THIS IS "SCARES AND DARES"
...BE PREPARED TO SCREAM!
black dog of cape north

cape breton: we'd seen moose, picnic'd in
mountainshade, worried about the wolves and lone hikers
encountered in our own desolation, worried about the car making
the next incline, worried about accomodation.

there was a cottage available in a small town with
only one general store, and the milk was bad and the
cheese way overpriced; the teenaged clerk said
no one lives here all winter; even i'm a stranger now, but
enjoy your stay.

and there was a black lab on the porch when we got
back to the cottage, a good-sized, docile animal;
we, as usual, befriended
the stray, offered him canned beans, ham,
and scrambled eggs, but he must stay outside in case he lives
around here.

black lab didn't seem to have anywhere else to be, so
we threw a ball around, and he graciously posed with sara for
pictures, until dark.
rowdy neighbours took the cabin next door, eyed us as they
brought in a couple of cases. just
scary, that's all.
worry.

one channel: we watched the commonwealth games from vancouver all
night, the other side of the country, the most extreme opposite
coast, and this impressed us. just odd, that's all, for mid-
canadians.

black lab scratched at the tin door to let us know he was still
out there.

party got going next door, language, music, fights. it went late.
black lab preferred to stay out on the porch, thanks, anyway.
checked the locks, windows,
checked the dog again. still there. fidelis. cerberus.
until 6 a.m., and then he had somewhere to be.
but we had slept well.

got home, got the pictures back, the moose, the cottage, the
picnic table, sara, the red ball...
a canadian love story

syrup.
knothole bleeding
pulse like phantom
pain
limb removed
salt iron sawdust
on the polished floor. (hardwood).

one lost slipper kicked
under the tangleweed
linens

6:30 glow irritates
the windchimes
just enough to roll,
reach the shadeless
half.
nottawasaga, alone
watch the character of the beach
striations in the sand
scribble you off-balance
sunwater ripples your feet
makes you move along
to rhythmic snare
hypnotic motion

you look back and you're gone
like footprints
already farther than you
had intended

and then you wonder
why the rocks have gathered
at this place,
unslick and glowing, breaking
your own music

trying to march to the offbeat
you lose your place

stop long enough to cool
your soles abraded by the gravel
here and then beyond the rock
concert,
sand smooths velvet patterns
paint themselves
with iron ore
deposits in the tide-line
streaking, melting, snaketails or
spilled cayenne out and back in,
photogenic

and you walk
exploring your own toes keep moving
as the beach is pulling
at the part of you not caring
how far you are from home
and somewhere, someone's yelling MOM! MOM!

and you keep heading down the beach...
pondlife

consider an amphibian,
from water to land
lungs and gills

it can crawl and float
and walk and swim
from world to world

surfacing is only
penetration of the first sky.
why whales beach

floating on fluorescent
pink, rubber, air
my belly and extremities
the only cool,
my dorsal sunned.

bubbling and blowing i
can breathe both
elements, i
suspend somewhere near weightless,
nearly oblivious to the rhythmic blue
of sound and light,
see only orange through
my several eyelids.

the lapping quiets me
the land tempts and
i test my amphibious nature,
toe my way
closer to shore, inching the margin,
scrape belly then
backpaddle against the tide.

if i were human i would want to swim
with humpbacks and orcas

if i were cetaceous
i would want to bask on the sand
like a mammal.
stationery
storm warning

i want a warm, no
- a thunderstorm:
pre-orgasmic tension,
skydarkening heat
my customary journey to the end
of the block, a clear view of lightning
over the park, threatening west,
the city struck before the hometown.

closer it Crawls to me
like an unmet lover, repentant
for his inadvertent absence.
i want
a torrential summer evening
to slake the burn of january -
winds switch on an open field.
early morning ride

having nearly forgotten the
width and hardness of western
pleasure, taking leather ribbons lightly
finding mossy rhythm, forward,
taller than your own level hiking,
horse scent of full-time cowboy, the outrider
ahead, young hips rocking in his saddle,
slow and tense we pick across a flaxen pasture
enter then the walking woods
leaving rusty gate open, behind
movement of body, legs, hands working
the ride, chafed already from the
rubbing, percussion,
tender bruising welcome...

a doe stares, like so many others
watching from the trees.
overhanging branches scrape and pull,
berries like blood droplets brush legs,
poison ivy precludes meandering off-trail
bitted horses lead, you only
ride...

