

# Village of Gargoyles



Poetry by Jnana Hodson

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JNANA HODSON

Village  
of  
Gargoyles

An Experiment in Identities



*Hamlet, an introduction*

ACT I, SCENE I

## AVON, ANON

What's not about a prince, after all,  
but a village afflicted with nobles?

I prefer yeomen and husbandry  
in places called Murton or White Haven.

Who knows what we'd do, given  
a silver spoon or winning Megabucks ticket?

We wouldn't stick around here long,  
that's for certain,  
even if you owned the King O'Hearts' castle.

I, on the other hand, still take solace  
in sharp winter, excepting the early sunsets.

Sit by the fire, on the lookout for dragons.  
Smoking or sipping mead from an ox horn.

## RESETTLEMENT

Banished too long to debased mill towns,  
she disconnected her quick mind  
from the karmic whirlpool.

With eyes closed she envisioned dwelling  
all year in drip-glaze mountains.  
As her aggregated solitude burgeoned

she dreamed instead of a genteel market square  
on a commuter rail to Boston  
where brain cells totter into chestnut.

## PARK BENCH REGULAR

You've said I'm your hefty friend.  
Admittedly, I've been dismissed so many times  
I'm not butting mossy heads.

When I've been derided,  
I'm not bon vivant slapdash, no sir.  
She orders I pray in secret

after I've been laid off.  
Since I'm a male of the tropical species  
I won't make a mountain out of a regimental molehill.

At least I'm four-season childless  
and not bottoming out.  
Just remember, I've been on hopsack relief.

I keep wondering  
where the turtles go.

## THE CURRENT MAYOR'S WIFE

I've been as seriously underweight  
as a cut-glass reverie. Still, I'm not betting  
on the next campaign. At this alligator farm

I won't get on your hand-braided nerves.  
Once anemic, I'm now a resilient pillow, see,  
and ever-so-drowsy. No matter

if I'm not fulfilling mother-of-pearl  
daydreams, she claims  
I've been with her on spring hayrides.

Why don't I remember? We jitterbugged,  
for certain, in that era  
that now makes me cognac weepy.

Could you ask the pianist  
to play me something  
I don't already know?



## A SOMEWHAT LIBERAL ACCOUNTANT

No matter how much I've been praised,  
I'm not letting go.  
It's an architectural issue.

I won't experiment with 10% off, not in this case.  
In the first place, when I don cream-colored poplin,  
it shows I've been on retainer.

Admittedly, I've been promoted  
because I'm late-night professional.

Still, she asserts I'm not tapping into  
whole areas of my gold-weaving talent.

So what? I'm not your spread-collar adversary.  
After so long in 7-gauge management,  
I've every right to frustration.

Regardless, as a Virgo,  
I don't start the day this dizzy.

## CALICO FLORIST

He appreciates I'm hand-chiseled frugality,  
no matter what. Still, I'm never chaotic,  
even when I've been swept away.

Since I'm a vanity-mirror opera fanatic,  
she pretends I've been outside the White House.  
I won't conclude an ornamental bargain

once I've arranged an empire or a minstrel.  
Sing all you want, I'm still no domestic issue.  
When I saunter to the decanter neck

emphatically, you say I'm barely primrose.  
After dwelling so long on the prairie,  
I worship the painted sideboard.

## STEEL-HEARTED REPORTER

Most of the time, I reside in an ingot manor.  
At least when I'm not scrolling the wire  
where I've frozen your iconic buttons.

She postulates I'm trembling  
but you say I've sweltered every time  
I fail to pull off a masterful stunt.

Although I've been somebody's dreamboat  
I'm not issuing an ultimatum.  
No matter what, I'm a muleskinner

who wonders, of course,  
why I'm not allowed to take charge  
instead of just fiddling.

## THE AVOCADO HAIR STYLIST

When I'm not on a shopping spree  
I'm an occasional vegetarian.  
You say I've been charming?

Well, since I'm not a kiss away  
I've been ill-at-ease  
until I drive my own amethyst convertible.

She's a stickler I'm all alone, but what  
does she know? I'm not out on casual business.  
No matter what, I've been kinky.

Such talk and I'm up in arms.  
Even though I've been risqué,  
at least I'm not your new hobby.

Still, you send me  
suggestive cards, letters, and the menu.

## ONE-TRUCK CARPENTER

I reinvent home maintenance  
each time I've been on the mantel.  
Still, I'm never out of my banzai stage.

No matter what, I'm not all that  
wildebeast brave when I'm indecisive.  
You'll know how often I've been set up.

When I'm not misfiring  
I'm surprisingly artistic.  
After all, I've been disciplined.

I'm not exactly a terrific humorist  
when I've been cowering. But let me  
be intuitive, and we might go caroling.

## SEATED EX-CHEERLEADER

On a multicultural whale-watch  
so far from overcast Detroit  
he acknowledges how I bruise

when I innovate

you say I've been whispering  
something about a pickle  
even though I've been around the block

I'm not disaster striking

where I dwell in midair  
rather than any marching band  
until I'm such high voltage

she screams

when it's time to party, I'm not cherry  
even as a New England Patriots fan

with bills, bills, bills to pay

I never spin cotton

## OVERTIME PLUMBER

The knees are the first to go, as everyone says,  
as well as your back. Mud's just another side of water.

After I've been boss in many small ways,  
she makes a point I'm a Gopher hayseed. Not another fat  
chance.

He takes for granted I'm rarely lucky but typically cranky.  
Some kind of hick, though I explore. Sometimes

when I'm not in demand, I've been cuddly.  
And after I've been conniving, I'm not hard

but easy to reach as a godfather fixing a toilet.  
Still, I walk away, to prove I'm no garden statue.

With blue eyes like these, I could be dangerous,  
splattering lead from the blue tip of my flame.

As I tell the electrician, "Plug away,"



while watching the sparks fly.

Besides, everyone knows

I seldom return phone calls.

## KOMODO GYMNAST

Even though I'm not a wild fowl

he remembers I paid attention

not that I've been a little bored

tigerskin

faux tortoise rings or a cuff

getting ready to rock

a pair of pants

on their last legs

## GRANITE STREET PYROTECHNICIAN

No matter what, I'm so rabbit-foot elegant  
I've never been hit with indecision  
not even, as she insists, when sleeping.

You see, I'm never feral  
but what he contemplates as psychedelic  
as the Fourth of July

rocking  
smacked  
into cool pearl

rather than the Neanderthal you say  
now wears shiny leather. Still, it's hard  
to scale down from overdrive.

Once another big project's done,  
you'll say I've landed in her butterfly closet  
still again.

## NE'ER-DO-WELL

Of course, I'm not proud of some things.

You know how I'm an open secret

of potatoes and gravy within a landscape

of an old McDonald's he comes back upon.

So what if I'm not having my toenails painted?

She stresses I'm not coming near you

regardless of sharpening these antlers,

once I thump, no matter what.

## LENSGRINDER ON ELM

Look, until I've been cowed by Amsterdam  
I'm not joining with you  
to buy an everyday greenhouse.

Can't you see, I don't give a fig  
about tax advantages flowering  
into wood-fired federal agendas?

What I desire doesn't sprout on branches.  
Be wary, I'm harder than quartz  
and shatter resistant. All the same,

even though I've been screwed  
time and again, no matter what,  
I'm still enthralled by mixed sunsets.

Once I've been worked over royally,  
you can't wear me out again  
like an unglazed yellow raincoat.

## SPRING STREET SOCIAL WORKER

Listen, I'm not your mother

shedding leaves after collecting rocks

because I'm not a skilled carpenter

or disorganized electrician or even plumbing

he recalls I get duck bumps as a butterfly hunter

until recovering sometimes I'd rather

be a monkey wearing a sterling pagoda shell anklet.

So let me record just what you have as Plan B.

There's no escape once you enter.

Except up those stairs, to start working.

## RAILROAD STREET GAMBLER

When I've been scoring  
yard work horses you say I'm ready  
for a gaudy escapade underneath the trailers.  
Because she puts her foot down that I'm not passing through  
I've been exercising a big gun  
even in the hushed Capitol Rotunda.  
And that was it. On the other hand  
he recollects my fondness  
for hand-painted sushi and sake  
so what will you give me  
as an oddball toast screaming and crying  
after playing a gold-screen impromptu?  
It's true, I've been an inspired ginger etude  
and once I'm dreadfully straight  
you say I too easily turn into  
a crisp and caramel souvenir of conception  
but at least I'm not disintegrating  
over any of them. In the end,  
my wife stopped asking me to do it  
before she left. Look out,

I'm not interchangeable until I've been lying.  
No matter what, even when confronted,  
you still won't find me mugging in the cellar.  
Just don't forget to deal me in.



## JAZZ VOCALIST OVER SALAD NICOISE

Why on earth should I be  
delighted to hear from you when  
I'm not a mobster or even a lobster  
wobbling off the beam  
as an astronaut  
turning furious  
at a dog walker  
who's pals with beavers and hummingbirds?

I love flutes and all that virtuoso voodoo.

At least he makes clear I've been as insightful  
as a verbal pyromaniac with insomnia  
when the periphery folds back to the core.

## MAIL CARRIER WITH A TRUMPET

Inflated to thirty-five voracious pounds  
I can't be rolling on a hot joints photocopier  
in the freckled weeds, no matter what,  
I'm committed to plowing toward the escape hatch  
once I've been postmarked in a state of discovery  
there's no sense sounding opposite sex whiny  
so go ahead and pamper me with inspiration  
after being paid off right out of the gate, especially,  
it's clear the decks. So just who's not bearing gifts  
when I'm easing back into the singles lane?  
I deliver more than fists full of fury.

## RECLUSE IN A BARN

I still have no cell phone

in a yard that's a haven for cats  
entranced by an array of songbirds

I harvest green beans and zucchini

These candy bars and soda cans  
are for grandkids who pop in

What I did was to save their marriage

So what's left after your great cause  
collapses and defeat follows?

You'll never find me in Facebook

## *First intermezzo*

Greek chorus?

Dreams? Postcards and snapshots? Rants?

*Household commerce*

ACT I, SCENE II

## HOUSE GUESTS

1.

Made love, and made love.

Sweet wine, candlelight twilight.

Mattress on the floor.

2.

“Don’t you have any games? Even a deck of cards?”

This time, I carry my own.

“You’re getting upset!” To him.

“You’re changing the rules!” He replies.

Look, all my Middle Eastern friends  
cheat at cards, expecting everyone else  
to venture the same – it’s just part of their game.  
Cheating, eh? Maybe.

3.

Wow! You’ve really read all these books?

I said, hoping to open his secret pages.

4.

“So I’m going to a baby shower  
you’ll never guess who for.”

## ROOFER ON JEFFERSON

Having been a Boy Scout  
and a homebuyer, too,  
I'm not a four-fold parachutist  
when I leap into my next project.

From frost I've become a fruit stand dweller  
spiraling, no matter what, into summer  
after seeing my first rhododendron  
blooming amid pine on Roan High Knob.

But I'm not swooning as a money-grubber.  
Still I've been in the San Juan Islands  
alert as driftwood rather than a Ph.D  
weathervane atop any old house of worship.



