

Naked in Daylight

Poems by Carol Adler



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Solitude
my jealous lover:
say you need me.

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FORWARD

After Catullus

I have no problem
sharing this extraordinary
collection of
rhetorical gems because
I know the
whole world has been
waiting
for them

PROXIMITY OF PERCEPTION

Pre-Natal

My cosmetics had been stolen and
my body was in pain. Part of
me had forgotten to turn off the
alarm but it was too late the bombing had begun
my shoes were too tight and when I opened my
mouth the streets shriveled up; with my iron I
immediately set to work straightening
corners. At this point it didn't matter if the
post office was locked because the message was
clear: this was my chance. Even the red ink had
risen in the neck of my goose, my crotch itched
and my hands fell away from all credentials as naturally
as if I'd never been stamped.

Never before had I ever been so sure of the
odor of run. Here at last, like Christmas seals on December's
bills was His Mistress' Voice
crooning out of the ducts...: "IIIIyyyyiiiiim dreeeeeeam-ing..."

Tear Up the Contract and Start Walking

This is my proclamation delivered at the stroke of indecision just before the twelfth hole at a moment that has never occurred. It's time for Laura to examine her parts to find out where they belong; she must either make peace with them and tell them where to go or hire a man. And June needs to find an addiction, she can't go on forever expecting others to look the other way every time she caters their affairs. Anyway, she's too good a cook to be wasted on grits. The stomachs here are waving their flags, the toilets are turning green, Morley's dreams are collecting dust in the delivery room, Dick's Toby Mugs are growing tails. I can no longer afford to rent my clothes nor can I willingly recycle my unclaimed fears, which means it's finally time to separate visions from glass.

All this left-brain thinking as I awoke by accident and discovered myself seated at the head of the class waiting for adjournment. First, however, I knew I would be asked to say something blue, which would definitely be against all tradition and would never match with my closing stanza. What should I do?

Fortunately my tape recorder was hitched up to the dust directly behind me, so I immediately dictated a dozen revisions.

Belief Systems

"What do you want for my life?" shrieked the old man in shorts who dyed his hair orange. As pedestrians hustled by close enough to be mugged, he began to wonder who really was worthy enough to be a victim. After all, he wasn't getting any younger and the world was growing colder and warmer by the minute.

At the corner beneath an umbrella, a yellow-haltered woman with a red ponytail was painting hot-dogs. Around her neck was a star of David that didn't really mean anything, she lied.

A long white limousine splashed mud on the man's trousers, and as he lurched back from the curb, his left foot landed in a mustardy nest of dogshit. In court we learned the driver was a dog with his dead mother in the back seat.

When the umbrella collapsed, the woman's wig fell off. On her shaved head was a star of David.

Addict

Yesterday a whole fried chicken strutted into the patio and ignoring the knocker, pounded on the door, demanding reasons. How had he guessed I'd just nested a dozen eggs in my right brain next to the vacuum? "Intuition," he shouted. Hot bubbles sizzled out of his angry balloon and I could taste the grit; my stomach gurgled. "Please," I begged, "right now I can't fit you in." "Ahh, so *that's* it!" His comb bristled as he stepped out of his crust and lunged. "Time!" he roared, capturing me by the books. "And Life," I squawked as he swung me around as if *shlagging kapparos*.¹ I watched the grease pour from his balls, watched my precious poems curl and shrivel into salty strips. Brusquely, he picked each one up, crumbled them in his fist, belched and sprinkled them into his wingpits. "Please, I have no insurance." His grip tightened. "Good; then make a wish." He clucked and grinned as he studied my wrists, deliberating which one to break first.

¹ *Shlagging Kapparos* is an annual custom performed by many Jews on Erev Yom Kippur (Yom Kippur eve). One takes a live chicken and waves it over one's head three times while saying a Hebrew phrase to the effect that this chicken should be slaughtered in lieu of oneself who may be deserving of like punishment for sins committed throughout the year.

Life of One Saint

"When he fished for compliments he ended up throwing them back because he felt unworthy," said the eulogist, helping himself to more scrod and parsleyed potatoes.

"He was cruising down the Interstate when he got bumped off by two sharks looking for shit," the sheriff wiped his mouth on his sleeve. "You got the wrong guy, I ain't got nothin', he said. I s'pose there ain't nothin' wrong with provin' he was right for once. He did have nothin', 'cept maybe the skin an' bones that was his life. So for a stiff fee I let 'em go. What goes around comes around. We need a new jail."

Personal friends requested that parking fees be waived. In front, diapers flapped on the flag pole and by the urinal one of the cousins was selling condoms from the Holy Land. "He wasn't a bad man, but he wasn't a good one, either," sighed his mother, clutching his teeth in her fist. "That's OK," said the priest. "That's enough to put down, you can charge the rest."

Another World

They were eating Chinese and discussing the stock market, five of them. Each a different order now undone, seated amidst clutters of domes and bowls.

"The economy stinks," said the lawyer, helping himself to more pork. In the center of the table, orange wax flickered in its lotus-shaped glass.

"What's the problem?" asked his wife, digging into her sweet-and-sour shrimp.

"You mean what's new?" added Ken, a writer who worked for the local paper. He liked beef and the usual, which looked like chow mein. Mixed aromas of incense and fry. Heavy perfume.

Toujours Moi? Paco Rabonne? "I just had an abortion," whispered Ann, Ken's daughter, to her new stepmother, June. June smiled benignly as she picked at her lobster with a foreign name. She was glad her dress matched the orange of the candle, glad she was wearing pearls. Glad she liked her new husband and that he also liked to Go Chinese.

"Isn't it a good thing?" she remarked, helping herself to more rice. The waiter poured the tea and wondered why there was no steam. He wished he could say more than **Yes. Please.** Without a smile. **Thank you.**

Today's Special

As if it were Birdland or the Boardwalk
or just Octogenarian Day at the market
in their shiny rubber-wheeled toys they rudder
themselves into the parking lot
and as soon as the doors open fly in
first to the toilets
then to sample handouts squeeze
grapefruits prod melons.

Today is Free Weigh-In. One by
one they line up and bounce on the scales

**but the needle's wrong i'm too fat too thin
just right just right osteoporosis osteoporosis**

Lettuce is up cucumbers are down
"This is a tomato?" shouts Becky. "Fire one!"
"PLAY BALL PLAY BALL!" shouts Nathan in
Bermuda shorts and baseball cap, aiming an apple
at his wife.

"Cottage cheese cottage cheese," chirps pinafores
Caroline, lifting each lid and peeking inside.
"I WILL smoke if I WANT TO," shouts Harvey
blowing a mouthful in the manager's face.
"Happy Birthday Hon," shrieks Dolores in Bakery
sticking her finger in a chocolate cake.

**whadda ya want tonight the same old
i'm sicka yer stale yer salty yer tasteless
and you know what you can do with yer goddamn greasy
I HATE SPINACH GODDAMMIT
a tisket a tasket
junkfood for my basket**

"How will it end?" asks Gladys on Register Eight.
Probably a blood bath," shrugs her packer.
"But when?" wonders Gabriel in Aisle Seven
mopping up eggs milk yogurt sour cream antiseptic

Displacement Myth: Electrophotography, or, the Tree Inside Each Acorn

Semyon Kirlian took a photograph
of his eye
and discovered the eye
known as Semyon Kirlian
staring back at him.

He blinked at the two eyes
but only one blinked back. He winked
with his left eye. Semyon the
photograph crumpled and
bent left. He put on
a Jane Fonda workout tape.
The eye put on a silvery leotard
and waited for Jane to
begin. But this was the advanced
program without warm-ups.
Semyon was a heavy man and
was already snockered on
vodka. "What's
the problem?" asked
Jane, stripping to the waist.

"My perception," moaned
Semyon, blinking nervously.
His eye swelled with
vision as Jane's hair
fell into his face in a shower
of tigers. "Copy me,"
she ordered. "Copy me,"
panted Semyon.

"Harder," she commanded. God, this
was great. Semyon obeyed.

Jane winked at him.

Semyon's eye popped out of the
DVD and started to crack up.
"Careful!" warned Jane,
too late.

