

Miscarriage

JANE DURAN.

The womb refused,
backed up,
its particles of silk wasted, perish.
Breathless –
the cloudy silo,
the yolk sea.
In the ceremony
of lifting
and enclosing
the womb refused.
The ceremony /of no-child
followed.
On either side
its ostrich neck
its camel neck
wavered,
swallowed the high
midnight.
The womb held back.
It had an eye
for sand,
spread its cool
oranges and reds
on dry land,
and bright
and fierce
as a lair,
the womb bear-hugged
its dead,
and let go.

Bitch

CAROLYN KIZER.

Now, when he and I meet, after all these years,
I say to the bitch inside me, don't start growling.
He isn't a trespasser anymore,
just an old acquaintance tipping his hat.
My voice says, "Nice to see you,"
As the bitch starts to bark hysterically.
He isn't an enemy now,
Where are your manners, I say, as I say,
"How are the children? They must be growing up."
At a kind word from him, a look like the old days,
The bitch changes her tone: she begins to whimper.
She wants to snuggle up to him, to cringe.
Down, girl! Keep your distance
Or I'll give you a taste of the choke-chain.
"Fine, I'm just fine," I tell him.
She slobbers and grovels.
After all, I am her mistress. She is basically loyal.
It's just that she remembers how she came running
Each evening, when she heard his step;
How she lay at his feet and looked up adoringly
Though he was absorbed in his paper;
Or, bored with her devotion, ordered her to the kitchen
Until he was ready to play.
But the small careless kindnesses
When he'd had a good day, or a couple of drinks,
Come back to her now, seem more important
Than the casual cruelties, the ultimate dismissal.
"It's nice to see you are doing so well," I say.
He couldn't have taken you with him;
You were too demonstrative, too clumsy,
Not like the well-groomed pets of his new friends.
"Give my regards to your wife," I say. You gag
As I drag you off by the scruff,
Saying, "Goodbye! Goodbye! Nice to have seen you again."

First Birth

SHARON OLDS.

I had thought so little, really, of her,
inside me, all that time, not breathing –intelligent, maybe curious,
her eyes closed. When the vagina opened,
slowly, from within, from the top, my eyes
rounded in shock and awe, it was like being
entered for the first time, but entered
from the inside, the child coming in
from the other world. Enormous, stately,
she was pressed through the channel, she turned, and rose,
they held her up by a very small ankle,
she dangled indigo and scarlet, and spread
her arms out in this world. Each thing
I did, then, I did for the first
time, touched the flesh of our flesh,
brought the tiny mouth to my breast,
she drew the avalanche of milk
down off the mountain, I felt as if
I was nothing, no one, I was everything to her, I was hers.

Her First Week

SHARON OLDS.

She was so small I would scan the crib a half-second
to find her, face-down in a corner, limp
as something gently flung down, or fallen
from some sky an inch above the mattress. I would
tuck her arm along her side
and slowly turn her over. She would tumble
over part by part, like a load
of damp laundry in the dryer, I'd slip
a hand in, under her neck,
slide the other under her back,
and evenly lift her up. Her little bottom
sat in my palm, her chest contained
the puckered, moire sacs, and her neck –
I was afraid of her neck, once I almost
thought I heard it quietly snap,

I looked at her and she swivelled her slate
eyes and looked at me. It was in
my care, the creature of her spine, like the first
chordate, as if, history
of the vertebrate had been placed in my hands.
Every time I checked, she was still
with us – someday, there would be a human
race. I could not see it in her eyes,
but when I fed her, gathered her
like a loose bouquet to my side and offered
the breast, greyish-white, and struck with
minuscule scars like creeks in sunlight, I
felt she was serious, I believed she was willing to stay.

My Beloved Compares Herself to a Pint of Stout

PAUL DURCAN.