## FORTUNE TELLER AT THE BANK

Between puffs of smoke she denies I'm blessed  
but rarely inspired as a tennis or model railroad buff  
who can wonder what comes next around  
the blender see how I've been cursed in shriveled  
theater aisles because I haven't directed the full-  
length prelude to a Hollywood stunt movie  
when it's all sweet dreams and good night  
he sees into my architectural aspirations  
still I count out his change from bittersweet  
deposits now that I'm not in the big city groove  
oh, Lost Angels, help me rework my karma daily.

## WASHINGTON STREET DETECTIVE

I'm not a home video  
on her photo shoot street  
until I'm inundated  
by Kool-Aid extrapolation.

I'm hardly a soulful police force  
who's been on her rehearsal sheets  
under trash-talking interrogation  
that has native tongues wagging.

Still, he can't forget  
how often I've been  
her funkblaster in the Chevy  
with the tinted bumpin' windows.

## CLOCK ALLEY NUN

Don't tell me about Mother Teresa logic  
    after I've been canoeing intuition even  
though I'm furious at the dog owners  
    responsible for befouling a complex  
where nobody owns a canine  
    sniffing for the subsurface imbroglio  
she seeks the last word I'm a holy wildflower  
    but a pinecone isn't a timepiece  
he smolders as a church official  
    fossil dabbling in sectarian politics  
you say I'm not absolutely unblemished  
    because I've been frightened as treasurer  
at least I'm not living with anyone but  
    these sisters and their homemade mustard  
won't replace those candles before Easter  
    no matter what I'm a hummingbird  
witness to a jailhouse hanging  
    who can comprehend the anger men carry.

## LEXINGTON AVENUE CLOTHIER

My autumn collection

isn't vanilla

smorgasbord

or a No. 1 Killer

but a rut

that expands

into orderly

limpness. If you want

a quarterback

in the basement,

my, how narcissistic

bedazzlement comes easily

to robotic maneuvers.

Mirror, mirror, no matter

you say I'm outlandish.

Sometimes it seems

I've been in the attic

since twenty, experimenting.

He catalogs the ways

I never jog.

## SALLOW TONE STOCKBROKER

While I'm not a bureaucratic machine

I'm taut

filling paper sacks with gratuities  
and tossing manhole covers

you say I'm high-strung  
but I'm still not kissing your boot

during a commercial break  
she pretends I'm angst-ridden

sleepless  
at least I'm not a lizard

investigating novel colors  
no matter what, my act's

been shrink-wrapped altogether.  
So what if I'm not wearing sunglasses?

## POSTAL WORKER AT 4 O'CLOCK

Subsequently trying to read my black leather  
emotions at the moment means you can forget

unethical rice and stew for dinner. It doesn't  
matter if I possess an ancient Cracker Jack soul

when I've been Old Glory proficient.

So now reconsider a menu that has nothing

to do with an awe-shucks trout fly  
and everything to do with tightening the screw.

## 8<sup>TH</sup> HOLE NATIVE

If you think I'm always found here,  
you're way off the fairway.

Listen, she'll insist I've been quite peachy  
while opening another Bud from the cooler.  
But see the adulterated blush. At least  
I'm not ripping wings off houseflies or moths.

Now that I've grown up, I'm plum iron  
pure hole-in-one, preferring to crush grapes  
rather than detach legs from fist-sized spiders.  
I'll even help her can tomatoes  
now that summer's ending.

Just remember, when I do get away,  
I take Titleist all the way.

## BRASS BATTERY SWITCH TRANSLATOR

Even though I scramble

at least I'm not a motorcyclist

living in a televised soap opera

she requires that I'm a holy terror, when angry

I'm not forever blowing lubricant bubbles

upstairs with the handcast teens

you say I scribble peaceful reminders

on the precipice

no matter what I'm not a unicyclist

or bicycling

or even filling a hot-air globe

as she calls in question I'm going dry

at the center of my star

in all of this household commerce.



## LANDSCAPER ON HICKORY

I'm not a stick of night-lamp butter  
but a scarlet autumn bough  
deceived or at least perturbed  
by what he presupposes is a single blossom  
on a circular tablecloth  
is that I grow more impatient with age  
no matter what I'm not a grandfather  
betrayed she summons in memories of treefrogs  
you say I reflect glass bowls of moonlight  
where everything follows water  
one way or the other I don't collect  
antique autos even after infatuated  
beaded droplets have me so dizzy  
I'm not perforated creaking  
wooden roller coasters  
piercing the unripe dogwood.

## NIGHT WATCHMAN ON DEPOT

Though I've been a bison champion

I'm not going home

as a Buckeye

not as tall as my father

at least I harvest persimmons

having been a Hoosier

after a hippie.

Even so, I'm grateful to not be

some former child actor

no matter the void

I've studied and

am still pissed.

Why aren't my toothpaste

and razor where I left them?

## FANCY-STAR QUILTER

Mother's hands fidget in prayer  
branching into an alternate dinner plan.

Why is addition easier than subtraction?  
Multiplication, over division?

Human nature is to acquire.  
Piles throughout the house.

We hate to lose. Even diet.  
So even paying the bills can be painful.

He was described as a family man with a passion  
for horse-pulling events and square dancing.

I've been to dances that have felt like both  
not all that long ago –

there was no life apart from the children's

wet towels dropped in the hallway.

## THE COFFEE-COLOR CAT OWNER

I'm not going to an Egyptian vet  
so I've been telephoning Johnny Badge  
until I'm as hungry as a brass filial.

You say I've been simply gorgeous  
but until the lavender divorce is final  
I can't go away.

I'm the polished pink granite  
rising from the green graveyard  
that would hold the bones down.

## TICKET SELLER AT THE ORPHEUM

I'm late on the green and for a rosy dinner  
but I'm no straw mat for anyone's strolling,  
not now that I've chased carved mahogany seraphim  
through tiled bathroom.

Bogart restates how I got in over my eggplant  
noggin, which wasn't quite the Fourth of July in Morocco.  
No matter what, Dear Abby will insist I'm lonely.

It's not just a queen-sized headboard mystery,  
this matter of fashion. Just look for new chenille  
after shortening henna tethers. It's all fantasy

they expect you to enter. At least I'm not trying  
to get fit. I'd rather stay too round and virginal  
to arouse the authorities' suspicions.

Oh, to be twenty-one again!  
Anyway!

## FIGURE BEHIND THE WINDOW

Lee understands I've been fenced in.

I'm not entering a comfort glazed earthenware zone.

No matter what, I dial a dishwasher-safe radio.

It's a domestic scene you see repeated

throughout the undergrowth

beginning with immediate family.

I'm not grounded in Victorian aesthetic, and so

I might listen to Christopher's *Cello Concerto*.

My older sister decrees I've been regally off-key

missing Charles,

I'm wounded by the wild-onion laced bow Allison Krauss

wields

and am rarely content confined to double-breasted clothing.

## UNDER A CRESCENT MOON ON CEMETERY HILL

Admittedly, I could be funny  
without talking back  
as I underwent adult orthodontics.

At least I wasn't lisping  
in Florida every winter.

Jack O'Clubs made no sign  
I'd been nesting  
up on the rocky hill  
rather than in flowering dogwood.

I'm not the gossipy sort.

I've never been touched, meaning love.  
My sisters have. They all have husbands  
and family, but I've never been touched.



Your holy book has already  
killed and shamed me.

## NEBULA SHUCKER

The Captain bears in mind I fantasize  
I never paid room and board at fourteen  
like my mother in the Great Depression.

Since I'm not all that disordered  
I've been bending backwards.

While Dad's roving out west, disregarding me,  
Paris rejoins I'm all-too-rational

unlike my whore of an older sister  
who sleeps around with any boss for her job.

Although once I've been exiled  
I'm not eating crayfish.

While I've been objectified  
I'm not shucking clams tonight.

No matter what, I'm not an iPod

and definitely not pregnant.

Even though I've been bending over  
I'm zealous euphoria. See how my

battery-powered inner conflict is always  
an elective course in righteousness.

Don't ever confuse me  
with a horsefly or ice.

**CHECKOUT CLERK  
BESIDE AN IONIC COLUMN**

I've been hickory-smoked sweetness, oh yes,  
who will do no more penance  
until somebody sees in retrospect my face on the scowling  
clock.

You say I'm not such a bathroom bitch  
or even doggie dung with a funny request  
spending the bitter night alone.

I've been a Babycakes, oh yes,  
whenever I become weightless  
orbiting on my stuttering toes.

Donatella stipulates I'm a mile of leg classic, at least  
some treasure in an earthenware vessel  
that was once an unknown multiplatinum quantity.

Still, ask me what I play as cosmic retribution

when I hear his haunting falsetto  
from the other end of the store.

## WAITRESS ON OAK STREET

Whenever I take some time off,  
I'm no longer alienated from myself  
dwelling on the details of some past  
roisserie in this upside-down town  
but soulfully kissing myself  
everywhere in the blueberry patch.

Besides, how much sex can one man handle?

And then we faced each other as criminals  
in a large meetinghouse across town.  
I didn't recognize her dad  
but think the man is her brother.

She left and I changed my mind  
to run after her but could not catch up.

When they drove off, I was somehow  
in hot pursuit. You'll see,

since I'm not the last of the boxing bears  
I'm trustworthy  
or at least tenderly  
foraging in preparation  
for a big move through the forest. Even so,  
you'll say I'm not all that wild.

No matter what, it's true I'm not younger  
hacking all night,  
ignoring a coworker all morning  
as if I can't find the Tabasco  
some clown thought was brown sugar.

## *Act I intermission*

“I’ve been wanting to do something with a codpiece.”

“Sounds fishy to me.”

“It’s amazing what they could and couldn’t  
expose then.”

“Oh, say, can you see?”



*If you're never sad, you can't swallow*

ACT II, SCENE I

## THE BLUE DEACON

No matter what, I'm not doing *that* again  
because Coltrane replays how I heal and bless  
while I'm not too strong  
I'm unworthy of great gifts. (But try me)  
once I've been swabbing a church service  
from a liver-diseased milk crate  
I'm not lifting showtime weights  
no matter how it often feels in my back.  
Dakota ordains I've been standing  
so much I make up my own cross  
within any gathering of people.  
No, I'm definitely not Liberace  
in this glittering Mae West outfit  
hung over in my soul from the new wine.  
Once I was a tethered hawk  
caught wandering  
before anyone was taking dictation  
you said I've been rambling  
about how I'm not a Jackson scarecrow  
but an elk sprouting massive antlers.

## MANDALAY CHARM CLERK OF COURT

Ever since I've been losing my old-school epoch,  
I'm not hanging loose in a modern dance extravaganza.

Even as a professional razor-sharp scribe  
I'm a Nutcracker no longer riding caboose.

Wrapped in layers of heartstring tugging  
by each of these others' point of reference

it's true I've been misquoted  
especially when swamped in a retro funk-hop mixture.

But at least I'm not biting my tongue  
on Vera memories, no matter what,

I'm not in debt, running for Congress or in darkness.  
All the same, Katie ventures I'm aloof

just because I'm not selling you anything.

When the time comes, you'll cry *Hallelujah* –,

As an enormous help preparing your power summit

I must be hard to handle.

## RABBI AFTER THE DIVORCE

I've been confounding her  
no matter what, I'm not sniffing  
that stuff with the kids when  
I prepare for center stage  
I'm not drunk  
just vaguely disappointed  
without any evidence she musters

I've been under surveillance  
even by a newspaper columnist  
who was once my trusted colleague  
and now says I can nurture when not angry.  
Actions speak truer than words  
except maybe those overheard.  
Just listen who says I'm good-looking.