The Right Communication

A lipstick rolls out of the mirror and turns left on Universal Boulevard just in time to watch all the bitten off fingernails grow long enough to be alphabetized. Outside, water purrs indifferently past strolling hot dogs ribboned and ringed, still looking for the right brain even though frustration is already stacking chairs and counting the cash. How can anyone know what to say without asking first--as if books could kill, like names and sticks--or know when not to be spontaneous and congenital?

Taking a cue from the gathering harbor, all the medium-size bowling balls hustle into their uniforms and line up as an affront to the approaching calibration. The array of guilt is remarkable, notes a visiting reporter. There's nothing to feel, notes another. And as we survey the vendors and count the prisoners, this seems to be the case. (If only we could sell our illusions and settle for ongoing propriety with no problems except maybe an hourly bell and occasional whimper.)

Inside, the pool is filled with stars even though the evening is still missing. No problem, purred the operator to her glowing laptop.

The Significance of Conversation

In the current condition, even before two people meet, they can dissolve or slip through the keyhole. Only the other day a woman tried to act as an impostor and got framed as the whore who called herself Little Bo Peep at the topless bar next to the airport. When she screamed that her credibility was at stake, they tied her to a cash register and tested her breath, three officers taking turns. This insult drove her to rent a husband who was a catfish farmer currently in the business of digging sinkholes. But the plan backfired. He fell for her head over heels, and she inherited neither fish nor farm.

A century or so went by. Then one day in broad daylight down the street from KFC and Wendy's, Gamaliel was in the rest room reading the comics and he came across a strip called Mother Goose. There she was, plucking feathers and singing nursery rhymes to Little Dell. He rang her immediately to introduce himself as a Doctor of Jewish Law, and she married him without even checking his cholesterol.

Complacency tends to get lost like socks in the dryer, so we'll skip over the years and come to the immediate dialogue: "How lucky you are to have hair." He didn't respond so she tried again. "Does it bother you to talk?"

"Only once, when I was a child," he replied. "Of course you understand."

In vain, Bo Peep searched for a straw, but the restaurant had just been invaded by a busload of fanatics on their way to The Falls. Reaching into her bra, she pulled out the one she'd saved from a previous shake. "It'll do," straightening it. "No," changing her mind. It wasn't clean and the tip was lipsticked... but she certainly couldn't use her *mouth*.

Wilber in Broad Daylight

Wilber spent ten years at a seminary pretending to be celibate, and ended up marrying Sebastian because he had to. After six rhythm babies out of wedlock, Bible class twice a week and confession every Sunday, Sebastian fell in love with a lesbian security officer at the factory where he assembled mannequins. "I love Marty for his tits and buns," moaned Sebastian at Sunday confessional.

"No small matter," said the priest, shaking incense over Sebastian's buns. "This will take care of everything."
He was right. Marty swapped his uniform for one without tits, Wilber became a nun and every Sunday Sebastian paid a Catholic mannequin to confess to the priest.

Retired Colonel

"It's time for tea," says the lamb,
blotting his saliva with her
pen and adjusting the forget-
me-nots to catch the sun.

But the Colonel has to pee first.
"It's like this all day, he mutters.
"With so many demands, it's impossible
to fill in all the blanks without
a dictionary. Eat, sleep
and pee, no four-letter
words and nothing beginning
with 'W' except wait, what, want,
wort went..."

"The President is on Line Four," squeaks
Mousie, removing his bubble
and handing him a wand. "He
says he can't do anything about the grape
requisition and oreos until you
find the right line."

"Shit!" The Colonel pushes away
his troops as if they were merely the
head on a beer, bolts upright
and slides into his zipper.
He's sick of covering up. It's
time for some action. Why
couldn't He make His *own* sandwiches?

Elijah

When he roared through the door puffing
on a cigar and waving coupons for
kosher soap, Grandpa dialed 911.

"Smoking is not allowed," barked Grandma,
dousing his butt. The baby screamed

"Oy Vey", Mama's wig vibrated, and Cousin,
who was gay, squeaked "this isn't funny."

"Vulgar," agreed Niece, a freshman
at Harvard. "Who invited him?"

"Roger, we must remember," whispered
Deputy Moss to Grandpa. "Come in, come in!"

Grandma yanked out a wish bone from her
ear and shook it three times to the

left, three times to the
right. "He could be Albert Einstein, or

Marcel Proust," suggested Prodigy from
the crib. "Who's to know?" mourned

Uncle, a permanent victim.

Meanwhile, Elijah was examining
the wine spots on the cloth.

Then he opened
his kit and took out

a miracle spot
remover. "Next year there will always be
a Temple," he said before taking off.

Conversion

Yesterday according to the sign on the steeple, the white A-frame village church became a jewelry store. The table in front is laden with glass diamonds, ice tongs, electric woks and walkmen. Inside under glass: picture frames and silver wish bones... at the far end, in green fluorescence, a speaker plays rock and a girl with foreign eyelashes and nails chews baseballs while she strokes the habit of a nun. Her body is glass with a plastic head. On TV at the cemetery the store is featured in a 30-second ad. "God is glitz," says the actor. By late afternoon the air smells of dog shit and tutti-frutti. "We were all Pilgrims once," preaches the minister.

Proximity of Perception

On the day his dog Spot ran away, Charles shaved off his beard and cleaned up the pad. Just as he opened the oven door to clear out his rage, it blew up in his face. On the way to the hospital his heart wouldn't start. The closest neighbor was on valium and couldn't find her clitoris so he walked two miles in ninety degree heat to the last resort where he found Spot eating crow with his former wife Joy. Both under the influence, they didn't see him coming.

"Joy, Joy," he called. Finally Spot trotted over and started to bark Beethoven's "Ode to Joy." "Celebrate!" shouted Charles. "What?" muttered Joy, tearing up the electric bill. Spot picked up the pieces, and like a good dog chewed them back together.

On the spur of the moment, Charles realized he was me, so I don't blame myself for driving her crazy. Guiltlessly, I can call the shrink, to ask if I can join them for a little pleasure, who could ask for anything less? Under cover, there's room enough for three.

The Appraiser

I make appraisals.
I do mostly ocean estates.
It's easy to make money for
wealthy people. The ocean
knows me well.

When I went to one of Mike's hotels
that he's breaking up into condos
I worked on one with thick
carpets and wedding pictures on the piano.
I stood on the balcony and watched the
tide going out. I pretend I

have family. And a beautiful wife.
On the coffee table is a dish of
candy, one piece wouldn't be missed.
And by the telephone, a penny. In the
realtors' envelope is an extra twenty

(they don't usually give tips).
I'm often lonely
but I don't like to think about it.

Gloria the choir director once said I was an angel.
No one but me and Gloria know that.

I did a free appraisal for her and her man.
Her man's in a wheelchair, no legs.
Gloria's an angel, too.

Sometimes I wish I could die.

He was a pilot in Viet Nam, he said.

THE MASTERY OF LOVE

If Good Doesn't Come

What is love? asks a child,
her sick kitten cradled
in her arm.

Bedtime and snowstorms, steamy baths,
sleet tapping against the window, prickly as
Uncle Wiggley's bunny whiskers, my
father patiently saying yes
to another story I already knew by
heart. Propped up on one elbow at
the foot of the bed, he was the child,
I the kitten curled up in the soft
drone of his voice. Last time
I visited him in the nursing home, his eyes
filled as he said, "I want to help
you."

Finicky about daily shaves,
he says the barber's name
is Tom Someone
with six grandchildren and photos.
"Whiskers are only for creatures that
wiggle their ears," he
grins, pressing my hand.
In *The Republic* Socrates masks as Plato and pretends
to know The Good. I got my
'A' but can only remember the professor's
beer belly and mismatched socks. My father
didn't need a course.

When he dies, I won't ask questions or
make statements, but take my place by
his workbench while he patiently hammers
tiny nails into leather sandals for my
Shirley Temple doll, each *tap-tap!*
a dotted exclamation poking out of
wintry fields like frosticled
bunny whiskers.

Roses

They used to spend hours weeding
horseshoes, triangles and circles
planted mostly with roses.

Although I lived next door I didn't know
they were blind until I brought
them an American Beauty
for Christmas.

What was it about roses, I wondered,
the blooms glimmering in the green
like a watery Manet.

Even when it rained they were out there
weeding. Like monkeys in yellow slickers.

Truth is a Lie Not Yet Formed

In a wet bathing suit I crouch in the corner of my misunderstanding. Terrified my stomach might discover it's stuck between floors in a jammed elevator, my body shivers its will to survive. My eyes lock shut, voices festering.