some silence,
some necessary, perfunctory conversation.
notice many qualities of light, green white gold
the vegetation and perfect loam below –
a brief impartial boredom, wishing it was over,
the slow, sore grinding, nearing the end of the hour, a need for
completion, anticipating the final wild gallop home to the
stables, consider a subtle spur and mane-clutching the runaway
causing the dangerous stampede
but then cowardly, pull back the reins, take control;
our companions seem disinclined, anyway

and at the barn, the excruciating
dismount as pelvis and thighs
re-unite, re-shape themselves for dry land
and the horses, still saddled, don't acknowledge the riders
but head straight into the barn for
a late breakfast and you know
your ass is going to ache for days.
timing

if you fade like the first snow
winter will be soft and
meaningless
there may be alternatives,
salt,
gravel, sand,
but april.
only april, the waiting

i will read books, send messages
sing as if you could hear,
(you were the only one who
ever heard -
the only one who bowed,
asked me to dance
through the corridors

and then you whispered
i'll miss you, too)
like first snow
blankets the green.
waiting

and you were the wine,
sweet astringent,
the colour of tears
in crystal.

the stutter of my fingertip
tracing the rim,
barely breathing candlesmoke,

all the while
watching both
doors.
black and white at a dull party

it's like
waiting for a train-
i'm Nell, tied to the tracks;
you're Snidely Whiplash
and after all this time
i thought you were the hero.

now Dudley DoRight should
come galloping along on
his horse, Horse, and
"save me Dudley, save me!
the train!"

or, you are
the train
-a light at
the far end of the tunnel...
music mounting, i struggle
against the ropes,
while cartoon frames depict
the dialogue and
!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

the front door opens,
blowing weather into the
foyer and it's just another
stranger
arriving late.
on completion

it chills,
the occasional wine,
a good, late harvest,
sweet anticipation,
but still indicating
finality

we promised to wait
for the right time,
sandblown, snowgrey
february,

we will raise
crystal to the minor success
of our collaboration,

perhaps leave rings
on the furniture and dregs
to warm as we reminisce,

and then
someone will go.
dinner date

ran an ad in the classifieds:
guinea pigs, $10 each.
males only.
call...

one called
-wanted to know -
how big are they?
like newborn puppies, or
kittens?
not - how big will they get?
but, how big
are they now? not, what colour are they?
how old? what's an abyssinian?
but...how big?

so i asked him
what kind of snake he had.

met a guy.
(yes, through an ad.)
chatted on the phone awhile.
seemed nice enough to
just go out for coffee.

attractive, well-educated,
drove a red '95 Mustang.
we talked a lot, about the origin of life,
stars and aliens, and arctic survival techniques,
discussed politics, religion, his resume,
'til, well, it's getting late...

and then
as we were saying our nice-to-meet-you good-byes
in the parking lot,
he asked me if he could take me to dinner
this weekend.
no means no

(no, thank you
means yes
to grandmas pouring tea)

...or coffee, dear
are you sure?
a big fellow like you
i'll bet you're hungry
let me just pop some dumplings
in the oven
it won't take more than
thirty minutes

No?
don't be silly
stay, a bit -
of course you do.

you must.
taste

as the harpist undertones
two lavender ladies
engage in pleasant chit-chat
and finger
sandwiches or
bad poets
- civilized dismemberment of
plot and character
while spring sails a riverscene
of jade and crystal by

care-less faces from the
permanent collection
peer over their shoulders
- turn up noses to
inhaler the irises,
hyacinths, pale tulips
sworn to secrecy.

yes, it all goes very well
and everyone seems to be.
parking at the river

shards of milkglass swept
under the embankment, a
ragged aubusson.

chameleon river
changes colour, texture, mind
at the whim of light.

jade ribbon, brocade,
black velvet, sequinned by
a wild night on the town.

bottles, condoms, used
like the waterfront, mornings
are often a shame.
the minnesota swans

take deep, the blue
oh wild angels
embracing liberty
by nature's grace
you fly

then cut by hunters' lead
you fall through heaven
to your own cold lake.

or sailing
like naive lillies, shallow
dancing
dip and scoop the shoreline

swallow deep the dormant lead
and poison bleeds you slowly
into your own cold lake.
the Talbot Trail

chartreuse feathers
patch the embankment,
mid-April cool
predicts the burn of
tigerlilies in July,
oh, how lovely.