When in the heat of the first night of summer
I observe with a whistle of envy
That Jackson has driven out the road for a pint of stout,
She puts her arm around my waist and scolds me:
Am I not your pint of stout? Drink me.
There is nothing except, of course, self-pity
To stop you also having your pint of stout.
Putting self-pity on a leash in the back of the car,
I drive out the road, do a U-turn,
Drive in the hall door, up the spiral staircase,
Into her bedroom. I park at the foot of her bed,
Nonchalantly step out leaving the car unlocked,
Stroll over to the chest of drawers, lean on it,
Circumspectly inspect the backs of my hands,
Modestly request from her a pint of stout.
She turns her back, undresses, pours herself into bed,
Adjusts the pillows, slaps her hand on the coverlet:
Here I am – at the very least
Look at my new cotton nightdress before you shred it
And do not complain that I have not got a head on me.
I look around to see her foaming out of the bedclothes
Not laughing but gazing at me out of four-legged eyes.
She says: Close your eyes, put your hands around me.

I am the blackest, coldest pint you will ever drink
So sip me slowly, let me linger on your lips,
Ooze through your teeth, dawdle down your throat,
Before swooping down into your guts.
While you drink me I will deposit my scum
On your rim and when you get to the bottom of me,
No matter how hard you try to drink my dregs –
And being a man, you will, no harm in that –
I will keep bubbling up back at you.
For there is no escaping my aftermath.
Tonight – being the first night of summer –
You may drink as many pints of me as you like.
There are barrels of me in the tap room.
In thin daylight at nightfall,
You will fall asleep drunk on love.
When you wake early in the early morning
You will have a hangover,
All chaste, astringent, aflame with affirmation,
Straining at the bit to get to first mass
And holy communion and work – the good life.

A Puppy Called Puberty

ADRIAN MITCHELL.

It was like keeping a puppy in your underpants
A secret puppy you weren't allowed to show to anyone
Not even your best friend or your worst enemy
You wanted to pat him stroke him cuddle him
All the time but you weren't supposed to touch him
He only slept for five minutes at a time
Then he'd suddenly perk up his head
In the middle of school medical inspection
And always on bus rides
So you had to climb down from the upper deck
All bent double to smuggle the puppy off the bus
Without the buxom conductress spotting
Your wicked and ticketless stowaway.
Jumping up, wet-nosed, eagerly wagging —
He only stopped being a nuisance
When you were alone together

Pretending to be doing your homework
But really gazing at each other
Through hot and hazy daydreams
Of those beautiful schoolgirls on the bus
With kittens bouncing in their sweaters.

A Dog Called Elderly

ADRIAN MITCHELL.

And now I have a dog called Elderly
And all he ever wants to do
Is now and then be let out for a piss
But spend the rest of his lifetime
Sleeping on my lap in front of the fire.

Finney's Bar

DEBORAH RANDALL.

Ah, you rare old devil, you fine fellow Finney,
Ravishing your fiddle so the tendons won't sing
Of virginity's meaning, Finney, you dog
With your dead-born tunes,
Elbows to the big bugger moon, in Dublin,
Your backside afire as you saw at the throat,
And Irishman's Fancy is spilled.
Finney, you swore on your fathers, you'd kissed
The hem of her sky-blue dress,
Emulsion-skinned holy mother whose waters
Are breaking with sin and piss; and she unbandaged
Her bleeding heart, she reeled
As you cut your fiddle,
And the boys in the backroom reeled with her.
Finney, I'll never forget you, a bless and a curse
On your head and the murder you did,
To music, the black and amber we passed together,
Your white confessional walls,
They fell like snow on my head, Finney, you rogue,
I've looked up your trouser leg.
I'd die to drink with you again.

The Did-You-Come-Yets of the Western World

RITA ANN HIGGINS.

When he says to you:
You look so beautiful
you smell so nice —
how I've missed you —
and did you come yet?
It means nothing,
and he is smaller,
than a mouse's fart.
Don't listen to him...
Go to Annaghdown Pier
with your father's rod.
Don't necessarily hold out
for the biggest one;
oftentimes the biggest ones
are the smallest in the end.
Bring them all home,
but not together.
One by one is the trick;
avoid red herrings and scandal.
Maybe you could take two
on the shortest day of the year.
Time is the cheater here
not you, so don't worry.
Many will bite the usual bait:
They will talk their slippery way
through fine clothes and expensive perfume,
fishing up your independence.
These are,
The did-you-come-yets of the western world,
the feather and fin rufflers.
Pity for them they have no wisdom.
Others will bite at any bait.
Maggot, suspender, or dead worm.
Throw them to the sharks.
In time one will crawl
out from under thigh-land.
Although drowning he will say,
"Woman I am terrified, why is the house shaking?"
And you'll know he's the one.