**WHITE PINACLE**  
**REGISTERED NURSE**

There's never a good time to be asking  
for more urinalysis, not even for an old  
pachyderm flywheel like me.

Years ago in an echoing cathedral  
a cowboy from Jupiter or Mars taught me  
chopsticks with the grace of a rattlesnake.

These days I'm saving pennies  
for a Salvation Army bell ringer  
to output on commercial television.

Whenever I come to the rescue of drug addicts  
I infix a neighbor child darting in some jig  
after touring the meatpacking factory.

Whether I really found moose tracks in that trail  
beside the disquieted lake, I know what you think.

Washington might have slept here  
without Martha or Bo-Peep.

## MATRIARCH OF CONCORD

Ulysses admonishes I'm so frisky  
forget taking photos.

Claiborne's subpoena has me steely  
fine-molded.

When wet  
these days, I'm not rounding the bars  
or turning carmine  
or at least am not totally abrasive.

Still, however light  
I'm not stepping aside.

Even though I'm effulgent  
and vaporous,  
you say I've been a growling old bear.

After I delight you  
I'm vivid and bold  
cashing out hotel casino weekends.

No matter what, I've plucked  
blueberries behind amusement parks  
just to grab a little attention  
on a beautiful morning after rain.



**LINCOLN BOULEVARD  
ELEMENTARY TEACHER**

So you say I'm clumsy?  
Listen, when I've been forgetful,  
I'm still not an algebra problem.

There are reasons to wonder where Chapman went  
and reasons I've been ready to quit  
with this rusty pantry tile.

Since I'm not independently wealthy,  
I glue feathers to my own wingspan  
after entertaining myself.

Webster returns to mind I'm not tenured.  
No matter what, I've been braced for locusts  
even when I hear the police channel name her.

I'm not dowdy and already it's 10:30.  
Besides I'm nobody's mommy drumming away

with once upon a time, maybe in the future

rather than reveal

what's kept me awake nights  
since gaining so much weight.

Gin makes me mean.

## HER OWN BEST FRIEND

After all that I've been kicked about  
you still say I give orders.

Listen, I'm not a Gypsy in Reno.

Because I'm not politically allied  
I've been knocked down  
even though I clerk Quarter Sessions.

Cautioning I fatigue easily  
Calvin's surprised I'm not home  
but have been soaring.

Let him celebrate  
the religious significance  
of helping the less fortunate

and know I've been wary  
of brown-eyed obsessive rattlesnakes.  
I'm not unfazed.

And then Kelli calls, insisting  
I resolve another sleeveless  
denim jacket conundrum.

## A NOT-SO-EVIL STEPMOTHER

No matter what, I've been sensational.  
It helps I'm a wealth addict, even  
if my husband's placed no limits  
on my account. Just look in the closets  
where chalky children roost over the pigeons.

After all of this, Jack O'Hearts reminds me  
I'm not departing. This starship  
he navigates after I've been oblique  
loops into uplands of turbulent shamrock  
where our daughters' soccer teams practice.

At least I'm a connoisseur of party goods.  
When I'm not signing on the dotted line,  
I've been a leader. Even though I'm hazel-eyed,  
once I've been sorting seashells, watch out:  
when it's all over, I'm not doing more chores.

## SUNBURNED AUCTIONEER WITH SIDEBURNS

I've also been a handsome shopper.  
It's just part of the trade. I'll move  
about anything but my lapis.

Once I adopt many European styles  
I'm no summer-night pendulum. Harvey parrots  
I've been a sales field representative  
for a heavy-duty engine manufacturer.

Still, I'm afraid of thieves,  
afraid of a break-in  
especially when I'm cooking the ledgers.

Even I skip through a sham quadrille  
as if I've been in North Carolina. In this business  
it doesn't pay to radiate doom and gloom.

Once I've been rafting the thick-lipped canyon

the Kenyan decides I've been a swearing maniac on safari.  
Little does she know, there's no way I'll use a cane  
until I order ominous new snap-tee sweaters.

## RAINBOW AWNING MAKER

Even as a 350-horsepower opera fanatic  
I'm no pillar of rectitude she summons  
but a raging dragon queen you call  
immature so let's ask why we don't hear  
more marching bands on the air to assist  
planning the day's footprints? Left, right, left  
you know the score demands appropriate fabrics  
for theatrical staging or a military encampment  
or even a statement atop the country-club entry  
just tell me if you're thinking of the second act  
oh, honey, I'm still not one of the clowns  
tumbling through dusty psychotherapy  
no matter how much resolution I've applied  
but doing whatever I can one stitch at a time  
despite all appearances, it's not a three-ring circus  
until I've contemplated the solar plexus overhead  
as a chain saw.



## CIRCUITRY TECHNICIAN

Until I catch a tight “A” Train  
I’m not preparing a farewell speech  
while Miles jogs our memories I’m a good boy.

No matter what, I’m full of integrity. Even  
if Barracuda orders me to laugh out-loud  
badly, I’m not mistaken. See

where I’ve been spanked or beaten. At least  
now that I’m free of the service  
my dinner burns in the oven.

To be so self-disciplined  
creates new products. All the same,  
you claim I’m not smiling.

No matter what, I can be inexpensive.  
You always say I’m compulsive  
but don’t touch that resume once again.

Later, when hiking in what were woods  
toward Centerville, I'll be stopped by a Corvette  
telling me she wasn't even going all the way.

Still, it's hard to believe from that kiss  
all these years later she's  
so avidly politically conservative.

## GRAY FIGURE IN FOG

El lets slip from his tongue  
I'm not pretending to be some workbook  
taking shelter from the norm.

All the same, I'll consider that but  
if you press me, the answer's no.  
I'm pressed now. Can I get back to you?

Everybody's working their butt off.  
Leave me a note anytime you're out of the building.  
As if I'll fade or wrinkle.

I have no fondness for this old fort  
or any of the other offices I've worked.  
Even my residences have been tainted.

Sally decrees I've been vulgarly offensive  
so I'll admit being not all that proud of myself  
once I've been shamed.

No matter what, I love quiet and solitude  
and so I'm not unprecedented  
when badly dressed.

I'm not accident-prone  
until surrounded by antiques.  
And, yes, I'm honest, if you are.

## EXTERMINATOR WEARING A SCARAB

I'm so puzzled and overwhelmed my son's getting married  
in a flak jacket so there are reasons to speculate  
whether he's still Pentagon virgin or shot through  
and through with diddling revenge  
as Helena's instructed, you know the story's  
as slack as a disenfranchised band of Indians  
contemplating escape from a Hollywood back lot  
where Johnny flashes on truth unlikely to drip ice cream  
yet on certain matters you don't need a wrought iron fence gate  
to make a street scene, no-no-no, once we're thinking  
of incisions to concoct a skyscraper or conduct Beethoven  
you could say it's not child's play but no matter what  
I'd still argue that everything's just starting to take shape.  
Under the bed we don't play games with your braids  
even though I'm no dirty cloud or the crest  
of the hill I've been abraded and stressed.  
Most of the time, though, I just end it.

## PAID ESCORTS ON HIGH

1

Don't say I've been cold paperback book covers.  
Say I'm thoughtful black interiors.

Don't say I'm a red-tailed jailbird.  
Say I'm a caramel-corn pet kitty.

Don't say I've been sweating elephant piss.  
Say I'm considerate for old time's sake.

Don't ask what happened to my suitcase.  
Say it's all personal this time.

2

See how high gloss stylish makes quite a difference.  
Now tie a mystical ceremonial knot in a string of my scarf.

See how battling an overwhelming injustice perpetrated  
against someone else now brings me to you.

See how preparing a large fish from a Korean market  
in the motel's side-aside kitchen now feeds a private party.

Now I have skills I was unaware of.

See how I move, leaving no forwarding address.

## UNION JACK CUSTODIAN

No matter how my first-baseman's cloud of action  
is dwarfed by sunflowers strung with banners  
in my own best cause, you still find me

oil-slicked hard to label in those places  
where we've been conjoined on those high seas  
where I'm not yet a weekend sailor.

See, I'm not locked outside some boredom  
but have been igniting wicks of bantam melodies  
that will sweep bell-ringers harum-scarum

through my nomadic hallways where she'll imprint  
me not just as the innermost janitor  
reading a neon compass or duct-taping

spark plug wiring under a disagreeable keyboard  
she plays with hands full of drop-dead baloney.  
What it all comes down to is I'm not skunked



or an endless blue stripe, no matter what  
she claims, it's always "teacher, teacher"  
I hear as chanting behind fish and chips.

You want me to tell our Queen O'Studs  
I'm no longer four years old and seem  
not all that ordinary with a smoking cigar.

## DELI COUNTER WORKER ON COURT STREET

At least I gave Gloria the silent treatment.  
while wrapping her chocolate pudding.

Maybe Lucas has memorized I'm not tubercular.  
You say I misunderstood his insignia.

Still, maybe he'll draw me closer, realizing  
I'm not the lurid she-wolf in winter.

If you're never sad, you can't swallow.

I'm not a spaghetti strap stipple  
bumped in my golden fleece.

Once I've painstakingly marked the  
Help Wanted pages, I turn black-and-white.

When it comes to vampires, I'm no dress rehearsal.

Now Angela lays down the law  
to defrost the meat cooler.

I still don't know him.

OK?

## ROLLED PIG IRON RETIREE

Even though I make my vintage bed each morning  
I've never luxuriated in wall-to-wall suburbia.  
Once I, too, was part of this runaway world.  
Now I'm vacuuming for the first time in a month  
and dreading Trick-or-Treat pendant handbags.  
At least I'm not an illegal street racing paperweight  
addressing a Valentine. No matter what,  
I'm not a dandelion in some gangsta invention.  
Still, Lauren insisted I hunt for the lovey-dovey  
shag bag with a riding mower hoping  
I'd acquire some striptease soiree unchained  
memories. What a cliché, now you say  
I've been talking to myself again, forgetting  
how I've been laughing every time I recall her.  
Ha-ha. Hardy-har-har. Since I'm too original  
for my own good when I'm not in harness,  
I'm not ironing the sheets. I'm the only one here  
anyway, Hoffa gave a word to the wise  
how skillful I'd been  
all because I rarely play by the same rules.

## BEECH STREET VIDEO ADDICT

For sale, by owner.

Go ahead, stick it up.

Even though I'm cooing without getting laid  
you say I'm searching for hot rod adolescence.

She has two babies now, the newest  
a curly-brown haired boy  
who purrs as I stoke his head  
while putting him down to nap.

No matter what, I'm numb battling negativity  
on a Turkish carpet. At night I'm still rewinding  
from children's daycare. Even so, all Cher found suggestive  
was my going to the dump with the payoff.

Besides, whenever I've been a brisk porcupine  
after pumping gasoline on parole, you'll find  
I'm uncommonly sensitive. You can just bet  
I'm not a piano or poison ivy at the end of my rope.

## SILVER STREET TOYMAKER

When I'm not another weekend deckhand  
I'm just a tea rose  
waltzing, both right and wrong  
determinedly in my own style.