there were frogparents
and blackbirds
singing over the afternoon
bright, there were
frayed remnants of
coat, almost unlabelled
but for mask, tailstripes
and estimated size,

there was warm meat,
so red, red, red as red
on a spring pastoral
and the occasional
WHISH!
of passers-by.
the brother's keeper

Gus watches from the safe grey porch
across the street
as his demented brother wanders off
down the road again, one-shoed, teasing dogs
and little girls, tossing acorns up trees
to the offended squirrels

Gus just goes to work and
comes home, often with groceries, but
always minding his own
business, ignoring the distress of old
Margaret, his sister-in-law,
as she shouts down the walk,
"Gordon, get home! Your dinner's on -
leave the kids alone!"

He takes the paper and a beer out onto the
porch, after supper, if the weather's good,
and when Gord comes up the sidewalk,
grumbles, "Get outa here, ya crazy bastard,
Go home."

And Gordon just chuckles, not understanding, not
even remembering his brother's name.
Human Interest Story

In the Gobi Desert
an Oviraptor was found
sprawled over her
fertilized eggs,
arranged geometrically,
spiralling birdlike with
their narrow ends all
inclined toward the centre
of the nest.

For eighty million years
she has cloaked them with
leather wings, bracing
an eternal sandstorm,
so now we know that dinosaurs
nurtured their young.

The same day, in
South Carolina, a 1990 Mazda
was found overturned
at the bottom of a lake;
two handsome little boys were
safely buckled into carseats.

Their mother had cried on
national television, every night
for a week before
she led the sheriff
to the boat ramp,
and now we know.
to a skinny-pig

you hairless, fatherless thing,
bloated nudity genetically prescribed
in a test-tube, i will tell you that
your mother was a naive
hostess, surrogated at the whim
of some pharmaceutical company,
a research grant your sole support.

most curious - the homeliness of your face
belie the normal voice of a cavy;
i was surprised you knew the language -
you are so unlike the sow who
harboured and nourished your pseudo-infancy.

darwin would cringe at the possibility,
the wonder and
the manipulation of genetic material
to invent a species,
an eighty-nine dollar anomaly.

you are apparently male but as
sterile as the petri-womb where
mutants are conceived
lacking precedent and antecedent,
hollow and so extinguishable, if
the novelty proves unfit or
the product fails.

and what of mary shelley? what had she to say
regarding such monsters, dependent on
false makers?
"Oh, the Humanity..."*

(for: Boo Boo, a blue and white Plymouth, 
Ferd, my 67 'Stang - (British racing green...) 
Frogmeyer, (ugly sucker: a Newport, I think,) 
De Sade, the badly primed red Marquis...
they all had names (and 
if I stumble over any of your shells, I know I'll break.)

my beloved Mimi, we are only here to find a donor bumper; 
I could never leave you in a place like this

this unordered melee of crushed colour: shattered 
windshields draping like crumpled cellophane, bullet-shot 
blue saran wrap, materials I never knew were used in cars.
doors gape open exposing the odd glove, a perfectly good 
beaded orthopedic seat-cover, someone's forgotten jacket, 
weather-useless. 
a washer reservoir protrudes, still half-full, 
offering itself as continuity 
like an exposed bladder or mammary gland.

there are tires, strewn like size 13 shoes, lights dangle as 
eyeballs from optic nerves, 
flies buzzing and the sounds of scavenger birds, not far away.

hood ornaments and nameplates are largely missing, 
the only ID's are yellow markers, numbers: 
A1333 ABC 82 10 
probably left over from the public auction but 
a Big V bag of traceable litter flaps 
from a glove compartment lock.

a muffler is tied into position with a coat-hanger 
and I remember my brother teaching me the pop-can method.

a once-bright orange line of school busses, two, three, 
four, five, six, seven, eight - 
they line the fence like cattle, tall enough to look over 
and see the little kids along Walker road, waiting.

life jets overhead, rolls down the highway, chugs through the 
soybeans, one field over.

and I wonder over the death of these personalities, 
the blue '82 Omni--there could not have been survivors, 
(like the red Aspen I once saw a dead nursing student hang out of 
- before the ambulance arrived.)

there! of course! a Torino pizzeria Chevette - this is expected 
of pizza delivery cars; I laugh at my own morbidity, 
blame the victim.
a Rose City Electrical van, wheel-less, stunted, pressing into its own grave, seatbelt swings from the doorless driver's side.

they all look so solid in the showroom or in the glossy magazine ads, so armoured and immortal.

now rust begins to set in on impact; I didn't realize they crush so easily, I think of a giant's hand mangling tinfoil.

the most recent arrival hangs embarrassingly by its ass, from the towtruck's hook, awaiting evaluation and placement.

a steering wheel leans against the fence. nearly obscured by the weeds, it wants still to determine a direction.

in the shop, saws cut away the useful, the salvageable, and overhead I hear dozens of gulls creak like the hinges on my Horizon...