Don't tell me again about Mozart. Don't tell me I can't ever again experience the sensuousness of gold shimmering on my hips, words weaving their arms into garments of sex, fur-lined cloaks. Don't tell me I can't rip them off.

By the manhole, the police wait with teargas.
If I control myself, they'll know I'm scared.
If I shout, I turn myself in. Don't tell me
about love, how its needles poison the flesh and

spray paint messages on lavatory doors. Impotent because I know everything and knowledge spreads,
I'm ready to confess I was never a virgin.

Transformation

Like a parent teasing a child with candy
my lover tells me sex is evil.

Meanwhile, the cover is off
and I can smell the sin beneath
the foil.

Once in a moment of
weakness he almost said
he loved me.
Then, as if knowing my reply
could be more addictive than sugar
he snatched them back.

Afterward, he kissed me sweetly
on the tip of my nose.

Now I understand the meaning of guilt
and forgive myself
for counting the days until Christmas.
My lover was right.
For him, sex is evil.

What Then?

I didn't come here to see the scar on his left thigh, momento from the bar fight when he threatened to kill me and I picked up a knife. Large-bellied, reeking of skunk and critter, one eye patched, the other swollen--"What, then?" he grins, already knowing. It's been like this all my life. I go along thinking my goals are everyone's. Strolling in the park, feeding ducks, or floating through the Belvedere, bathing in Klimpt and Schiele, in the afternoon nibbling pastries at Aida or Dehmel's. Then I wake up lying in a litter of greasy McDonald's wrappers or in a Victorian garden, a bullet in my chest, red-faced Adam standing over me with his usual accusation.

Or I'm writhing at the bottom of a pit where I'm supposed to wait for the rug dealers or used car salesman. It's not that I ask for all these myths I keep bumping into. Who is this man who claims to be my father, wife, brother, Atlantean cousin who does mail orders on Herkimer crystals and Hong Kong radionics?

I can't even get rid of childhood traumas that never happened, like getting locked in the outhouse at Canandaigua Lake, or kidnapped at Disneyland. I can still taste the naphtha, feel the panic burning my chest.

"We do belong together." Is he a four-leaf clover I pressed into *Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm*? Cookie cutter I dumped in the sand box when it was time for lunch, the thundering bookcase I called God? I lie under the full

moon waiting to get pregnant. Slimy with sweat, his breath reeking of garlic, he leans over me, studying the map.

Away

Beneath the pile of broken promises
he glanced up at me from the bottom rung:
"I need you desperately."

His eyes were glazed
and I was a slave again,
carving his name in the wind.

And when we'd chased each other
from one world into the next
and he'd captured me, spinning me around
until I was dizzy and sure

he'd beg
from the bottom rung--
"I need you desperately,"

His eyes would gloss over as one by
one the promises flew off

like bricks.

One Day

"Nobody is, in effect, a perfectly good woman."
-- *Stealing the Language*, by Alice Suskin Ostriker

The strange thing was
I didn't know I was being punished
until my nipples shrieked
and I wanted them to be
twisted and pounded non-stop.

He could have poked
out my eyes
peeled me like an orange
peed on me.

What had I done
to deserve this pleasure?
Because he didn't know either,
he stopped, unmounted me

and strode away.
Now I write him letters
telling him it wasn't his fault,
but he doesn't answer.

No wonder fortune-telling
is the growing trend
for those who refuse
to be superstitious.

Crow-Eating, Male, White, Southern

Honey Ah loves you like a frien
an you've got ta unnerstan
Ah've got lots uv acquaint'n'ses
but when it comes to friens--

cuz y'see Ah believe in pleasin
evraone
now mah firs wahf she tells me she say
she *lahked* ta be beaten
an ah swear ah could *killed* her sometahm
fer wantin ta be so stubborn

she was the bane a' mah good intenchuns
moral all raht
not a crooked bone in her skull

an when she done somethin
whatever it was
yawl can be damn sure it was done raht
no twistin aroun in *her* mahnd.
Fer *her* D' Trut' was D'Trut'.

So when she took a gun an shot herself
Ah sweah All's Ah said to her
only jus the minute before Ah says
like Ah says to you now

"Honey Ah loves you like a frien--"

Unconditional

Because I believe in love, I am here to forgive the mother who stuffed rage in my throat, the father who scalded my tongue and lopped off my fingers. Here to embrace the husband who raped and robbed me of dignity and hope. Here to embrace the man who flashed naked out of the bushes, the men who knocked me to the ground and ran off with my money, the men who trade lies for sex, the men who call me man-hater then beat me up, the men who come to me with their amateur scripts, asking for handouts.

I am especially here to forgive the man who told me I was depressed.

My mother stands over me with a seven-branched candleabra. My father feebly reaches out and tries to remember me. In a hospital gown, my husband rises from his nightmare to greet me. Prisoners wait for me to come. I place my clitoris on their tongues and force their fear to melt into trust. All night long I give the disempowered my ripened vineyards, my song of songs.

Altered State

I was lying next to a man who wanted to make love to me and thinking about lying next to my former husband by the swimming pool at Ramat Gan. We were on our honeymoon and my husband, a composer, was telling me about the time the Hitler Youth tried to drown him.

I'll teach you how to swim, I promised. I didn't say then that faith, not music, was the universal language. I didn't urge him to accept my offer, or even believe in me. Nor would I have told him, ever, that his father, who died young of cancer, had also tried to drown him in cruel expectations that could never be met. I had faith that in time he would learn to let love be his ballast. We made love, I loved, oh I loved, and taught him how to swim, but he never liked the water.

This man was sleek and tanned, every part of him languaging desire. *I don't understand prepositions*, I protested coyly. *You don't have to*, he grinned, *when love is unconditional*.

Indeed, I marveled, realizing now it was not the sun but a hand on my forehead, and again there was music, wood flutes and drums. But as soon as I said yes I discovered myself floating in a cart through the supermarket. Just ahead a broom had fallen down, forcing me to detour through baby food and diapers. Near the nipples a crown of mistletoe dropped onto my lips and I felt myself lifting into the air on the strings of the third movement of the Mahler 5th. The drums grew louder as the flutes blew out morning glories in pastels that matched the colors of the bathroom.

Yes, I repeated to the repair person

as he pulled out my
skull from the freezer. You're right.
It *is* time for a trade-in.

The Mastery of Life

Every time she tried to learn
where she was

he came to her as direction.
From whence the source?

Let's start over.

A woman writes a story about a man
who becomes her lover
because he looks for a woman
like her but she can't be sure.

It's getting late,
let's try again.

The man in the story is a
writer. One day, the woman writer
meets this man, but doesn't know it's
he because they've never met outside
the story. This man talks without
quotations and moves without
verbs.

They talk possible scripts,
a left-handed woman
who accidentally gets
trapped
in the mind of a man with no

ambition except to
go to the zoo, museum, Alaska,
alone--the story embellished by long
arguments, snatched coffee breaks,
a Bermuda cruise, God, how trite.

"What do you want?" he barks
as of course, she collapses in tears
and he rushes to the rescue, holding her
as she trashes him.
She grins. He grimaces. She
grimaces. He turns off the computer.

Trusting

There comes a time when tuna fish
sandwiches grow hair and the mirror
talks back in brogue.

Swinging by their tongues
in a foreign country

indifferent monkeys peel down
intricate constructions, pausing
only to scratch themselves
before soaped-up mirrors, parameters
suckle on waterproof
pens, and on the keyboard
two horseflies play kickball
with yesterday's crumbs.

At daybreak, the planet shivers
and the sky opens in the East
to Venus and Jupiter, a single
light. For the first time
in two thousand years, they
reunite. In Rome, Adam stretches
an arm across the nave,
Eve reaches out.

Today, my love, I'm here
forever, just you and me, whoever
you are, whoever I am,
no bridge, no span. The phone rings as I
dial your number.

Duckling? Swan? I laugh.
You grin. Never mind, the
words will come, their
intention clear.

Homebody

I enter the doctor's waiting room.
Musak, cold air.

I have a manuscript in my briefcase,
someone's novel about unconsummated passion.
In matching chairs, between the magazines, a blue-haired
woman wearing a red hat, and her husband
(or a husband and a hat).