No matter what, I'm not having  
another cardiac seizure  
or any of visible signs of aging  
to confront when you admit I'm clever.

I'd like to say I've been wandering  
in the apricot shower stall even though  
I'm not hickory smoking you can say  
I'm technologically advanced in the libido  
where Demi cites my talent as corny.

At least I'm not another dickhead  
out hunting in bear season.

What a difference since being in the kitchen

when she announced she'd made some kind  
of decision and posed the question,  
“What are you going to do about it?  
It could be the answer to our marriage.”  
It was a rainy afternoon with green tea  
and the soil already saturated.  
Smiling at her, I said, “I don't know.  
Sounds like your problem, really. So how  
do you want me to answer? It's a no-win.  
Seems to me you're full of shit.  
Shit-shit-shit.  
Besides, I have a date in an hour.”  
And gave her a hug in leaving.

These days my attention's on cartoon heroines  
whose fans yell *Tough titty!* at the referees.

## TROUBLE BREWING

Cinderalla's many faces – rubbery, expressive, lively  
nothing seems to happen without an emotional response  
in a peasant family

her real father in prison out in Washington

– Walla Walla, we safely presume –

“you should see me with makeup on”

budding blooming potential

full of unvoiced anxieties

tending bar on the side at fourteen

– later, saying her uncle was jailed

for doing bad things to her

skipping school, all the same, and smoking

the briefest outfit in the whirlpool

still, the attendant opened her eyes to a comet

through his best field glasses, in the cold



she could be a movie star excepting  
the spring-loaded self-destruction  
comes too far forward

toward rumors of teenage girls  
hanging out in the summer apartment  
packed with migrant housepainters

she barely reads, and glossy  
fashion magazines, at best  
– doesn't believe in God

– what future is there  
with a badly done amateur skin art like that?

eventually, the U-Haul's outside their door  
as if that will save anyone

all the while, you remain virtuously solo

## *Second intermezzo*

“She grew fat with lies  
that vined around the doorway  
I’d slipped through.

“I’d promised to leave it open  
hoping a pearl would appear  
in the rusting lock.”

*Ninth inning, in the stands*

ACT II, SCENE II

## GENERIC EMBEZZLER

Take it, Baby, take it.

Baby, take it. Baby,  
yes, take all it's worth.

There's a great black hole  
within that smile  
where the air-conditioner runs full blast.

Still, I'd avoid Tropics  
where everything mildews  
before sunrise.

## HIS CAMPAIGN MANAGER

Every name's a solid-gold token  
we've shined into footwear  
befitting the next race. Beseech all you want,

after passing endless cornfields  
I get congested. It's the one part  
of this job that will turn me irrational.

The candidate says never frustrate anyone  
but the bastards, yet enshrines a duty  
to insist on silver-plated punctuation.

## WEATHERVANE HISTORIAN

Wherefore, I'm most at home in other epochs  
where porcelain toys and bourgeois guilt  
bang on the smudging horsehair plaster.

To choose now, between swallow-tails and uniform.  
I've never tolerated conflict, except as a bloody battle.  
Now, to recapture all we've long presumed lost.

Henceforth, though beaten as a youngster  
before learning to jerk off at the center of my own epic,  
how welcome the openly childlike ferocity of retaliation.

## VIDEO STORE ASSISTANT MANAGER

Big deal, I've been wrong a few times.  
No matter what, I tan in July. You say  
I'm not sowing seeds of future success.

So what? I'm not a solar eclipse.  
It's true I've been full of cranberries.  
When it comes to movies, I'm a historian of sorts.

Bill knows I drool over Cary, Harrison,  
and Sean. At least I'm not a leaky fire hose  
or carving a stale turkey on another trip to the Catskills.

**MAKEUP SALESLADY  
BETWEEN TWIN POSIES**

Between hair bands for hyenas and raspberry gloss,  
I select the appropriate olive hue and demand full price  
for their preshrunk concert-tour celebrity.

At least I'm not a sucker for carbohydrates who  
bares dazzling white fleece at the wedding reception.  
You never know where the goats will reappear.

Since I'm no longer so young, I'm not hitting the asphalt  
but just lick the caramel ice cream of high-fat desires.  
I'll tell you, that bitch is getting on my last nerve.



## AFTER-SCHOOL GIFT WRAPPER

no matter how homesick

I'm usually just ignored in a cabernet dusk

but you say I'm very sweet

tenting and ice skating deliriously

without a happily ever after where I'm from

not squealing on just anyone

so what was all that jabber

about an agitated fink

when you were downing a chicken burrito?

## AD AGENCY SCHEDULE BUYER

I tell you, no modern drawstring dilemma  
sings sweet-pea baritone. It's not like  
they've been living in my front-pockets.

If learning's a supermarket, I've been  
to Oxford or Cambridge until I was fifty, at least,  
so I'm not maintaining any further pretense.

Let's ignore Chinese take-out for dinner.  
After taking to the crinkled lusterware shore,  
Rahm is rankled I'm a thoroughly Cornhusker native.

## CANDY VENDOR IN A TAPESTRY

A peppermint unicorn, more than chocolate, transforms  
my boss' insistence I'm worn fur coat gentle, however glad  
I am he didn't move into the gambrel attic with me.

A once pissed-off pushpin, I've inhaled dregs of moon mist  
from humpback blowholes so long I've ceased braying  
at champagne midnight. Just imagine.

Little does he know. Once I close my eyes and leap,  
I'll tell nobody about the thunder machine issues.  
When I phone in an order, he erases now I've been seasick.

## THIRD-TERM TAX COLLECTOR

I don't understand any of this contour  
until I've been swearing and giggling  
after confounding the new computer at the office.

Even though I'm a former wild-game birdwatcher,  
I'm not everyone's favorite herringbone companion  
– especially once I'm royally Captiva enraged.

Yes, I'm a compulsive solitaire player.  
You rightly say I've been incensed. At least  
I'm not making serrated stainless-steel motions.

## BEARISH AUTO REGISTRAR

I'm not a preacher's kid  
recoiling or loathe to tedium.  
At least I'm not related to doctors.

No matter what, I'm opinionated  
and righteously outspoken, yet still quick to forgive  
all the socks and magazines stuffed under the bed.

On the other hand, I'm not yet liberated  
from the great No-No List  
but ever-so tag-team platonic. Just imagine.

## WOMAN AT THE CORNER

Sofia testifies I watch the neighbors, but it's not true.  
Even though I've been expelled from Eden  
I'm not a short-term investment.

So what if Franklin's being technical?  
It's not like I'm a T-bill.  
still seeking a suitable helpmeet.

At least I'm not dusty.  
When you're as tall as I am,  
demand mostly premium.

## TAKING TIME OFF

On the lips, yes, I'll drink wine  
to enter the drowsy glow of a foot massage  
three or four nights straight.

No matter what, I'm not losing heart  
air kissing or hugging my ex briefly in public.  
You say I repeat turning crabby.

Reviewing my clandestine films of our best intercourse,  
I resolve to camp irregularly, and at least call to mind  
how once I'm caressed, the sound stays indoors rarely.

## LIFEGUARD ON A SAILBOAT

Syliva proscribes I chase rainbows  
in a getaway car  
with a sapphire egg.

Thoreau knows by heart I've been a swimmer forever  
understanding and supportive  
and not always like bony.

When the surf breaks  
across the Isles of Shoals  
I've analyzed clouds and currents.

There's more to life than a whistle.



## THE LIVING DEAD

I'm not money-minded  
but an amateur genealogist  
who's been buried alive in dated numbers.

Taylor has dictated I ski ineptly.  
The charge was overwhelming,  
a rejection of bliss. Still, if you put

your biscuits in the oven, pronto,  
I'll stop by to demonstrate  
the fifty-plus 24-four-hour channels.

## HAWK-FACED NATURALIST

After all, I'm so feathery  
I'm not even required reading  
for a teenager sipping ginger-ale.

For now, it's a matter of stacking wood blocks  
after trimming a sharp-needed Christmas tree  
and its oriole nest woven with hidden agendas.

At least I'm not flaunting my new attitude  
when I'm being lugworm myself.  
Annie exacts we not fly to Madrid together.

## FIBERGLASS CUTTER

Don't chalk up another tracer-filled point  
now that I'm an exciting spiky top lover.  
Did you say I've seemed horse-and-buggy shy?

My mother brushes off I'm not open-toe-platform  
boy-crazy after I've been vulnerable.  
She admonishes I recover rubber feet every time.

Let me watch another baggy pants thunderstorm.  
When I've been jazzy I'm not spewing  
like a fish ladder at the hydroelectric plant.

## PALLID LOCKSMITH

At least I've been awkwardly polite.

When I'm not striking out, I cook  
an excellent salmon, according to many.

Until I've been outraged,  
though I'm a Thursday night yogin,  
I'm not tearing myself apart to set world records.

No matter what, I sniffle.  
In my huaraches, I'm no bugaboo  
who fears balustrade intimacy.

## CONVECTION STEAMER SOCIAL ACTIVIST

Just show forth I've been counting crows  
above the gorge  
as a member of the tramp-stamp committee.

We've found some bright-eyed alternatives  
to hawks and doves  
are either nutritious or apologetic.

After working this flaccid quarter  
as a downy woodpecker public friend,  
my heart's no longer in worldly comforts.

## HINGED-COVER FOLKSINGER

Now that I've been striding out on my own  
Joni deduces I'm unconventional  
as I argue with Rumi. I'm always missing something..

At least I'm not Shirley after being jolted.  
The answer to pain is pain, opening.  
No matter what, I'm not the piglet.

Dale signifies my extreme cool  
as a sidetracked hyperactive, unpredictable  
grilled pork chop, not just plain burnt-edged pizza.

## NEW-MOON TEA DRINKER

After Hillary pronounces I've been upset  
I'm not leaving the ram's head attic  
until I hear wind chimes and far-off traffic.

So what if I've been inconclusive.  
Clark intends I dive from the high board.  
At least I'm not undercover, on a bogus assignment.

All these times I feel it's the ninth inning  
and I'm in the stands, watching my son's team losing.

I'm not delivering that curved-horn message.  
After I've been slicing a pile of lemons  
I'm ever so thankful for crickets.

## *Act II intermission*

“No matter what, I’m not making that decision  
when I’m responsible for so damn much.

“Hit me in that Cadillac  
and I’ll sue your socks off.”

And they said it was free parking.



*Stiff and sore, the next morning*

ACT III, SCENE I

## REGULAR MECHANIC

The Ace O'Spades says I'm shackled  
to Black & Decker perfection.  
Even though I'm finally engaged again  
I'm zippered in fine-toothed doubt.

I'm not overly dripping cautious.  
No matter what, I'm still not ready  
to plant the damn tulips.  
So what if I've been fired from a cannon  
in Betty Boop's bed?

I don't demand special attention  
unless I've been overworked oil.  
See, I'm just cowboy-hat middle-age bitter.

Teri quibbles when I sort out coyote motions  
but Ace discloses I've jitterbugged into  
this compression regression transmission,  
that I'm known for crooning "Doona Loona"

over joints and valves  
and downing gallons of lemonade estrangement.

Yet when I build a bonfire, sweetheart,  
I'm not cool tunes made in the U.S.A.  
Sometimes, in fact, it's been dotted-  
snake-stripe wallpaper torn from the trailer.