America

TONY HOAGLAND.

Then one of the students with blue hair and a tongue stud
Says America is for him a maximum security prison whose walls
Are made of Radio Shacks and Burger Kings, and MTV episodes
Where you can't tell the show from the commercials;
And as I contemplate how full of shit I think he is,
He says that even when he's driving to the mall in his Isuzu
Trooper with a gang of his friends, letting rap music pour over
Like a boiling jacuzzi full of ballpeen hammers, even then he
Buried alive, captured and suffocated in the folds
Of the thick satin quilt of America.
And I wonder if this is a legitimate category of pain,
Or whether he is just spin-doctoring a better grade,
And then I remember that when I stabbed my father in the dream last night,
It was not blood but money
That gushed out of him, bright green hundred-dollar bills Spilling from his
wounds, and, this is the funny part,
He gasped, "Thank God – those Ben Franklins were Clogging up my heart
And so I perish happily,
Freed from that which kept me from my liberty" –
Which is when I knew it was a dream, since my dad Would never speak in
rhymed couplets
And I look at the student with his acne and cell phone and phoney
ghetto clothes
And I think, "I am asleep in America too,
And I don't know how to wake myself either"
And I remember what Marx said near the end of his life:
"I was listening to the cries of the past,
when I should have been listening to the cries of the future"
But how could he have imagined 100 channels of 24-hour cable
Or what kind of hour cable nightmare it might be
When each day you watch rivers of bright merchandise run past you
And you are floating in your pleasure boat upon this river
Even while others are drowning underneath you
And you see their faces twisting in the surface of the waters
And yet it seems to be your own hand
Which turns the volume higher?

Do Not Go Gentle into That Good Night

DYLAN THOMAS.

Do not go gentle into that good night,
Old age should burn and rave at close of day;
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.
Though wise men at their end know dark is right,
Because their words had forked no lightning they
Do not go gentle into that good night.
Good men, the last wave by, crying how bright
Their frail deeds might have danced in a green bay,
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.
Wild men who caught and sang the sun in flight,
And learn, too late, they grieved it on its way,
Do not go gentle into that good night.
Grave men, near death, who see with blinding sight
Blind eyes could blaze like meteors and be gay,
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.
And you, my father, there on the sad height,
Curse, bless, me now with your fierce tears, I pray.
Do not go gentle into that good night.
Rage, rage against the dying of the light

The Gas-poker

THOMAS GUNN.

Forty-eight years ago
– Can it be forty-eight
Since then? – they forced the door
Which she had barricaded
With a full bureau's weight
Lest anyone find, as they did,
What she had blocked it for.
She had blocked the doorway so,
To keep the children out.
In her red dressing-gown
She wrote notes, all night busy
Pushing the things about,
Thinking till she was dizzy,
Before she had lain down.
The children went to and fro
On the harsh winter lawn
Repeating their lament,
A burden, to each other
In the December dawn,
Elder and younger brother,
Till they knew what it meant.
Knew all there was to know.
Coming back off the grass
To the room of her release,
They who had been her treasures
Knew to turn off the gas,
Take the appropriate measures,
Telephone the police.
One image from the flow
Sticks in the stubborn mind:
A sort of backwards flute.
The poker that she held up
Breathed from the holes aligned
Into her mouth till, filled up
By its music, she was mute.

The Snow Man

WALLACE STEVENS.

One must have a mind of winter
To regard the frost and the boughs
Of the pine trees crusted with snow;
And have been cold a long time
To behold the junipers shagged with ice,
The spruces rough in the distant glitter
Of the January sun; and not to think
Of any misery in the sound of the wind,
In the sound of a few leaves,
Which is the sound of the land
Full of the same wind
That is blowing in the same bare place
For the listener, who listens in the snow,
And, nothing himself, beholds
Nothing that is not there and the nothing that is.

Late Fragment

RAYMOND CARVER.

And did you get what
you wanted from this life, even so?
I did.
And what did you want?
To call myself beloved, to feel myself beloved on the earth.