* Herb Morrison, radio announcer covering the Hindenburg explosion, May 6, 1937.
promissory notes
lace

I

after winter,
ice crusting stays, snow beneath
trinkles into the sewer, leaving dingy
lace; grey patterns hover delicately
for only a day.

II

maybe it's the willows,
a distant haze of chartreuse
tangles before the sky, hinting
at organized thought, curtains
grow as the robins arrive and
morning more often smells of worms.

III

the most talented are the
wolf spiders, hanging such elegant
displays at barn windows. they know how
to present a work
in the advantageous sun, watch
from deep within a well-constructed
sleeve, their gauzy mosquito nets
collecting dew.

IV

dye must bleed from the veins
of those hand-sized maple leaves,
they dry and skitter to the fence,
leaving reprints overlapped,
applauding the pavement for its
sense of direction.
HOW TO CLEAN A TURTLE

wait for it to die.

it will dry, legs and head
dangling, tail tightens to the plastron.

you may need to store it discretely, wrapped in newspaper,
in the deepfreeze, off-season,
or until you determine your intent and hence, your technique.
regardless, label it clearly.

method 1 (especially for soup)

i was told that boiling loosens all the meat, limbs tumbling in
froth, steam fragrances the kitchen;
use a strainer to salvage cooked flesh, separate from the broth.

retrieve shell from the bottom of the pot,
and continue with your favourite recipe.

method 2

a better method, for the squeamish or those less inclined to
scrub the soup kettle, or those intending to preserve a complete
turtle skeleton, is as follows:
in the heat of summer, climb the most populated tree in your
yard, and drop the whole, dead turtle, (fresh or frozen),
to the safest crook.
be sure not to impose upon a nest, but by mid-august, most
fledglings have flown, anyway.

see that the turtle does not fall too deep into the trunk,
beyond reach, but is exposed to air and sun, and scavengers.
climb down.

you may want to check the progress of the squirrels and
maggots in about three weeks.
or you may not.

by about the first of september, the turtle shell should be empty
enough, and completely abandoned by anything save the most
diligent of ants; these can be easily blown off
after you have carefully retrieved the turtle and all delicate
skeletal remains from the hollow of the tree.

the head and tail are no longer bound to the
shell, so be sure to handle accordingly.*
gloves are optional.
now the bleaching process:

(NOTE: a problem has arisen in the past in this final stripping of the bones and shell; if left too long to soak in a 50/50 solution of bleach and water, the carapace will indeed begin to deteriorate, the platelets flaking away like mica, forming ultimately, clear little windows in the ex-house - this may or may not suit your own designs. bones, too, will become gummy if left for more than a very few minutes.)

leave them soaking only long enough to kill any bacteria - three minutes at best, and then rinse with clear, cool water.

finishing

once completely dry, the plastron might need to be reattached to the carapace, and some smaller parts, (especially the skull and lower mandible,) may need to be glued into place.

set the re-assembled turtle in a sunny window for a few days, preferably away from any cats.
your finished turtle is now ready to display.

*you may choose to preserve only the shell - hinged, gold-footed and lined with velvet, it will make a darling little trinket-box!
dream: pictograph

it looked so much like
my own poetry, in
form and content;
the night kept taunting
"IMPLEMENTS! IMPLEMENTS!"
and they were all laid out
in stanzas, rustbrown tools
wordlike, within a rather large
vertical walnut frame; the tools of
this dream were mounted like
archaeological remnants on
beige velvet
and if i could decipher
the rebus i might be accused
of plagiarism,

and she cried to herself
as i was forced to
poeticize something personal,
humiliated her, but apologized,
explained that i didn't know
the story was hers, the pain was hers,
it was only a journal entry,
an anecdote my own brother had
passed along, i had no
intention, believe me