Opposite, near the aquarium,
a pregnant teenager chewing gum, and a scrawny woman in
a McDonald's uniform who twitches her neck to the
Musak. Every so often she reaches into a bag of
jellybeans balanced between her knees.

I look around, wondering which camp
is more palatable.

Finally, I decide to stand by the door and start
editing. I am an alien, but I don't mind. A homebody who's
always at home, I have my work
with me. The Musak
can even be one of the melodies the abandoned lover croons
to his absent beloved. Everything belongs.

After Making Love

I roll away from your darkened form
and fall into a seamless shoreline
stitched to the pale horizon
of another world
where water laps against
ancient stones and words stand like
monuments against a sky that reflects

their hieroglyphics *I am*, selfless and pure
as your blue eyes that hold the secret
to a charted route through that part of me
I permit you to keep
as map for the next journey
when again I shall need you
as star and cipher.

**TEA AT THE EVERGLADES
BATH & TENNIS CLUB**

Jet Path

2 p m: the jet circles the island.
Below, aquamarine pools
glisten in the sun, lined up and waiting.

As when a person flies high enough to
transcend themselves they see the players
instruments poised, listening for their cue.

Or when one lifts so high over the
past, patterns appear; coincidences
asking to be defined.

The jet speeds faster than sound, yet
nothing moves. I think we
must be on time, or overdue.

Malaise

Florida, like a damp sponge on
the forehead of an addict. Florida,
a swamp drained by the edicts of robber
barons, determined to build castles on sand.
Don't forget the pungency of first oranges,
saltiness of ocean wind, herons profiled in the rising
sun. Listen to the litany of rapes and break-ins;
notice the motor cycle gangs; look away from
blood-shot irises, hold-ups at noon. Ask yourself
why there's no justice in a land that prides itself
on motherhood and apple pie, why the apples are wax,
mothers the slaves or victims of their own undoing.
Go outside. Steep yourself in the summer heat
'til it coats your skin and
seeps through your veins like mercury
in an indifferent barometer.

Tea at the Everglades Bath & Tennis Club

Ignoring the valet, I park my Toyota at the end of the lot
slip off my badge and straighten my wig.
Even though the trek through the desert
takes longer than planned, I'm still early
but the cucumber sandwiches
are already next to the samovars,
six penguins standing guard.
Why had I come--just to prove I could pass?
Even the chefs are Aryan. Hair bristles on my tongue, my
hands grow breasts. Two pigs squeal out of my shoes like
popovers, taking my toes with them. I stand nude in a
marble tub extending my nipples to the host. The mirrors
turn black. Is there some mistake, I wonder, as an angel
hands me a lyre. Psalms cleave to the roof of my mouth,
rosehips become blood. As I limp down
the golden staircase, the Red Sea parts
indifferently. Outside
I crawl on my knees over burning cinders.

WEATHERING

Inhuman Needs

February splats onto the table opposite a large bowl of force-bloomed forsythia, as if to sit down with the Talmudist, If not now, when? Ignoring languaged limitations, never and no, imaging of stumps and hunchbacks: igniting the sun's chill with an Aquarian spark--as if this reassurance would automatically sprout green, The Winter of Dissolution canceled by ice cream, the penny arcade.

In spite of errands and call waiting, the more enlightened make a point of listening. Adapting to wind chill and rejection, shrugging off odors of fake strawberry and sheep, forecasts of condition. Meanwhile, circumstance saturates every pore, the baby squalling.

Perhaps it's better to do without than wait for a distant cousin to warm the palm: klesmers who drop their leavings on the most expensive lawn, singing as if Spring were forever, voices running in a running stream. They will teach you about equal distribution of bolts and funnels "in the name of Spirit," and how to con. Each month may have a different picture, but the seasoned hooker rips them off unthinking.

On a visit to a new place, observations sharpen. Helena discovers the indoor pool warm and suitable for the prima ballerina, arrangements of forsythia and tulle for the Grand Finale. A band of light impenetrable and whiter than white serving to intensify purity within, to keep out the angry opportunist, sooty crusts. In time, salt will eat his heart out, leaving ugly potholes. She may pause to step daintily around them, or simply leap over, knowing that June is just around the corner.

The Reason for Metaphor

February in Vienna,
Bitter cold. Only a few snowflakes
worrying the panes.

Outside, twelve pigeons
are perched on the ledge
twelve porcelain replicas,
Hapsburg figurines from the
Kunsthistorische.

Twelve cups
in the Emperor's pantry.

In the hallway
twelve portraits
of the Emperor
twelve of the Emperor's children
and wives.

Perched on the embouchure
of a golden flute
twelve glass
nightingales.

Apple blossoms shower the air
As the concert begins.

Age of Uncovery: April Fool's Day

Someone must have turned on the light
or maybe it was just a feeling.
I woke to the sound of turtle-doves
not just cooing, but singing an intricate
Montiverdi-like madrigal. I know even the most gifted
conductor couldn't teach turtle-doves
to master four-part harmonies, or even
sing in unison. Birds are birds.
I'd like to dream in continuous swoon
knowing this wish is my only reality
like the reality in sex that seems to
intuitively seek hidden intimacies. Dreams
that force two souls to shed their separateness
zap, dropping them into a reflecting pool of

touch and taste that scatters the heart
forcing it to enlarge itself
in widening rings. I've scoffed at the lover
who spends his life trying to effect
a perfect orgasm, the addict who won't give
up until he finds the Truth.

Armies have polluted their dreams
in order to purify rivers of blood
and return to the bed of love
with suitable charms. How many Crusades
ended up as ritual slaughters? Flashing metal
from sharpened blades pleurably ripping
at flesh; convolutions of
maimed bodies rotting in the sun. "Amo, amas
amat" in tasteless wafers. Communion
of lips and tongue.

Monteverdi was no saint
nor can any artist control
his emotions if his lover steals
the key to his strongbox. We're only
human. Even turtle doves drop their excrement
wherever they can.

Perhaps Freud was wrong. Perhaps
we take pride in needlework, the tatting

of intricate affairs, lacy wristbands
of black adorned by peach-colored roses. Simple ticket for
immorality to anything that lasts
longer than a kiss, spray-painted initials whitewashed
from the mind.

I know the assurance I need each day
is nothing more than my own affirmation mouthed
in language my body understands: simple gesture
of peeling an orange, keeping the rind intact
without puncturing its delicate skin.

Fourth of July

The giant kaleidoscope is already revved up
and set into position
and we're ready to begin
once we've centered ourselves and started to spin

so it comes as no surprise to anyone except maybe
the children
that as soon
as it's dark enough to see the light

we hear the first sizzle and crack followed by
fricative sprays
that whistle and snap
producing peacocks, palmettos--prismic displays

that splat into the water and shoot up again
in backward dissections.
"All we need is reality,"
sighs a veteran. "At what price,"

grimaces his mother, testing the milk
against her wrist.
Grouped around the table
each Master signs with a flourish, blots and

passes the pen, glancing up only to check
the *Wall Street Journal*
and discrepancies
in a hidden agenda.

Shivers, palpitations. More light. More showers--
and then--as we inhale
and wait--exhale--
deep within: the First Vibration.

Hissing as it lifts its head,
rattlers shaking,
and rips into the sky.
The baby screams as it starts to uncoil

Light peeling from its skin and shooting up
in blazing spurts

that shower into a circle of stars
and stripes, lincoln, washington, flowers

that blossom then detonate.

More crackling, more screams,
another jet,
music from the band below.

When it's time for the Grand Finale
all the popcorn is gone
and soap bubbles blown
to vanishing. "But it's the spirit that counts,"

says the doctor, his laughter turning to
ashes as the Masters
remove their jewels,
their lace cuffs sliding back.

Inert wands lay on the cement in pools of wet.
Only two percent got the message.
It's not that freedom's too
difficult. It just couldn't be detected.

October Moon

You were ready, you said, to heal the universe, because now you knew about desperation and fear and rejection and what it was like to be strung out on drugs until you didn't want to do anything except look for the next fix.

Sitting across from me, poking at your salad, your clear eyes steadied on mine as you poured out your soul. I wasn't attracted to you, nor did I even listen to your shit, because I knew you wanted money. You'd banked on a rich bitch from Palm Beach and instead you got me.