## HEAVY EQUIPMENT OPERATOR

No matter what, I spray a stuffy nose  
while reviewing old ledgers  
of how I persisted and went on  
across the country twice  
to clamber around Mount Rainier but not the summit  
so when I grew older, infatuated with my own indigo girl,  
at least I wouldn't gillnet fishy hungers.

I'll be buying her a corset or bustier for her birthday.  
"Black?" "No, peach!" and then  
"It wouldn't be for me – it would be your *birthday* present!"

How lovely, desirable, in one or the other.

You'll say I'm on fire  
not papyrus  
not retired  
but catlike and smoky with Rosie the Riveter  
now riding a cattle car  
on the railway to Zion.

It's roll my jones, then, and rip through the slash pile.

All this work to do.

## CARBON-ARC WELDER

At least I'm not red-pepper woeful.  
Ever since I've been mothball deranged,  
Princess Deuce O'Hearts repeats I'm a former linebacker.

The Rhinemaiden alleges I'm almost perfect, in my own eyes.  
Though she says I've been fleur-de-lis strange,  
I'm not tunnel loop upset.

Sometimes you're a refuge of stuff under the sofa  
when the biggest room in the world  
is the room for improvement.

After I've been impassioned,  
you say I'm not Punjabi assertive  
but nervous, even sunflower jumpy.

Don't forget, I'm not hurting anyone.  
I anticipate fluted cast-iron change  
once I've been anti-skid imprinted.

## LONG-HAUL TRUCKER WITH HIS SHOES OFF

Put in a new rig, I've been sleek and modern.  
No matter what, I'm not returning to Cleveland.

Once you've been an usher, you catch life in a new flight.  
From my balcony box, I view the whole road as theater.

Hilltop High wasn't the best years, anyway,  
so why should I enlist in just any cause?

I'm not clairvoyant but keep a low profile.  
Alone in my cab, though, I'm anything but aloof.

When I appraise thunderstorms,  
you say I've been preaching.

I've been through so many soy fields  
I listen to dressed poultry after sunrise.

Still, I hate getting stuck behind a boat  
or hearing the first ice cream prowler of the season.



## NONSTICK DEMOLITION EXPERT

Say what you say, I'm not a tin whistle  
choked in speculation.

When I'm chic, Venus and Serena make my world stop  
and then I'm as shabby chic  
as wind  
falling  
through an empty zeppelin.

One time I was camping without a tent in the backyard  
and the telephone rang, its sound muffled within a potholder.  
Once I found the receiver and answered came a warning  
of a storm approaching from the northeast. I turned  
and saw it, a tornado approaching the television tower.  
As it approached, I realized it was veering toward  
the neighbors' garage, so it was traveling in reverse,  
toward the southeast, contrary to all science.

At times like this, at home or on the job, I'm scared awake.  
Somewhere in my inner space tangle.  
I'm never a watermelon or clock ticking.

You'd think I'd be clear, though it's tempting  
to talk about fuses and make it sound dope.

All that's my secret genius.

Bang, bang. You're dead.

Just joking.

## KEYSTONE ROAD CEMENT MIXER

My boss trusts me to be his planktonic Smith & Wesson.  
I'm just a regular open page chopping firewood at the gym.  
See, I work hard and harder.

No matter how much I've been unaware  
of what doesn't contain sand around me,  
no nuclear physicist or lighthouse tender  
would do any better. You, on the other hand,  
see me as a fading corrugated box,  
an interval you say's ripped so furry I can't possibly be  
green discomfort that isn't conspicuously wealthy  
or a celebrity trampoline Kama Sutra  
growing feathers of optimism on any moon of Neptune.

As though you're crash course in theory.  
But what good does that do me, just where I'm stuck?

Though I'm barely acceptable as a backyard barbecue chef  
(and nothing of a neurosurgeon),  
you wouldn't peg me for a Sunday School teacher

but the kids all love me, and listen  
the way I take a little of this and a little of that  
and build something they might remember.

I'm the man standing on top of an SUV  
to photograph a sunset times ten.



resembling cocaine sunsets I build in the aftermath.

At least I'm not lemon-candy outspoken  
when it comes to the tool shed of passion.

As a free-thinker climbing laid-back stairs  
                  up from the herringbone mud,  
I recognize the full moon's mutilated, not flat.

## CEDAR LANE STONECARVER

When the Queen O'Hearts has chased me upstairs  
no matter what, I'm not named Mark  
or pastel blue regretful. Keep that straight  
as a month, day, and year or the surname.

Even when I'm a tad psychic, there's no room for error  
though I keep voting for a terminally ill party.

Spooky grooves wait to appear within every rock face  
however upbeat Evangeline wants me. I remain solid.

Everything comes down to that time I was with a past lover,  
her husband was nowhere to be  
seen,  
plus my ex-wife and had to deal with a check to be cashed  
before it could bounce, so we were rushing down to a small  
river  
crossing under a freeway as the old road turned into  
a mountain climb somewhere in Virginia where coal fields

are the reality, but now that the news photographer was our  
guide

we had a baby and discovered we had to be back for school  
or work by three. So we rushed back to the trailhead,  
where the parking lot was full of milk trucks,  
the kind that used to deliver to your door.

As I gathered up the baby's diapers, I accidentally  
smeared poop across the kid's bottom and my face.

From that, I learned everything about this business.

At least I'm not a dim busted bulb  
discovered after dynamiting  
Baroque embellishment over jagged windows  
far into a scabbed landscape.



## HILL ROAD ELECTRICIAN

Tracing the salmon line to a thunderclap,  
I'm not telling anyone my trademark  
is a temple in the Andes.

Flip a switch and you can see  
I'm not regenerating cordage  
in the chocolate night of Alba's basement.

In a flash, Tiger imparts I'm not a soccer star  
but a lofty mathematical intellect  
fried in relative emerald achievement.

No matter how neurotic I've become  
as Mena circuit box houseguest, there's no way I'd fit  
her optical frame without a rebuilt substructure.

Still, she says she can't wait to start a family with me.  
You want to see what's in my toolbox.  
Just be forewarned when I'm wiring the siren.

## DEVELOPER ON CHERRY

After a poker hand is played to winning consummation,  
the open field you see is crosshatched with graft.  
Its ground is unblemished skin to be touched and revealed  
for a hidden a camera. My vision has less to do with architecture  
or investing than with turnover. Still, Miss America  
remains fascinated all the while she keeps insisting  
I'm an emotional igloo action hero  
who's never been an army brat like her brother.

Don't tell her I've not yet been with Cindy  
when the chips were down. Once a project's inked,  
I'm funky edged, open-ended firing on all cylinders.  
These things aren't timeless, but roller-coaster precarious.  
Today, I'm miffed at house painters who haven't shown up  
as promised, meaning I won't date Niki till my return  
from Jerusalem, whenever, or whoever is next.

Though I'm not a corporate muleskinner, it's about connections  
and glossy presentations. I'm rarely gullible, but when she said  
she was Giselle, I believed her. Maybe it was the handbag.

Listen to them and you'd think I've been quite the catch of  
goodies  
not yet stabled in uncharted country filled with Gran Marnier  
at midnight, curling blueprints, and sharkskin briefcases,  
but let me declare, Babylon shall not hold me down.

## UTILITY LINEMAN FACING A NOR'EASTER

At least I'm not grouching  
about migrating with the seasons.

The Queen O'Spades coddles me into shades  
of violet for a change  
while Jack communicates I keep our faith.

Even though I'm not birding  
I've applied war paint and feathers.

No matter what, I'm a pileated woodpecker maverick  
flitting from rock face to rock face  
where they address me as Foreman.

Since there's no returning to the Happy Green Valley,  
I've been amateur soldering but not on their payroll.

Here, where you'd need a damn good icebreaker,

before and after the party.

I own a Frabill 6170 Fortress GT portable bob house.

## SURVEYOR IN AN ALLEY

When I couldn't locate Egyptian papyrus  
marked with symbols of antiquity,  
I've peeled white birch  
for ironic banners to unfurl in her mood swings.

I'd let only the wind sift  
through this geometry of ownership  
determining where the fence goes.  
These lines of community connect at the courthouse  
keeping livestock from roaming the city.  
Still, when I lead the pack, it's not as Mr. Equality.  
Jane exhorts me to slow down in my radical free will tangent.  
There are benchmarks to honor, of course, and iron spikes.

What I do is by timeless rules.  
At least I'm not Red Korean rolling in white clover  
distracted by saucer-sized daisies or poison ivy  
but full-blooded patriotic American  
with no Ellis Island in my background.

In running this line, you can see how I've changed.

So there you have it.

I'm not a farm boy any more.

I swear to God I'm an atheist.

## SNOWPLOW DRIVER

Alumni announcements of big promotions and  
professional portraits of new administrators  
in that well-groomed confidence I'll never have –

not again. Maybe I've pressed too far over into  
ambiguity or out of superficiality or just feel  
no more desire to be that politically active,

meaning the big power trip up the mountain.

You say I'm expert becoming topaz  
not barbecue chatter this white boy unbuttoning

Lindsay is not looping in a journey through the past  
no matter what I think living to excess will prove  
it's difficult to avoid break-beat self-enslavement

even when I'm right and it starts falling, remember  
to take precautions: it's all too easy to spin out into  
the velvet recliner rather than the backseat.



I'll accept being a frontiersman who never *et cetera*  
until a checkered flag ducks through scribbling.  
Just check the small-town graffiti.

## BUTCHER PREPARING TO STRIKE

I've had enough of your ribbing,  
being the butt of your jokes  
or left dead-weight hanging.

Who can be all that outstanding  
when you say I'm not the average color  
of most overblown sheep in the freezer?

Lady Mabelline underscores I was rattled by blood  
pooling or crossing the low-tide mudflats  
below a boneless balcony carved from her fire.

As I fixed the delivery van in your driveway,  
I was outfoxed by a suspect holding a folding knife  
to the greasy history of a single top grade tassel.

While weighing how far I've fallen from the porch,  
I fray. At least I'm not peeved rotten  
when Mickey wantonly splashes about a zesty lake trout.

Without becoming bright-eyes annoyed,  
don't piss me off after I'm cleaned out  
of USDA prime by the truckload.

No matter what, it's the paper and string I love.  
Just because I'm virile,  
be sure to keep the blade sharp.

## STATE STREET CHEF

Get it straight, I'm not a chili

eccentric

smoldering

at forty

but hissing

vulgar vinegar.

Mary-Kate's convinced I'm not cordless

sourdough

no matter how vicious

or emotionally overextended

the zucchini

from last weekend.

Listen, my wide-ranging conversation

kicks dirt

on a parsley plated dish

with simmering jealousy

no more than the seedless watermelon

in your salad.

When it comes to the spice rack

I prefer savory to the sweet  
leaping trout in our wine cellar  
and besides, your love's not  
on the printed menu  
these dog days.

## SUNRISE PASTA MAKER

Take the rolling pin after I've been roving the bleachers  
and you'll know I'm no bootleg racist dream machine  
reading the non sequiturs of my own story. You'll see  
it's obvious I'm no racer, no matter how hard I run.

You'll say I'm just padlocked eye candy shoveling snow  
on the sidewalk of my enterprise or flour around my feet  
though Andy accepts I'm so quiet in kill-crazy orgasm  
it's presumptuous to paint further lollipop histories.