"IMPLEMENTS! IMPLEMENTS!"
just a glance and i ran,
chased by my closest friends,
how daring!
me, how disappointing!
they thought i had more integrity,
more talent, and now

i run from these people through
the basement of a mall,
find a movie theatre or concert
about to start, and crawl
over semi-crowded seats
excusing all the way.
dream: for julie

you peeled a thin ribbon of
lemon zest from your right forearm,
curled it like a bracelet around
your frail wrist and offered it
to me in friendship -
i politely tasted the strand of
bright and pale yellow, commented
that, julie, you are so thin-skinned,
i can see the source of poetry.
we turned to watch the sky blow crimson,
and orange, and diamond sparks -
me showing you what would be southwest.
dream: barncats

barncats, all black
and scraggly, eight weeks big
they frolic, scatter
finding open doors

we sight birds
circling above the barn,
swooping fullface chubby
owls descending
we were gleeful, amazed until
i knew they wanted the kittens

they must be rabid, hunting
at noon -- we shoo the raptors,
shoo away the cats
sending them for cover,
see one stray far too high
up the willow,
and an owl marks the bough
dream after the vampire movie

the world had been blasted to
a dusty nuclear daylight
there were fragments of civilization
still smoking deathly bright
and silent.

i was there, the
only colour,
explaining this new pompeii to--
i can't see the figure.

my hands trembled over the crumbling remains
of each exbuilding
furnishing or undefined obstacle
and all decomposed at my touch
like a midas magic.

not everything. i soon
noted to my friend that certain geometries were solid
and as i found those artifacts my fear and
pleasure grew;
it had to be the bevelling.
yes, everything with bevelled edges had survived
this chaos.

then i whirled about, feeling
the sides and forms of these survivors
- dust fell away to reveal
mahoganies and ebonies and pines
as coffins took their shapes
randomly unearthed at my tactile summons.

quiet was disturbed by air
faintly rushing first,
but mounting slow and rhythmic, suggesting
breath from within the coffins
i listened for any sound beneath the earth,
tracing this, assuming perfect corners
were to be found buried like well-water.

as i divined the miracle at my feet
we rooted frantically with our fingers
to find another coffin breathing deeply in the earth,
wondering what dead could brave
such disaster.
if there was life inside this holocaust
we clawed to find it even remembering that
only vampires live the unlife,
so what must we be,
and what about the daylight?
dream: futureworld

location: dude ranch.
play cowboys
put you in line for
your initiation...

clinical, and there are nurses.
a grey upholstered chair.
they brace your legs and arms
in padded clamps

(yes, dear, this will hurt
quite a bit, but you'll be
sedated
and kept overnight, feel better
in the morning)

it's branding-
you're branding them!

a scream
from the last young fellow

- he sobs in the next room

but why?

(you must, for your children. how will they know you?)

my children do know me,
i want a tattoo.

(no dear, this is better, lasts forever on the
strong-legged meat of your thigh.)

i want a tattoo; i know what i want.
i choose!

(but dear, your children...if you ever...get
separated,
like the sheep, how do the little lambs find
mothers all named Bessie and Rachel and Belle?)

then the cowboys and the shepherds should read more books,
be more imaginative in the naming of their livestock.

(what does it matter when your mother
is probably meat?)
dream: S.O.S.
calling spaceship VIVA
distant like nebulas or
kahoutek

we are deflating
black-holing
a vacuum
unclean
voices, signals, scrambled
eggs-frying colours
deadly artistry

you carry in your wallet
the last photographs
and memorabilia.
dream: sigmund
the dream as metaphor
displays the dread
unconscious

a simple hospital scene:
peaceful green emergency
waiting
room
waiting

he comes in, masked,
eyes lowered, shakes his head
slightly

(“doctor are you ashamed to tell me?
what have we done wrong!?“)

wake up wake up
screaming
merely sobbing
no it can't be he's only
sleeping
just a bad dream
we are all so young
and i forgot to say i love you
baby.