After I paid the bill, I imagined you tripped out of the restaurant over to Angela's or Andrea's or Electra's--the name of your last wife, as strung out as you--and spent the evening sprawled on the floor smoking pot delivering more diatribes about cosmic sex and synchronicity while the women played with you and you braided their hair. I imagine you wiped yourself with my poetry or stuffed it in your shoes, or maybe read it to one of your cronies at the Arts Bar.

This morning, when you called, I wanted to hang up but we ended up talking for over an hour. You told me how you'd sat in the tub with the razor, ready to end it all, then heard voices that commanded you to wait a minute and you found yourself taking off to Gainesville where you ended up in a cave for eight months meditating until you saw before you The Crystal City of your inner self.

You told me how you lost your license for architecture, that you owe the government for back taxes, one son is in jail, your psychiatrist is a yes man... Thank God for the clear vision of you crumpled in a heap beside all the filthy puke-streaked played-out versions of yourself. Thank God for your beautiful eyes pleading for help and for the illusion that I could maybe

turn you over to the perfect healer who would answer the beeper even if it was Saturday and rush to your rescue pulling you back to the age of four when your mother came at you with a knife before walking out, leaving you at the table, fork lifted.

Attracting Opposites

I was born in the month of the archer
the month of fire and ice
or laughter, the deliberate withholding,
planned extremity. So I know, above the
clouds, low ceilings, the clever one
still plans to come. It is a furnace, a
mouth of Damaen. And you who run from him
beyond the forest into the clearing, what
can you do about guilt? If the archer shoots
one swift arrow, be convinced
it will center not by aim but
speed and intent, straight through the
white shining.

LEAVING

It Was a Leveling

It was a leveling that quieted the winds. It stopped when thinking stopped, when the mouths clamped shut, it was almost humorous, the sorrow drifting off, sympathy canceled out. Though I can tolerate storms, they have secretary claws, executive teeth, they push into a place like a raging addiction, in no time can decimate tomorrow's resolutions, scribbled agendas, multiple forms. I was turmoil. I craved attention, my love was conditioned. I collected Methods, memorized the right slang, bought six-inch heels. The truth that finally came demanded long-term rejection, programmed safaris. This is the heart that laughs and this is the heart that connects. The eye on the forehead is only a lens. The winds taught me this when they took me by surprise. I was dreaming: I shoot up in bed, my body is shaking I'm painted like a clown, voices chant mantras, my books are gone, the door swings open. I scream for my husband but he doesn't know who I am. I recite credit cards, birth dates. I say "Daddy," but he only looks at me and asks, "What time is dinner?" reminding me he's already famous and due before nine. On the patio, salamanders cling to the fence, frogs leap against the door, jacarandas rattle, inside the television blares war. On the card rack none of the messages are mine and in the movies all deaths have the same killing. We're told to be happy without definite instructions. We're told to swim laps to feel younger, to wait patiently for the sirens.

Leaving

I drive away from the house of myself
without records or books

as if on a five-minute
errand printer still running

head spinning from the shock
of his hand, stars tunneling from my head

I will not look back at the
silver box where the numbers are

gone from the name
I strip off. This crazy woman is no one

I've met. When she comes to the
door I will not let her in because I

will not be there but she doesn't know that
yet. Time it will take, to disconnect.

Locking the Door Open

Suddenly the door flew open.
Promises flew out and scattered over the streets
among gnats and mosquitoes that flew around
them in circles, landing on alley trashcans with the flies.
In front of me, rising out of the sewer, with wings
on each ringer, a tear-shaped form, trumpeting.
And the moon flew through the clouds.
Clock hands flew around their faces sweeping off crumbs.
A crow flew backward, like a misguided omen.
The dove flew without purpose, having memorized it before.
At my feet I could feel the lapis breeze
gathering froth, feel it swirling around me in the swift
undertow--a heightening, and spiraling
steam from the pits below,
where pigs roasted, their juices basting the flames,
squelching them only for a moment.
The rivers flew through the town collecting bruises, taking
them to the square where voices flew
among beggars and bejeweled madams whose poodles
flew at one another, as if quarreling about
something more urgent than food.
Everywhere one could see writhing bodies, barber poles
announcing tomorrow's fear, residue of plagues that flew
back and forth from one war to the next. Near
the Danube and the Keys, storks flew
over rooftops and made wreathes for little ones.
Eggs cracked into furred paperclips that waited
for directions stating there's a reason to speak out
before silence succumbs.
Affirmations flew through the wires,
and operators flew to their ears to receive them.
And the necklace of paper dolls flew into homes.
At once I flew to the front door and pounded.
Too late. It was locked open. Rattlesnakes
ran out from closets and drawers,
decisions dribbled and bounced, carpets
chased after me as I fought my way
back, but their tufted claws captured me
and scrolled me into the Law. I tried to kick
myself out, again too late. A metal belt snapped shut, I
was licked for postage, flipped into a bin. I tried
to cry out, but the questions were jammed

by a computer whose chips had been
stuffed into my mouth, a string of licorice
knotted over them. Words spiked my windows,
the glass shivered and flew to
the ground soundless. My vision blurred. I
saw myself beating against ignorance that
refused to let me in. Once I thought I was
home. I thought I was mother. Now I know I
am dust, flying against this gutted openness, unable
to believe, unable to trust. Blinded by the Furies, I've
lost my credentials. Nothing matters except moving
forward when I know I am lost, moving backward
even if trapped. Here I am, a mummied tourist, handkerchief
apparition that flies in and out of a windy funhouse
whose painted door sings and rocks on its rusty
hinge, held there by an invisible host.

No One

knew I was supposed to be dead
until I appeared as usual the next day

although the calendar had been trashed
so no one knew what day it was

that I was supposed to be dead. I appeared
as usual because I didn't know what day it was

although I didn't know the calendar
had been trashed. No one knew

I didn't know, nor did they know
I knew they didn't know. As usual

I was dead although I appeared
because I was supposed to.

You, Silence

will not be disturbed. It's frightening.
Even in mid-day nothing moves you, you
stay rooted in the soil of yourself
as if you had nowhere to go except inside.

Is that true? And do you expect me to listen
without your telling?
Like a face in a storm
shimmering behind veils you wait

and I feel you drawing me
toward you, into
your ancient eyes --
what do you want?

Remnant

everywhere the world has taken off
leaving me with missing pieces

time stutters in the brain
in clotted echoes

messages hyphenated
lines of construction

what was supposed to be
finished isn't even begun

my hands are ready
but my fingers are numb

in the pool i see remnants
of myself i could fill in
if i wished

but i know about
light
i am what i am

Rishea

After the amputation
I discovered Rishea in
the broom closet wearing
a bathing cap, goggles and pink orange
and lavender tights.
Gently I coerced her out and
invited her to attach her legs to
me so we could go around the
corner to a meeting
of minds. As soon as we
arrived however, I learned my
ego was up for grabs. Although Rishea
urged me to leave while I could, a woman in
back with no clothes on immediately
stood up and blocked the exit.
The room reeked
of fish and house paint and the
pain from my stumps qualified
as sufficient reason
to ask any questions I pleased.
But at the moment I couldn't
think of anything except Rishea
and how much I wanted her
to justify my need to be
recognized, in spite of my
handicap. Rishea said my
numbness was natural
because the power lines were
down. If she weren't here
inside me and if her head
weren't throbbing right
next to mine, I'd've gone
crazy by now. She's like mint sauce
for lamb, the plus on a report
card of all 'E's. She says if I
will it strong enough, my legs
will come back.

Carte Blanche

One day, guiltlessly, the gods tore out whole months, even ate up conditions. Paperweights no longer made snow even though populations were shifting to Florida.

"What does hegemony mean?" asked Jesus, a seventh grader whose parents owned a used car lot.

"Who wants to know?" snapped the teacher, deliberating between ribs or pita. Perhaps, she reflected later, as she removed her pink bra and examined her tits in the sun, if he'd asked instead how it feels, I'd have said yes. No one seemed to understand.

Jesus cried all night, and the moon didn't rise over the ocean. But few were disappointed. After all, it was only the Fourth of July.

The School Board wanted to keep school in session year round, to save on power. But the State said it would ruin the beach tariff, so it was voted down.

By the time they found her, the teacher's body was badly swollen, but it didn't really matter, since the paper shredder broke and the ground was white as her gown.