At least I'm not cowardly by the pound but contending  
it's all about flash or just utterly preposterous  
flava at the beach where watching the ocean jiggle  
means you understand why I'm so afraid of offending.

You'll imagine what could exist without the torment  
that makes me speechless as if trying to garden in Eden  
when all I need is uniform thickness and good gluten  
to attract skunks and squirrels by the feeder.

## MAPLE AVENUE FUMIGATOR

Kardashian babbles about how I vacuumed  
five-pointed stars in her flared-nostril sleep  
until I laugh, snapping wooden yardsticks.

DiMaggio calls me about bedbugs  
I ascertain to be their cousins  
crawling down from elderly rafters harboring bats.

Latifah promises to clear out the house first  
just like that, see, so eliminating rats is  
hardly black-belt karate in these big knuckled hands.

So what if I'm not the cast-iron state treasurer, with me  
it's satisfaction or double your trouble back  
throughout the duct work, if needed.

Keep in mind I'm independent as a kitten  
in a blue-knit fisherman's cap, still licking  
my own manes to a whistle. Trump knows what I mean.

Though Abdula demands I launder linen shirts by hand  
nothing's kept me from bottling my own brew  
or counting alewives in springtime migration.

I was no longer their guardian goalie.  
At least I'm not a cowhide-boot counterfeiter  
who hides goods under the flooring.

In spite of everything, I'd say my life's good,  
The cockroaches will return from the downstairs tenants.  
We'll all always be children of divorce, anyway.



## MILL WORKER IN A RUSTY BOX

Emily obligates me to wear pants  
because I'm so sedentary  
on this assignment.

Once I object  
I'm not a blue funk  
covered with butterflies.

You'll have to agree  
at least I'm not overdrawn  
or behind in my bills.

Once I punch in, I'm wound  
in a cord of thick fumes  
while waiting for the line to snap.

Check with my union steward  
the Crown Prince of Florence Street  
before ordering me into overtime.

**METER READER**  
**IN EDWARDIAN SHADOW**

I follow my rounds not as a Brazilian hunter or trapper or  
the soldier he looks back on but still stalking  
the fresh-faced and befreckled perimeter.

Once my gleaming medal was an underwater boulder  
rather than a crushed yellow sofa. At least I've read hand-set  
type in the digital age when I should have been slashing ivy.

No matter what Dru deduces, I'm clinical regarding  
this bleak Calcutta prognosis you call degenerate.  
I repeat to my cocker spaniel.

Drawing circles for a cabbage she intends as crusty  
past relationships relived backstage between rehearsals,  
she argues I turn secretly violent entering the tower.

So what if I get murdered? All it means these days is  
I don't have to worry about a frickin' thing.

Now what would you do without me?

## CHAINSMOKER DOWN AT THE LODGE

Ha-ha-ha! Pelosi thinks I'm a joker.

I have a letter to prove it.

At the Confederate officer's banquet  
of toasting and dancing, cheek to cheek,  
my great-grandfather sat with a broken leg.

Now I'm working the vault scene, "Surrender!"

I did everything wrong.

I had no intention of making money.

At the Defense Mapping Agency  
we used the same words but meant different things.

In the plan, overlooking a fatal flaw, even so,  
the Army was the best years I've known.

## *Third intermezzo*

As the obituary said,  
she slipped away quietly  
into spiritual abyss.

“How dare spring come  
when my heart  
is choked in winter?”

On the other hand,  
all the men in her life were  
HOT & DRY.

What? No popcorn?

*Downtown, with a group you would  
order for breakfast*

ACT III, SCENE II

## RETAILERS DIPPED IN BUTTER

Your best customers aren't always the public  
or the marketplace.

Sometimes the village is in a city  
far from your imperishable birthplace or  
just being downtown, with a group you would order  
for breakfast. Not just a precision-ball  
low-key sequence acting tortoise-shell weird  
with beeping cheesecake, either, after  
a rosebud motor-driven outrage  
fueled all-night encouragement to get skin-the-cat  
drunk, no, you'll notice who's turned promiscuous  
Sunday morning,

You can't always be dealing in mark-ups  
merely to accommodate  
that seventh-grader in size 12 footwear.

We won't go to aluminum-can extremes if you forget  
we're sometimes royally clever  
hanging center-axle assembly doors between aisles.

The essential quality is we're always smooth and savvy  
as any actor on the big screen masterfully playing  
to their identities while faithfully asking yourself,

How many days till Christmas?



## VINE STREET BANKER

You're mistaken to accuse me of class distinctions  
if I'm slightly testy with out-of-state piranhas.

They're too dishonest for this town, though  
we can cash in with a treatment to oxidize  
their flaky dingus.

I'm not facetious but here for good reason  
far from any brethren in the money-tree wilderness.

The clock starts, after all, when clients  
ask to use my pen, you'll see who to trust.

I'm so cumbered by Nipper and Chipper investments  
it's no wonder we keep intoning symphonic sketches  
by Chadwick and Creston.

With so many voices, where else would I stay?  
It's the local boys, after all, I keep from sobbing.

As for me, having been introduced to silk, I peel  
shrimp by the icy barrel. Besides, no matter what,

you'll never find me shit-faced at the bottom line  
anywhere south of the Yucatan.

## ARCH STREET INSURANCE AGENT

Buyers imagine me a periscope economist  
more than any Minnie Mouse moisturizing body  
intersecting curves. So let's talk.

Sellers know my respect  
for the unpredictable and predict  
a disreputable verily, verily. It's in the policy.

My staff puts a premium on my tone on the phone.  
Even in this fusty neighborhood, we're  
not so off the beaten path I would pose for *Penthouse*.

Still, in this business, you don't take chances  
without exchanging something. All the same,  
I'm out there slithering in the heavy rotation.

## ART DECO JEWELER

I'm so fond of native turquoise  
I once bid on a Rothko canvas.

Of course, they'll pay for their scorn.

So it wasn't that smart to occupy a gleaming  
bar stool so late into last night.

I'm renowned for engraving cadet swords,  
though I wonder about the Air Force usage  
in any cockpit.

It's true, about watch repair  
once time finishes blooming.

Driftwood sets off silver bangles.  
Here, take my Tel Aviv eyepiece.

Basically, I'm simply a courtier  
to the Queen O'Diamonds.

who will contend once again I'm too blue  
rather than golden. But as long as she buys, I'm dicey.

After touring the decorator's showcase  
she'll proclaim I need a scalping.

# LINGERIE EMPORIUM ON THE SQUARE

Back to work, back to school  
run like two junk-food rabbits.

The same old business still delights me.  
You know I'm not stubborn except

when the Queen O'Clubs insists on unmasking  
stains on a Kyoto handkerchief.

It's not so, even when you say  
I'm rat-poison confused, but just because  
I've been wary

doesn't mean you can call me  
an extra goodie. No more.

Since I've been a peanut butter cookie  
I'm not often found between the kielbasa

or baked apple

not unless I'm just curious, like that time  
finding two Vestals in a single dressing room

or way back, suffering my first cramps.

## BOMBAY TAILOR

At least I chase a New Delhi aura  
rather than raking in extra rupees.  
There are good reasons I've been vegan apprehensive.

I'm no longer paramount  
after Helena puts it past I've been savvy.  
Still, I watch rippled clouds

and remain shrewd  
no matter what. As curry goes,  
I'm not hard to pin down.

Even though I've been swamped  
as a disguise, you'll find  
me full of paisley retrospection.

Don't mess with me, you mother.  
I can be worse than a sizzling summer roof  
or woodchucks in heat portrayed by Mork and Mindy.



## TENOR SHOPPING FOR A SILK SHIRT

I'm no Romanian wine connoisseur  
holding  
his breath  
reciting legends  
mad with ionic radiation.

I'm a Pole with blue eyes trailblazer  
scaling professional and romantic  
brick walls  
since I'm all about air.

I'm always the one with The Woman.

You say trusting  
means I'm not sinking  
after intoning new strains  
as a compassion junkie  
who's not going ga-ga

or gagging. Just look and listen  
to my high C.

## PEACH STREET BAKER

You heard me right, Julia. Look at the snake-handling rut  
I've substituted for opal accents in my old cookbooks  
and conclude it's fruit, butter, and sugar, mostly  
that make me an effortless prophet  
when I'm not shouting with a Zimbabwean drumbeat.

Cake! Cake! Cake! With birthday frosting. Or retirement.

Just because I'm no pit of durable solace in the crusty dawn  
Anthony will insist I've eluded FBI agents for umpteen years  
or have other furtive reasons to prefer the cellar  
of yeast bubbling against any resolve to live in high style.

Uma's just another one who's declared me  
so everlasting sweet and yummy I believe high-hemline  
cannibals would pay dearly for a man of flours

from America.

Fortunately, my pies kick ass.

A fresh roll in the hand beats self-explanation.

Now, light the rosy oven, please. And stand back.

## CHURCH STREET GUNSMITH

Even though I've been target practicing  
in a city park with the itchy skin of August  
I struggle to run free of wild debt.

We could argue it's a matter of tonal reproduction  
fidelity, the way Rev. Roberts interprets reasons I rent ponies  
along with a desire to be mineshaft ready.

Just because I'll never be Chaplin or Chan  
you say I'm antisocial frigid water. All the same,  
you trust me with your grandfather's Remington.

At least I'm no burnished architectural rendering  
with twenty-four stories of blue sky just taking the day off.  
I'd suggest double-barrel, for starters.

While I'm not an ivy-covered fire escape company  
I find too many roofing nails in the driveway  
after Marie confirms I've been thoroughly buck-broke naked.

No matter what, I'm no longer climbing the back stairs  
to collect deer skulls, snakeskin, seashells, and beehives.  
Not with this much security.

Here I was, surviving your evil earthquake  
where rats fly in her sleep  
with a group you would order for breakfast.

## CONSIGNMENT-SHOP OWNER

You heard I'm not old money  
but shrewdly investigate  
skimming beehive pockets.

No Louisa May Alcott of an aeroplane  
or purple-winged  
motorcycle  
revving in trendy lavender  
on raked sand  
fits me.

The porpoise motion, though, skirts another matter  
imploing me to reevaluate my standards.

Hard times are good times, if you know what I mean.  
There's no need for me to sing a silky Hosanna.

No matter what, I'd procrastinate  
snapping those cocoa garters  
between needlepoint window dressings.

Though you don't look denim destitute  
you'd be wise to pick up your check  
before I find a new clique where I click  
rather than play mocha horsy.

In the meantime, I'll leave you hanging.  
I'm really just a beer-and-pretzels kind of gal.



## BOOKSELLER ON LAUREL

In the non-fiction stacks  
just stretching my toes  
to get out of my head  
Elvis substantiates how often I'm wrong  
or inadequately rewarded.

In my heart  
are stone-framed windows  
with African violets  
in a rare-book reading room  
in Bloomington, Indiana.

When I've been vivid  
volumes to blame  
oogling  
rabbitskin-glue lovesick  
at least I'm not anorexic.

## FIREFLY GROCER

No matter what, no garbage technician  
whistles between unblemished warehouse pallets.

Martha fasts to silence a thundercloud  
that would reveal I'm a lecherous old fruit  
she'd toss with Pinot Noir.

Clooney adds nothing when I've kept silent two weeks  
when the night meadow of a quietly impassioned July  
dawns into radiant melons.