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Sonnet 130

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE (1564-1616)

My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun;
Coral is far more red than her lips' red;
If snow be white, why then her breasts are dun;
If hairs be wires, black wires grow on her head.
I have seen roses damasked, red and white,
But no such roses see I in her cheeks;
And in some perfumes is there more delight
Than in the breath that from my mistress reeks.
I love to hear her speak, yet well I know
That music hath a far more pleasing sound;
I grant I never saw a goddess go;
My mistress, when she walks, treads on the ground:
And yet, by heaven, I think my love as rare
As any she belied with false compare.

Jabberwocky

Lewis Carroll

'Twas brillig, and the slithy toves
Did gyre and gimble in the wabe;
All mimsy were the borogoves,
And the mome raths outgrabe.
"Beware the Jabberwock, my son!
The jaws that bite, the claws that catch!
Beware the Jubjub bird, and shun
The frumious Bandersnatch!"
He took his vorpal sword in hand:
Long time the manxome foe he sought- 10
So rested he by the Tumtum tree,
And stood awhile in thought.
And as in uffish thought he stood,
The Jabberwock, with eyes of flame,
Came whiffling through the tulgey wood
And burbled as it came!
One, two! One, two! And through and through
The vorpal blade went snicker-snack!
He left it dead, and with its head
He went galumphing back
"And hast thou slain the Jabberwock?
Come to my arms, my beamish boy!
O frabjous day! Callooh! Callay!"
He chortled in his joy.
'Twas brillig, and the slithy toves
Did gyre and gimble in the wabe;
All mimsy were the borogoves,
And the mome raths outgrabe.

Hot Ass Poem

Jennifer Knox

Hey check out the ass on that guy he's got a really hot ass I'd like to see his
ass naked with his hot naked ass Hey check out her hot ass that chick's got a
hot ass she's a red hot ass chick I want to touch it Hey check out the ass on
that old man that's one hot old man ass look at his ass his ass his old man ass
Hey check out that dog's ass wow that dog's ass is hot that dog's got a hot
dog ass I want to squeeze that dog's hot dog ass like a ball but a hot ball a hot
ass ball Hey check out the ass on that bird how's a bird get a hot ass like that
that's one hot ass bird ass I want to put that bird's hot ass in my mouth and
swish it around and around and around Hey check out the ass on that hike
damn that bike's ass is h—o—t you ever see a bike with an ass that hot I
want to put my hot ass on that hike's hot ass and make a double hot ass bike
ass Hey check out that building it's got a really really really hot ass and the
doorman and the ladies in the information booth and the guy in the elevator
got themselves a buttload of hot ass I want to wrap my arms around the
whole damn hot ass building and squeeze myself right through its hot ass and
out the other side I warn to get me a hot ass piece of all eighty-six floors of
hot hot hot hot ass!

EASTER WINGS

Lord, who createdst man in wealth and store,
Though foolishly he lost the same,
Decaying more and more
Till he became
Most poore;
With thee
O let me rise
As larks, harmoniously,
And sing this day thy victories;
Then shall the fall further the flight in me.

My tender age in sorrow did beginne;
And still with sicknesses and shame
Thou didst so punish sinne,
That I became
Most thine.
With thee
Let me combine,
And feel this day thy victorie;
For if I imp my wing on thine,
Affliction shall advance the flight in me.

Frances Slack

I think the needle is stuck
ink the needle is stu
ink the needle is stu

ESKIMOPIE

I shall
Never pretend
to have forgotten
such loves as those
that turned the dying
brightness at an end of
a child's afternoon into
preludes To an evening of
lamplight To a night dark
with blanketing To mornings
of more and more There deep
in the old ruralities of play
the frosted block with papery
whisps still stuck to it **kissed**
me burningly as it arose out of
dry icy stillnesses And there now
again I taste first its hard then
its soft Now I am into the creamy
treasure which to have tasted is to
have begun to lose to the heat of a
famished sun But if I break faith
with you poor dreadful popsicle may
my mouth forget warm rains a tongue
musty Pauillac cool skin all tastes

I see
sweet
drops
slide
along
a hot
stick
It is
a sad
sorry
taste
which
never
comes
to an
end