Dream

I knew it was time to wake up but
I wasn't ready. Soon the
hotel appeared, white ship,
immaculate, rotting clapboards painted
over. It reminded me of my little-girl
white leather shoes that my father used to
clean for me with a chalky fluid that
smelled worse than my mother's milk
of magnesia that never worked.
My father used to cover and dry, cover and dry
until one day the child disappeared.
When my mother gave up and shrieked "ENEMA"
I kicked and screamed, begging
for more time. One brush up against
my shoes and all the chalk would fall off
uncovering secret chambers, stuffed
cubbyholes, grubby finger marks on the
walls. Over her lap I went, as the hard rubber
nozzle was shoved inside.

The hotel had a screened-in
porch like my grandmother's, and it
was lined with pots of geraniums and
there was a glider and rocking chairs
with striped cushions like hers. In the summer
we used to sit in the dusk and watch the fire-
flies come out and maybe listen to some-
one bouncing a ball down the
street or kids playing hopscotch, and
it was all so trusting and right, especially
when my grandmother emerged from the
pantry with fresh-baked cookies, sugar,
molasses, chocolate. She used to flatten them with
a fork, two neat criss-crosses like the railroad tracks
behind the hotel. On the cocoa box were tulips from
Holland like my grandfather planted
around the house. People said my
grandfather talked to himself but I
know he was talking to his flowers. The
whole yard was a garden and there was even
a vineyard. I must have said good-bye to
someone as I left the hotel.

The sun was bright. It was morning. Yellow-hatted workers were digging ditches for pipes and sewers and at some of the corners the street signs were down. I kept walking because I knew I had to. I also knew I had to return to the hotel because I was expected back. Yet something was wrong. Where was my husband? Surely by now he'd be waiting, surely it must be time to return. But even though I thought I'd memorized the way, nothing was the same. As if going in a circle, I kept coming back to the yellow-hatted workers and I had to carefully skirt around the mud that had already splattered my stockings and shoes. Then you appeared, my daughter, you with your beautiful eyes and your understanding. You took my hand and said, It's all right, it doesn't matter. But it does, I insisted. We have to get back. I'll know the hotel as soon as I see it, it's wonderfully old, just layered and layered with the chalkiest white, they've done such a good job. Even my screams are hidden. And your father--we can't leave him there with the marriage. Have you heard from him? Surely he has to be somewhere.

Why? you asked, as if to remind me of something I'd forgotten. I awoke then, my tongue chalky, my mouth dry, and soon after, you called, sweet daughter, and I repeated this dream. "Do you know what it means?" I asked, over the miles seeing her blue eyes gloss over like a summer storm. "Yes," she replied. "Those workers tore it down as soon as you walked out. He's blocked, Mom. You tried." Her voice was so like my own.

Lies

No trace of what happens until it's too late.

This morning the baby was gone.
It was nameless, I lied, glad
to see his relief. When we hugged each other
my love died. I vowed he would never know
he had become a stranger.
He doesn't like females, my body had said.
Embryos are holograms. The room was pink and blue,
the aura of healing bruises.
He didn't bring me home; he was busy.

Now I block out carnivals, playgrounds
and school crossings as I drive to that room.
Blood-brick buildings. A bleeding sun.
A man at a public phone calling
the hospital. A pregnant woman crossing
against the light. Each step another row,
soon the sweater will be finished.
Morning again. Steam from the shower.
With an impatient flick of his wrist,
he downs his juice and woves All-Bran
on the run. Obediently, when his car stalls
I call the repairman.

On Saturday my friends stop by, bringing
crystals and books, earrings, pendants.
The mail person dumps newsletters
from Peru about shamanism,
Greenpeace pamphlets, labels and stamps.
I'm safe here in suburbia. I don't even have
to cry. My mother left me her china,
my father his Shakespeare. I like people
even though he says they have too many
problems based on money.

Patterns so familiar
even resentment grows untended.
Slowly the world turns, each day
a little more. Though we embrace
and I feel my lean body against him

the truth is still there.

I knew where my heart was
and when he said no, I held on to it
like it was another lie about to be snatched.

Fait accomplis, I said firmly
as he advanced. My shoulders came out
to meet him with a needle.

Gifts

My mother-in-law spoke English like I spoke German and we both understood each other through the bond of wonder and amusement that I could bake her *linzer torte* and create feathery matzo balls and *spaetzle* for her "boyle"s soups and stews. When

she broke up house, it seemed "not quite right" to give all her treasures to her "Marianna," so she insisted I take the Römers. That summer, carefully we wrapped each long-stemmed goblet in tissue and packed them into the car. "Stay good together," she blessed us, hugging the children.

When she died, the goblets turned to stone but I didn't know that yet, since it took ten more years for me to walk out of my marriage asking only for those glasses, which her "boyle" wouldn't disown.

Thank God her German came through for me and *Sanks Gott* my English delivered the message. Each day I pull out a stone from my heart and place it on her grave. With wonder and amusement, together we toast "*L'chaim*,"--"To Life."

THANK YOU

Thank You

First I would like to express my confusion for all the wonderful accidents that were deliberately estranged from any and all significance just to make sure the coffee would be hot and there wouldn't be any mistake about serving real butter. Of course you must have guessed by now if you hadn't known already that such truths are invincible as America and home fries, especially with grits. It's wonderful as always to recall the times we've tripped together over our own popcorn, thinking someone else was to blame--until it finally occurred to us that if life has to have purpose beyond watching television we'd better see if our bathing suits still fit and not listen to the thunder.

How wonderful, when fear was in its prime, to recall how we used to sit glued to our inhibitions, watching them manifest themselves in carefully charted plane flights that would later be Xeroxed by the public and placed on the back burner. We used to say we wished we knew what we were doing, but now that a few more holidays have come and gone without any future beyond what we've already encountered and they seem to be here forever, we realize how easy it is to forget the mustard and yield to the gentle breezes of summer, at least until one of our special friends reminds us how lucky we are.

And that's really what I'd like to say tonight and every night, whenever there's a full moon. Yes, I'd like to pause a minute to acknowledge the fruit on the vine, and to recall with you the vision of truth lined up like soldiers or coke cans at a well-managed service station. We were all young once, and that's a fact. Let's not get carried away. Let's be here, right now, for

everyone who needs us. And let's remember how important it is to catch the clothes just as they're coming out of the dryer.

Agenda

Each evening's ambiguity, especially when the newspaper doesn't come or the computers are down, is no reason to abandon the miracle of what can always happen in the structured time between now and then. It's only a matter of observing the mind as it attempts to connect with the process of dispensing with things no longer needed: fenders, meat grinders, cut-out cards from shredded wheat boxes, tonsillectomies. When did we take down the curtains and put up blinds--the year the relatives opted for Florida instead of an annual visit? Uncle Jack's heart attack that we learned later was another woman and only he went to Tampa, while Aunt Lillian filed for a divorce before she took off with her own lover. Certainly the reasons for Teflon were to establish priorities and make life easier. After all, "it's not our duty" to expose what some thief of the imagination is determined to snatch once we leave the room to bring in the rest of the problem; disguised, as usual. How could we have suspected anything, living so far away, and when antagonism seemed to be the only entertainment, climaxing in bedroom scenes that could be heard all over the neighborhood when the windows were open?

Who really wants to know whether or not we iron sheets or sleep naked--We skip rope with reality not so much to deny the process of aging as to give ourselves another chance to become one with the hyperbole of ego that arranges itself in prismic displays even when no one's looking. So in order to avoid self-estrangement in the process of learning, we put on music, the *Mahler Fifth* or maybe *Die Fledermous*, hoping to change vibrations and eliminate another dilemma.

Or we suggest another trip to the foyer where the lighting is less dim-- as if portion-controlled perception would re-adjust the painting that inevitably hangs crooked every time there's a storm. Sheep and mountains somewhere in Turkey that was bought at an auction to cover a crack. Actually it was Aunt Lillian who walked out. She had it all planned down to the last detail, even leaving enough money to pay for the maid and dry cleaning. But it's not uncommon to blame the other person.

It's Only a Matter of

indifference before
anyone catches on, especially
when everything we always were is in
present tense at another time, say,
when we forgot to be thirsty until
we recall the forty
years in the desert.