Since I don't wear a tie, my moth-wing aprons are legion.

Watch closely, knowing how quickly  
spoilage produce impoverishes.

How dare you insinuate  
I'm unduly tense when it hovers!

I pray the simmering crickets allow my Nordic Celt to sleep  
well.

The random blinking after picnics blows into a thick  
of huckleberries full of lullabies.

Here the light sings kernels of sweet corn  
telegraphing brief constellations I array the next morning.

Still, you think I'm plum crazy, and I am.

## OLD POST BLOCK COBBLER

No matter what, I ignore the conference call  
from Tokyo  
you race to answer  
bullied into a different kind of masculine.

The natural fragrance of fine leather  
is too staggering for birds  
in my handcrafted garden. Take my time  
in these racks without doors.

I restitch a sadness buried in the lumbar curve,  
retrace the adolescent sacred pathway  
to the top of the elms or a hayloft –

ritually, I'm twisted and incapable of rebellion  
except if you don't have your ticket.

I restore your sole  
if it's worthy.

## VALLEY ROAD REALTOR

Even though I tap my nails in front of the camera  
don't ask what's in the clear bag.

I'm not a crystal chandelier in a parking lot  
waiting for a ribbon of quietly humorous e-mail.

After accounting for three little pit-bulls  
I appreciate a good pen point on textured paper  
more than a fishbowl in morning traffic.

This isn't a gig where you land three-day weekends  
when we need red-bone fence stakes, kiddo,  
for the strings of the surveyor's banjo.

It's always before Monday.

I've driven tacks on the roof after a snowstorm.

Anyway, I haven't yet transacted a graveyard.

The asking price should always be suggestive.

I'm good at more than location  
when it's your place or mine.

When he bid me to move in next door  
Hefner discovered I'm always so smack-the-lips organized,

No matter what, I'm never late for an appointment.  
Even a nomad belongs to a place in the bones of haggling.

## SYCAMORE STREET PRINTER

Of course, my new Danish typefaces  
guarantee  
a baby carriage will jump from engagement and marriage  
along the lake.

Even though I'm not surf breaking along the shoreline  
I've published broadsides. Admittedly,  
since I'm not pouring a sleeping body into self-service concrete  
you say I'm going nowhere  
except our overgrown cellar.

Collecting mica along the river of invention  
sharpens my skill at the corporate image  
until it has teeth opening into a smile.

Now it's fair to counter:

What's a wife without any secrets  
slipping from Neenah envelopes  
you print in Caslon or Gaudy

on a light green square.

After hours, we can rove off.



## WITH A MILL STREET MATCHMAKER

When DeKooning demonstrates the hunger  
of stony endurance, Lily says I'm still not damselfly wings  
under a magnifying glass in the sunlight.

Miz Hepburn says her industrial methods are unnatural  
but refuses to be turned into any super-secret case study.

Ambrosia says when J.P.'s playfully dangerous  
you shouldn't wear goggles.

When they finally recommend  
I light a bank of candles, I'll anticipate  
pipe organ chords from the firehouse.

If we get that far, Heidi will claim victory,  
a red hot smoked Serengeti.

In their portfolio of seduction, we'll find reasons  
to be angry with one side or another.

I'm still baffled when Woody gets bored as a crow.

## MEDEVIAL CAGE LANTERN RECEPTIONIST

With all these gimcracks and geegaws  
no relentless cinder  
chants mantras in primary colors.

Before secretly practicing zazen  
Boone clean forgot my rattling stainless steel pans  
with the great heart of a grizzly bear.

No matter what, I'm no orbiting tapeworm  
wrapped in orange troubles ahead  
of some Lichtenstein nudes.

When I'm dizzy, I'm not a double-door  
much less shatterproof cursing  
when you finally shout I'm no dangerous rat fuck.

That's not just no, it's fuck no.

## CRABAPPLE LANE TRAVEL AGENT

Redressing mummies on a deep-voiced Ferris wheel  
I breath in rhythm with the shock-absorber cobras.

Dickinson retorts I'm not a first frost  
but stalled on ski lift after a thaw.

No offbeat Spartan veneer withstands  
my favorite rock band, Felonious Sexual Assault  
costumed in dull chains of pop-top ringing.

Assuming some gun-toting nostalgia  
you masquerade without your ferocious twin sibling  
to switch next summer's two-week reservation at the Ritz  
of salty teeth on an egg-shell.

We'll take all that swagger to dark farming tractors  
already tied into knots.

Now here's my package with hotel

and crocodile rental  
on the Nile of denial  
reeling.

## SCHOOL STREET PAWN SHOP OWNER

Whenever I come down sick,  
I review another decade of journals.

At least I'm no silly goose  
joining a bowling league.

Tecumseh expects we'll wake before sunrise.  
Abigail contends I wipe my nose  
after peeing  
in memory of Baghdad and Kabul firestorms.

Since I'm not raking leaves  
I'll ask the questions.

You accuse me of lusting after my neighbors  
just because I've been peeling a banana.

Look, I'm not shoveling coal  
for the firebox of a black locomotive.

I've ordered winter coats, not pale red tile.

Once I'm bound for contrition,  
no matter what, I'm not wearing a bowler.

I'm truly glad Betty's making healthy big changes  
having tripped upon manatees and moose  
in her recent journeys.

But this village really fits  
the center of my universe.

## FRONT STREET BARTENDER

Maybe it's not all that strange after all.  
After I've been on an underground tongue  
no matter what, sweep the entryway.  
Since Ella thinks I've been a weathercock  
I'm no longer floating in evil intentions.  
You know the forecast has freezing rain more than  
additional financial aid for my daughters.  
Still, I'm not quite ready to face another Santiago dragon.  
Now that I've been underwater in Utah,  
I'm disappointed I haven't heard Word One  
from Valerie or Joanna. As it is, everybody  
needs a fearsome mascot or two.  
After I've been on a brooding parade  
you say I'm not Obama.

Just be cagey I'm not Mormon  
but am offended by rowdy customers  
who occupy my reserved parking spot  
by the back doorway. So what if I wear  
a spotless white shirt and striped tie



to listen to their roofline conversation  
about space aliens or falling hammers  
or a ghost in their cousin's old house?  
I have some strange neighbors as well.  
Who would use a birdlike umbrella  
after running beside armadillos and elk?  
Until I return, just water the houseplants.

## *Act III intermission*

Did you see in the news?

A 94-year-old woman was flashing  
teenage punks and turning them  
back into virgins.

A home invader was a zombie  
who carried his hostages  
to an industrial site in New Jersey.

*With a Rubenesque girl playing  
beachball*

ACT IV, SCENE I

## GOLDFISH PAINTER WITH GAZEBO MERMAID

Lady Fishtails hopes I'm not kidding about assets  
when I clean my chrome-tipped brushes –  
we're both such slippery ambitions.

Though I've admired the tranquility  
of three-sided pyramids  
I'm not riding another camel she fancies.

Even a disarmed pacifist would consider  
pomegranate sandpaper  
to deface her bestiary of tricks or treats.

Even when I'm not feeding an alligator  
or collecting figurine elephants with gemstone eyes  
I'm seen as a mystic harboring emblematic houseplants.

Now, even though I'm square-jawed independent  
every liquid enterprise still requires

three times longer than I allocate.

## INTERIOR DESIGNER DRAPING A CELTIC CROSS

Since I'm not your average yantsy patriot  
trying to falsely color how I devised  
ragged-edge cartons to accommodate  
summer mountain chamber music –  
He screams. He cries. I wash more mushrooms.

You say I'm a butterfly chasing a Guadalajara rainbow  
through the excavations of many spooked ruins  
when I'm not a mother-grabbing Republican  
reflecting the divine transcendent reality  
manifest in the details of lustrous fabric.

Even Mamie Eisenhower maintains I'm not  
that kind of girl.

## WALNUT STREET GALLERY OWNER

Tell me I range far in historical-marker galoshes  
for inspired exhibits of that hooded forest.

Cross your forearms, if you want, and look  
with deep-set, hostile eyes as you question  
the continual struggle for balance in my universe.

Thank God, I haven't been framed as a cat-nosed  
streetwalker gripping the cornice of a Rauschenberg  
cathedral.

I refuse to place a sketch for my hereditary crest  
on my forearm. Besides, it can't be me,  
with my ridged spine and flaring pointed ears,  
you shout across the room as I enter.

When I've been snarling in thinly mannered lines  
we still wonder what's upsetting all those blue jays.

Still, appearances warrant so much

I floss the marble teeth, no matter what.

Besides, now that we're into the Monet  
who ever heard of any of those others?



## SET DESIGNER IN A COVERED WAGON

Until I'm more disfigured  
than a rock star's  
half-time show on harbor ferries  
I'm underpaid talent.

At least I'm not an Ottawa spendthrift  
daytime social sciences teaching assistant  
elected to office smirking  
with a flash of genius chancing  
major side bets in the aisle.

Even so, in my limber prime  
I'm not yet an otter in the water  
as the script demands  
when I delve into her cedar chest.

All I do comes alive at night.

## TOURIST WITH A BRIEFCASE

Once I've been to almost every airport in the Northeast  
I must square dance. See,  
I'm not paving the way to any silk suspenders promotion.

Besides, I'm not convinced  
you're a twilight canoeist. Not now  
that I'm rhinestone encrusted.

Seeking my bauble fortune with little success  
I unwind blackout-lining embroidery.  
What's a life without an appendix of secrets?

At least I'm not a chip on the rattan shoulder  
I've been hoping to purchase as custom-made leather.  
Yes, I'm a six-pack caretaker, and so on

## RARE MAPS COLLECTOR

I've been so good with directions  
Oprah gathers I'm a stargazer

who arrived here without a reliable name  
much less accurate cartography .

Since I've been a travel guide on the side,  
I'm not the least bit unruly. Still, when it comes

down to camping apparatus, D.B. distorts  
how prone I am to unspecified allergies  
vanishing in thin air.

But I'm not changing anyway  
especially after constructing a melancholy spreadsheet.

It's like feeding the possums. Besides,  
I'm not cutting loose, except in my elaborate imagining.

## TRIFOCAL REFERENCE LIBRARIAN

I'm not harboring any illusions  
after continuing this foul checklist.

Come in and I'll talk. You don't  
have to be State Police to know

I'm a long way from my spry roots.  
At least I'm not a purple thrift store.

Even though I've been mathematical  
once I'm under fire, watch out.

You say I've been matronly logical. Hence  
I'm not hell-bent for just any toy  
that lights up.

## COMMUNITY THEATER DIRECTOR ON CLEAN SHEETS

See, I'm a folding paper dragonfly  
not a frantic duck  
dive-bombing headlines  
or buying a wide-ass pistol.

See, I'm sometimes villainously cool  
chlorine-free rainfall  
even when devastating raw oysters  
that fall into a mandala of seven sacred instruments.

See, J. Edgar snarls with rat-a-tat anger  
where I've chopped his publicity photos  
for *Superman* attached to a ribbed gray sweater  
splattered with pork slabs and cole slaw.

See, this time we're portraying Hecuba  
as a crack head. Let's see  
what that will get us into.