sigmund, what have i learned?
how it begins

you are my friend and there is too much noise and not enough flat wine in the fridge and my other friend, your wife, has gone out with some people from work and the first time i saw you i knew instinctively that we would be together i knew that this was why fate brought me to my friend, your wife

and you are alone tonight with the kids and i am alone tonight somewhere else with my kids and we are both very much alone, bathe the children tell stories kiss goodnight and then phone back a little later.
windfalls
this will be about
apples. two apples.
i am your catholic sin.
it is autumn
and we are
ripened.
i have tasted your kind.
flesh, like mine
solid and clean and
sweet, nuzzle the fragrant
red
test your tongue
flat
against the round, cool
breathing comes like a
harvest wind
we inhale the
last resistance
plunge
voracious
teeth
breaking
skins.
breaking rules.
i am your catholic sin.
you will be my
bountiful
disaster.
a fantasy

fine marble, no
a fabric, something light,
and soft like
italian vineyards woven with
silver morning -
i can only imagine how it might feel
to tread those particular grapes.

i imagine the marble
that would be your arms,
solid and garden-warmed
posed around me, you
somehow make us dance
a wild and silent
tarentella.

the fabric, yes
gauzy, white and loose,
i imagine tearing it away
from your chest, the tatters
that had been my skirt
- now doves.
chance

there was a curve in my
daydream wishing, wanting,
- and that was all it took?

so simple;
i believe and
you appear, my secret genie.

these puzzles, clues,
games, we parry at knowing
each other, meet somewhere
between the
cyberpathic and
mars, say, afraid, say

...how fast is the speed of
falling,
wanting,
rounding the curve?
preparations

the backyard is a mess. tomatoes and melons rot on untilled clay.

chrysanthemums drag out of the garden and catch some falling leaves.

a rake will stay propped against the fence.

i bring in the animals, lock the doors, turn up the thermostat, and wait.
Shakespeare's Toenails

Like crescent moons from some romantic ode
midsummer night, he waned and now, what's left
but crumbling relics, documents, first scrawls,
illegible and rude; what to accept?

Each foss'liced shard and scroll ever retrieved,
cold amberflies, cave murals deep in France
all that is literature, all that is art
and contraband, humane inheritance.

Shroud of Turin, Tut's death now unmasked
bodies taped forever crumbless air,
and Disney chose a glacial evermore
in case there'd come a time we'd want a share,

a sweaty shirt, fistful of idol-scalp;
most heroes did wear hats or paper crowns
and as Egypt rolled in Aubusson the kings
were busied carving names beneath their thrones.

And Cleo - was that rug she borrowed fresh?
Or taken off the floor in Shakespeare's parlour,
where he, by candlelight, unconsciously
picked away those crippling ingrown corners.

Methodically he tore and edited,
called Anne to bring along her sewing kit,
heard tiny scissors clipping as the sickles
clicked softly to the floorboards, in full sets.

Fastidious, Anne will surely raise some hell,
the children are still crawlers; William scrapes
his discards hastily into her purse,
then tries to get his mind back on the play.

So, somehow, lifetimes later someone finds
an unknown script, more Beatles' tracks and then
another planet just one star away;
cognizance askew, and all new questions.

Decisions: what to keep, what to believe,
these bones within spiced linen, face imposed,
this silenced voice should be acknowledged, praised
for lasting anonymity's compost.

Whose bones are these? Whose hair and pearly nails?
Whose contribution should be so revered
that any scrap of flesh is canonized
and worthy of perpetual concern?
the cycle

but
i don't want my grave
ritually cleaned.
those weeds are my own
self, roots spring
from the mould
and the pine or mahogany;
they have broken through.

now clutching the percentage
of moisture that i had been,
they take me to air and
show my credence to the sun.

your commendable violets
interrupt
the process.
Vita Auctoris

Laurie Smith has always lived in Windsor, Ontario and sees no particular reason to leave. While raising two children, she earned undergraduate degrees in Psychology as well as English and Creative Writing, and a Bachelor of Education degree.

Active in the literary community, she has been involved with Wayzgoose almost since its inception. She is a board member of the Scratch 'n Sniff Writing Collective, publisher of the Popsicle projects and GRANITE series, and her work has appeared in several literary magazines. She is past editor of Generation at the University of Windsor and co-editor of the Wayzgoose anthology.

Smith was the first recipient of the "Adele Wiseman Poetry Prize", an honour most cherished as she considered the late writer-in-residence a friend and calls on her now as a muse.

Additional prizes have been awarded by Secrets of the Orange Couch, The Guelph Alumnus, and The Lance. Smith has also served as a judge for many local literary competitions and is currently Chair of the International Freedom Festival Creative Writing Contest.

Besides writing, seasonal interests include politics, gardening, and thoroughbred racing, watching soap operas and Jeopardy!, and exhibiting cavies.