Call it being centered in someone else's
dream or in that sensitive
spot between the eyes. Even death is
parenthetical, a quick
trip between semesters, one of those
times when the luggage got
lost and you're stuck without
toothbrush and bra.

Silence might
pencil in the most important appointments
that could still be canceled
though there's no way of
telling, especially if the power's
down. Somehow I wish

this moment
could go on forever, then
I'd never have to worry about
checking it out against
another. But now the doorbell's
ringing and the rolls have to be
warmed.

Beauty in the Eyes of the Beholder

One would almost think it would be worth giving up, if the value could be placed right in the middle of the aisle, where people could trip over it and force the clerks to come running with mops; except for the embarrassment, since no one wants to deliberately bird-dog on the abstract or leave droppings.

Yet it seems to happen as naturally as apples and sex. Just now, for example, when the doorbell rang, it could have been anyone. Which is why we install special systems and leave the TV on. So the heart responds, Is everything OK? without knowing why. Emergencies such as a shirt and no pants, or hair in rollers. Beauty on billboards driven past and stored in cemeteries years later after the children are grown and one stops to ask, "Whatever happened to Grandma's twelve-foot thighs and the tiger-striped bikini?" Glass held high...

Perhaps this is why VCRs are so popular: Self-control is the art of denial-- an audience of one never hears itself cough, and we can re-run ourselves as long as the stomach holds out.

If only we didn't have to drive through it daily, stopping for the usual flattery that eventually parks us in angles that have to be confronted. Once we open the door we know we've had it. Defense could be anything from Avon to Armageddon. Only yesterday the street was loaded with mattresses, but thank god we knew how to get around them...

"Recreation!" shouts the anchor man, and although we're told his lies are paid for in overtime, we board anyway, and leave the rest to the elements, where hopefully surrender becomes beneficial. Then: sure enough, as soon as we round the bend in the harbor, there she is, with her crown of dollar bills and Mona Lisa smirk scraped clean of bird shit. One of us is

bound to lean out and scoop up enough coins for at least
a small dish without toppings. As we said at the beginning,
before
being interrupted, flavor is in-consequential.

Song: "Occasional Times"

The clocks are working overtime,
the inner ratcheting is larded up with the norm.
What in daylight was called gesture
has been swept under the rug.

At the zoo the monkeys seem programmed.
What brand of money buys love?
Or shouldn't comparison be in degrees,
arenas for airing everyone's conception?

And how does the simple branch of an oak
the diviner plucks explode into
geysers of money from semblances of
dreams? Please relate to the deliberate obscurity

that underscores whatever this landscape is
creating, the rehearsed lines it is mouthing.
Once they were purchased at a premium only
because they seemed wrong,

confusion breeding excitement, energy
palatable and unique. Now cottages are boarded up,
only slums are affordable, or the lot
next to the vacant school. Everyone's watching TV.

Usually time will ignore us,
though memories, like souvenir match flaps
discovered years later in a moment of need,
can self-inflict. Or, like right now, on

the Interstate, bumper stickers: I
(HEART)... coffee cigarettes sex
whatever happens to fit for the
occasion. In cloud forms, symbols become

evanescent reminders. Or listen: the
concertmaster is tuning us with strung cat gut
and hair even before the music has begun.
With Mercury in retrograde and postal rates

on the rise, it's no wonder black holes can erupt in
canned laughter of a sit com, like smeared

lipstick on a wine glass. It's easy to get used
to bottled conditions, especially if we can take

the vinegar and afford to put
them on a card. Come closer, there's nothing
to fear. Let's turn off the news and
talk to each other until the evening disappears.

ONE-LETTER WORD

One Night Stop

In Danbury Connecticut I couldn't see
anymore it was raining
too hard and night so I
pulled up in front of
a line of dirty underwear
dashed out
and said yes to the Lebanese attendant for
"Room 213"

said yes to the eyes
that followed me as I ferried across
the sea of puddles yes to the man
dumbly sub-
mitting to fleshy lips

Spacious pristen a moon was
under the bed
and a saucer of milk

I'm only visiting
I told myself
no one
cares if I play with
him lick milk
from his balls no one
will see me get punished

but I kept thinking about
tomorrow and the clean bed
linen and my clean
nightgown I'd carefully packed
in the one bag that came in
with me and that also
had my alarm clock
and a poem I'd written
about love I kept

thinking about kneeling on the
stones and shrieking
while he ripped out my tongue
and placed before me
the vomit of words

there was a postcard in the drawer
with a picture of a wall and
people praying before it
with a purple pen someone
had scribbled "Allah be
Damned"

all night I could hear a woman
crying

River of Blood

As it was meant to be
we came together to serve
the river of blood
that ran through the village
and was said to date back
to the Age of Miracles.

It wasn't long before even the
trees bowed down. Medicine men
lifted the curse by connecting
pure thought to Earth's
intention.

In the Spring, fish swam upstream
and we danced until dawn.

II.

There were those who rejected
our mission. No wonder.

Stones grew cold in their palms,
our music only a buzz
in their ears.

Before they died
they turned on us, shouting
death was better than
fear.

The music grew louder.
We couldn't hear.

On the river banks
we collected their hardened tears.

One-Letter Word

I.

The one-letter word bounces in its crib
It is tall and straight
Large-boned, large appetite
It is always hungry

The one-letter word learns how to walk
It walks through doors and the doors
Follow after it

And it grows taller taller taller
Now the doors bow down
They let it walk over them and
The whole house follows

the one-letter word learns it is a car
It learns it is a boat
It is impressed with nouns

At once the one-letter word
Makes a list of cities
It buys Pimsleur tapes and a food scale
It mimics, "Ego, ego, ego."

And the lawyers start calling.

II.

The cockroaches come out at night
Make a fist one-letter word

Tell the philosophers to go within
Tell the psychologists to heal themselves

In the test tube that is your stomach
In the computer that prints out your fate
You are reading surfaces

You the hamburg beholder

Your hands are cushions
Your mouth is a bone
You are a soup ladle a broom

III.

Dance naked one-letter word
And your teeth will become horses

Walk on your warts like a martyr
Your feet will sprout compasses

Keep turning every question into tongues
Let the ark feed your psalms

Balance the light on your horns
The breath of the stars will rescue you

Only for a while will you be fooled
Thinking you can take what you already have

Only for a while will you wish
For marshmallows and a pink chin

IV.

Buy Mozart kugel for the one-letter word
Fire the splotchy-cheeked preacher
and dispense with *should*
Snatch up carpets and drawers

Make aisles of lightning bolts
Commission statues and pretend
You and the one-letter word
Are competing for the Pulitzer

Use pleasure as the best excuse
For loving it
Don't expect miracles or bargains

If you do you'll end up signing
the one-letter word as your given name

and people will talk

Behind your back the doctors will line up
The creditors will be alerted

And every time you say you don't care
or you're worth the price
The one-letter word will grow weaker

V.

Humble yourself to the one-letter word
And you will cancel your indigestion
Even the lottery will seem possible

Close your eyes and
Lock the door open

Strap the one-letter word to your forehead
Wrap it around your arm

Surrender to the one-letter word
if you don't
It will tickle you until you bleed

VI.

Beware of those martyrs
They will pawn sticks and stones
As diviners and fetishes

Find the hospitals in their eyes
See them blindfolded
Reading the one-letter word

If they invite you
Bring your own food
Don't even drink the water

When they pass the cup
smile and say you gave at church
Roll in your shadow before they step on it

If they call you for help
Refer them to someone more qualified
Unless they can pay

Beware of these martyrs
Their promises are tent flaps
Their pamphlets are treason

VII.

At last you can press the
one-letter word and get good reception
At last you can be anyone

The one-letter word
Is writing these words
And it can't even sign its name

The one-letter word
Laughs at itself and knocks off
Its head without thinking
It likes to play games

Make love to the one-letter word
Your eggs will always be perfect

Make love
The one-letter word won't ever
Ask you to stop

Cinema Paradiso

I'm thinking of little Michael who spent his childhood clinging to a pet monkey given to him by his dad at birth: thus, Michael's nickname, "Monkey." I'm thinking of the day Monkey's dad announced he was leaving home for another woman. Monkey was seven. I'm thinking of the way 'Monkey' cried when Monkey asked his mom if he would ever come back, and when love died did it also go to heaven. At twelve, Joey became Monkey's best friend, and then Joey was kidnapped and killed. His body was mutilated and returned to his folks UPS. His mom went crazy. It seemed logical, thought Monkey, to join his friend so he rode his bike to the Causeway bridge and waited until dark.

At home, an eyeless lump of chewed-on Steiff lies inert on the bed and tries to remember the last words Monkey's father said. What had he promised? Ice cream? A trip to the zoo?

Sleeping Planet

A heart is frying in the pan, its blood hardening into a wax crayon that an American cowboy is trying to shove into a golden pencil sharpener. The heart died several centuries ago but was freshly wrapped in cellophane when the woman bought it earlier that day. It was a mouthpiece for the ripped-out phone at the corner and it still reeks of the foul breath of its users, odors of sweat and urine mashed into garlic. Desperation and denial pour through the vents and saturate the street.

Once the heart belonged to a troubadour who wooed the miller's daughter, but when she fell in love, he ran far into the next century and left her with child. He never saw his son until the little boy became a priest in the mother's dream, and swam out to find his father but he was gone. When he called for help, his voice drowned in the waves of his mother's dream. Sometimes he still calls out but now the streets are deserted by five and the ocean is clogged with shoes of the fishermen.

Where is the pure whiteness of a sun that used to bleach those streets until they turned to milk for the hungry children? Where is the sparkle of sand that used to whip up swords of laughter, whirling them in a mad dance of blinding passion that skipped across the screen on lakes of limitless pleasure? Tinkling bells, bracelets of enticing charms or the clinking of glasses as lovers toast their separate journeys into the same fiction? Words, words.

The pale hair of the little boy is streaked with broken promises. His feet

warp from walking the water-soaked boards of the bridge that never seems to connect to the domed portico where the angry priest Elijah swings lazily in the hammock. Oh, it is too much. As soon as he reaches out for a soaked wafer it disappears in the mouths of icons that shiver and quake as they repeat the same litany of age-old complaints.

He falls on his knees. The icons fall after him, their hearts rolling out of their cracked cases, rolling away like marble. Bewildered, the lost child crawls after them, his empty hands grasping the light as his mother calls to him to turn off the TV and come down for dinner.

The Most Profound of All Messages

From "De Profundis" of James Wright, which has been taken, in turn from the German of Georg Trakl.

A cobblestone square, placard gleaming in the dusk.
A shul here once, Jews chanting, "Yisgodol".
A marketplace, now only the words, "Judenplatz."
The wind is chilly in this open space.

On either side, shops for hardware, gloves
handkerchiefs. Owners whose ignorance
keeps them safe.

Coming upon this spot,
a young woman is suddenly overwhelmed
by the sound of voices.

A bearded man, prayer book in hand
approaches and invites her in.
The wind whips through the wire fence.

Her heart begins to hammer.
With his diamond-studded cane, the man
lifts her skirt, fondles her.

When she awakens, she is naked. Blood
streams from her mouth. A yellow badge
is dangling from her vagina.
Bells from the cathedral, voices
chanting the Mass.

Displaced

In Memory of Jerzy Kosinski - 1933-1991

He was already famous before he made the headlines for twisting a plastic bag over a head of cabbage and filling the tub.

The head sank. Some said it was a displacement problem. Others that it was a matter of faith. Still others blamed it on the recession. People were sick of wieners and kraut. Reasons are not important, states the Society.

Although it sold more greens for a week or so, the venture lost six million.

Many take their lives for granted.

Naked in Daylight

Although it's only July
summer has already pulled out
leaving me on the tracks
still waiting to get on.

Why was I late? I'm always on time.
Unticketed, empty-handed

who told me to go naked in daylight
and forfeit the past?

In darkened windows
I see only your eyes
laughing at me

mouthng good-byes.

About Carol Adler

Carol Adler, MFA is an entrepreneur, professional writer, editor and teacher of English and creative writing. She is President of Dandelion Books, LLC, www.dandelion-books.com of Tempe, Arizona; a full service publishing company that markets its “uncensored nonfiction, conscious solutions and unfettered fiction” using the latest production and delivery technologies, including on-demand dot.com networking. She is also President and CEO of Dandelion Enterprises, Inc., www.write-to-publish-for-profit.com and President of the International Arts & Media Foundation, a non-profit subsidiary of Dandelion Enterprises, Inc.

Adler’s business experience also includes co-ownership of a Palm Beach, FL public relations company and executive management positions in two U.S. rejuvenation and mind/body wellness corporations for which she founded publishing divisions.

This is her sixth book of published poetry. Her publications also include well over two hundred poems in poetry journals, and several fiction and non-fiction works. She has published two of her novels under the pseudonym, Sarah Daniels (*The Woman with Qualities*, and *Come As You Are*).

As a ghost writer, Adler has developed and written manuscripts for a number of professionals in the health care and human potential industries. These include: a holistic medical book, *Why Am I Still Addicted? A Holistic Approach to Recovery* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1991), for Richard Plagenhoef, M.D., *The Six Steps to the Fountain of Youth: How to Slay the Dragons of Aging Without Drawing the Sword* (Belleair Bluffs, FL: TriNeuroGenics, Inc., 1997) for 59-year-old world karate champion, Dennis Kelly; *The Human Body Owner’s Manual for Optimal Performance*, for Guy DeIuliis, vice president of Optimal Human Performance, Inc., and *Answers to the Top 10 Health Challenges*, for Sheryl Simpson, ND, MH, LMT (TriNeuroGenics, Inc., 1998).

Adler has served as editor of several poetry and literary magazines, and her career includes extensive teaching of college English poetry, fiction, non-fiction and business writing, and conducting of writing workshops in Florida and New York State prisons, libraries, elementary, junior and high schools, and

senior citizen centers. She has a B. A. in philosophy and English from the U. of Michigan, and a Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing from Vermont College.

Forthcoming is a new novel, *Slouching Past Bethlehem*, published under Adler's own name, and a seventh collection of poetry titled *Jesus Christ and the Tooth Fairy*.

Other Books by Carol Adler

Poetry:

Arioso: Selected Poems by Carol Adler......a collection of Carol Adler's poems selected from three previously published volumes of her poetry. (Ebook)
ISBN 1-893302-99-7

Fiction:

Slouching Past Bethlehem, by Carol Adler...Dr. Gissalayne Chondroitin (five PhDs in five useless academic disciplines)--currently employed at Hook, Line & Sinker, LLC, ("We give you the rod, you hook the fish")--has one agenda: find a man, fast. But not any man; the sugarcone.com internet match websites has already led her down the disaster trail too many times. Magically—or maybe not--on New Years Day of YK24 (2004) Jonas Foreplay sits down in the empty plastic seat next to her at the SeaTac airport on her way home from her most recent sugarcone.com failure. In this fast-reading novel, Adler neatly hides the truth of what's really happening right in your own back yard. (E-book) ISBN 978-0-97889611-7-6)

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The Woman With Qualities, by Sarah Daniels... South Florida isn't exactly the Promised Land that forty-nine-year-old newly widowed Keri Anders had in mind when she transplanted herself here from the northeast... A tough action-packed novel that is far more than a love story. (Hard copy and ebook versions available) ISBN 1-893302-11-3 [Sarah Daniels is Adler's penname.]

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Write to Publish for Profit: How to Write Non-Fiction, Fiction, Poetry & Memoirs... and more... by Carol Adler... Writing tips and techniques from an experienced professional writer, editor and publisher who is determined to help you succeed! Chockful of great information, this book is for newbies as well as five-star professionals. Includes special chapters on fiction and poetry analysis of works by top-selling authors. Falling in Love with the Muse...What Shall I Write About?...Flying First Class: Getting Started...Separating the Pros from the Cons...Be Wary Aware of What You Write & How You...Right It!...The "So What" Factor...Writing Articles...Fiction: Write Your Heart Out...Poetry & Roses (Red Ones...The Story of My Life –

Memoirs Laced with Gratitude...Resumes, Media Releases & Other Necessities...What Makes the Harry Potter Books Such a Great Read?....Pointers to Learn from The Celestine Prophecy...Writing Great Juvenile Fiction...Writing & Publishing Ebooks (Online)...Publish It!...Be Your Own Best Marketer & Publicist...Are Tutorials, Book Doctors & Editors for You? (Ebook) ISBN 978-1-934280-57-7, 1-934280-57-7

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