## GAZING GLOBE DANCE INSTRUCTOR ON A PEDESTAL

Even though I'm not Shakespeare in cellophane  
I strive to liberate high-tech idiots  
who thence investigate gyrating pairs of sordid opposites  
preoccupied with fragmenting resonance  
that calibrates fluctuations of sonority  
so minute Bertha disputes I steam mussels  
in garlic and sherry. Understand, I seek  
familiarity more than happiness polishing silver  
but at least I'm not bloated after fighting  
a respiratory bug, I've been pouring tea.  
At least you can say I've moved from perfectionism  
to balance and freedom in a paint-by-numbers  
autobiography.  
Just like that Rubenesque girl playing beach ball.

## BRONZE-FRAMED SWIMMER

Bedazzled by some wild boar beauty  
when the starting gun sounds,  
Dolley conceded I'm not heartbreak deaf.

I'm not a speckled blue washing machine  
abandoned on a front porch  
between plus-size mounds of tires.

What I really want is a sexy and funky  
tarantula splash  
somewhere other than cartoon whitener.

Still, when you hear the crowd cheering louder  
the self-expulsion takes place  
so that everything emerges as boiling rocketry.

## CORKSCREW JOGGER

I'm the occasional anarchist  
Fulton unbosoms in lightning  
sowing seeds of inevitable fruition.  
No matter what, I'm not a microwave.  
Lucretia bickers I set goals that aren't flawless  
but turn back the clock to jump-start my journey

without a snow-blower even though  
I've been in the spotlight of passion  
I'm not a clinical test.  
You say I play footsie around the zodiac  
splashed with cold dashes of reality principle,  
even so,

I'm not leaving until I've turned true-blue.  
I tell you SUVs are for fat people.



## SHOOTER IN AN EMPTY BOAT

Pocahontas presumes I've been Yakima basketry  
rather than a high-fashion photographer  
drooling in sleep.

Bradford avows I'm not unplugged  
jovial  
polished ceramic dragons.

I've been a row of sunny poplars  
awaiting a phone call  
from a Monterrey hairstylist  
since you say I'm no more trendy  
than a sod-roof cabin.

At least I'm rarely lost  
in a stoneware disco  
nor do I yabber on  
while lighting the scene  
without a celebrated, impeccable vassal  
I'm not selecting wild fungi.

No matter what happens in a tidal pool  
because of the Goddess Distillation  
I cross a natural bridge  
with orphaned bear cubs.

## COACH WITH RED BALLOONS

Back when I wasn't so seriously ill  
Patton came to know I'm not the enemy  
on the revolutionary dotted line.  
You say I'm the Wild West come alive  
a Lone Ranger  
in pinstripes  
no longer diagnosed with cancer  
but in recovery  
outdistancing a puckered trumpet.  
These days Suzanne decrees I commute  
for therapy  
and so I'm not contesting you  
this time around in the end zone.

## GRAND BOULEVARD CABINETMAKER

Even though I've been a decade  
in New England rookeries  
I'm not a gritty miser.

Susan B. insinuates I adjust to jealousy.  
Foster responds I'm not an obsessed beaver.  
No matter what I'm still in transition.

After I've befriended your other lovers  
you left sunlight on the planks  
where I'm not dancing tonight.

No matter how much I enchant  
when I discover being a child  
who's not very happy these days

wearing orange and green costumes  
divided against itself  
this grained wax

won't live up to expectations  
until the whole house is immolated.  
Now please close the door.

## HIGH PLAINS CHOREOGRAPHER

As extra-fine grain elfish  
liberty I'm not a vampire

R.E.M. broke the news I'm scholarly  
when not wrapped in chains

likely to die with blue eyes and freckles  
Sugarbabes asserts I've been given a new name

as a mosaic of Venetian glass cast in America  
however amoral, I'm not wearing rings

in a hotel lounge or smoking Soviet rocket fuel  
even though you say I'm a coward

I'm as authoritarian as a lethal injection  
see, I'm not wearing earrings

even as beautiful, long-legged, and lean  
you see me as shrouded

no matter I'm wearing grubby ankle socks  
just watch out with my makeup, please.

## DOGWOOD TRAIL GARDENER

However uncertain I'm not breaking ice.

I've survived Times Square  
blazing with sexual insult.

Still I'm not balding  
no matter that plastic surgeon  
boldly states to Alice I'm an egghead.

Yet look how these hands  
work endless rosaries  
blossoming with gift wrap  
rather than cruising the French Quarter.

I've neglected to climb mountains  
until Mr. Frick misconceives I'd been bandaged  
in black homage to subservience  
baking wild pears in marmalade  
without a spider returning  
as a stone mason's assistant  
expecting so much ahead.

I could be a blue-book essay



where you're searching for an answer.

**HOT-AIR BIRDMAN**  
**OPENING SARDINES**

At least I'm not paying a champagne mortgage  
affected by toothless gravity  
as a bony-assed sponge  
window lacking appropriate armor  
the foxglove I'm not roofing  
ascends with me on a rampage.

Unlike the cherubim I've been scarred  
landing in flower beds as a sundial custodian  
who's not crying on your shoulder  
merrily, merrily  
reckon how the star-filled wind  
steals into tomorrow's shadows.

I look down on white crosses and steeples  
of a secure or at least familiar  
blue vestment  
Emerson deduced what extremely hot breath

can instill

far from where I go bass-fishing.

## MAGNESIUM FLAME MOTORCYCLIST

No matter what I'm not a quartz crystal  
    until I test the Son's Strength  
before the Father of the Tribe.

    Even so I've been married to a scrawl  
who bids me to compete with a pile of laundry  
    when I'm not spinning squalls and flurries  
or a pedagogue who recollects everything  
    but an infant cancellation mark

Bloomberg confirms how I was once a Manhattanite  
    smelling of women and not always focused  
without my long-hair and ponytail.

## BIRDWATCHER

For me, the wonder of Shakespeare  
isn't the brilliance

but that there's so much of it  
– not a one-tune Smitty –

or Picasso, so doggedly bad  
to do likewise.

Now you take Jay, there –  
just wait till all his buddies show up.

## POTTER

The owl as a helium-filled orb  
in my attic studio  
becomes a totem pole figure.

To be well grounded means  
having no need for long travel  
except to visit the grandkids.

Working the wheel or glazes  
has me quickly speaking with Hopis or Navajos  
or Japanese or Greeks, anyway.

It's not that I'm picking at an unplugged guitar  
when I garden along shady pathways  
between boulders. Listen,

rather than a single masterpiece no one can afford  
I create kaleidoscopic cartoons for general enjoyment  
and complain at the gallery's markup.

Before I touch clay, I write  
300 good words for the day,  
usually about garden slugs in public office.

## *Fourth intermezzo*

Golden boy, eh?

And so just how did he see himself with his golden girl?

It must have been a double-whammy

when the curtain fell.



*Chance encounters*

ACT IV, SCENE II

## FIFTH-TERM REPUBLICAN AT THE WISHING WELL

Pay attention, I wear only white.

Just announce I'm not a rusty news anchor  
anytime I've been arranging yellow flowers

you change the channel even though I've been heard  
many times on a humble stick-figure microphone  
however brilliant I'm losing my fine brown hair

but wish you'd shut up each time you say I'm thinning  
in the front page reports I've been a sheet of parchment  
illuminated by T-bone headlights, hey people, listen

I'm not denying anything but get that bombardier camera  
out of my face at least I'm not pretending  
to be grateful for a modest increase on next year's lease

no matter what I'm not standing on the ladderback barbican  
spitting cough drops or lighting an illegal monogrammed cigar

while Tina accuses me of being a graduate of some

out-of-state university I always deliver on deadline  
even when that has nothing to do with the way I voted  
– got that straight now, don't you?

## ORANGE-BREASTED PARROT OWNER

Look, Cronkite may have said I'm not salacious  
but that ain't how he acted. Anyway, I'm not

modifying anything. Let him consult with a surgeon.  
Look, when it comes to romance, I've been

all too patient and not just this year. Besides,  
you've already pointed to that kettle of Easter eggs

I'm not coloring just yet and you can see we're hardly  
domestic. On top of it all, even though I've been

seriously depressed, Horatio Algeria wants to buy me  
a tarantula or python. Do I look like a yellow

chalk outline? Honestly, you seem to think I'm just  
waiting to feast in a cool, dry summer morning with

a sweetheart in Portugal and maybe it's true but I just

don't seem to be going anywhere here but down.

Most of the time I feel myself caged in electoral wiring  
and now it's decided I'm not baking holiday cookies

until I smell a southern breeze in that color of lipstick  
I can let myself be marked by natural fibers

and then read a wall-mounted map for pleasure.  
Look, I'm not a starched moleskin collar. I just bend.

Besides, even though Billy's of the opinion  
I've been translucent, keep the crackers to yourself.

I really am better off than I was last week.

## FLAG-WAVING PANHANDLER ON CONGRESS STREET

Come back, ladies and gentlemen  
to the unemployment line  
of a wraparound Indian jade belt.

Hold the thought, I've been an Eagle Scout  
and am so prepared for new self-portraits  
even when I'm not sea spinach.

You say I'm an outrageous Cajun.  
Well, I'm not lowering my voice just because  
I've typically appeared miraculously complex.

Ethel trusts I'm bound to fail. Talk about pride!  
Do I look like an ostrich? Just lend what you can  
whoever you are. I'm not entering outer space, either.

Since I've been richly contrasted,  
no matter what, I struggle to succeed.

Even I've been looking to the future.

At least I'm not all vanilla opposition  
to strip mine desolation. I go all the way  
and always undertake too many billets.

See, I'm not sleeping in the alley again.  
I'm prompted to measure the grass growth  
and have often been startled by cats' eyes.

## DRAGONFLY KEYBOARD OPERATOR

Even though there are no forced bulbs this winter  
and no amaryllis at the moment  
I'm otherwise subtle and no Calamity Jane or Wild Bill  
confluence of intense but difficult scholarly connections

however much Janet alleges I've tried posing  
raw in the mad science or the reflected sky  
you'll argue even though I'm rarely neutral  
bold patterns and geometric composition

until I've been shaving my armpits and legs  
just dope out I'm not living in some trailer park  
even when you say I'm not headed for Vegas  
let me remind you I'm staying put another year

no matter how often we've been panning for gold  
I'm still skinny in my self-image  
rather than the moon child Edward dismisses  
as a vegetarian commonly draped in a mauve sweater.



## DWARFISH SAND DIGGER

When I said I've been in a fire lookout tower  
and not at a cockfight it was just to show you  
I'm a stickler for certain details regarding scope  
of observation while working in the sugar bowl  
just continue until I'm not somebody's thumbtack  
no matter what I've been cautious around gophers.

(Hey, I'm the one who's afraid of a starling tree  
and would ask what kind of woman drives a Mustang)  
still, since I don't pilot a 747, Nancy could argue  
I'm not fully alive but practically grinding soybeans  
into the cause of my sprawling frustration  
each time Lucy attests I've been part of a hog slaughter.

## GOLD KNIFE AND SPOON LAWYER

I'm not breaking your leg on a 10-speed  
    until I've been at the eye of that hurricane  
you consider finely wrought cardiovascular silver  
    Marissa justifies cleaning out alien files twice a week  
it's blasting red alert since I'm not joking  
    but humming Springsteen looted at least stumbling  
through private golf links where it's snowing  
    injustice for a precedent, forget copping a plea  
with cops at bay after an autumn of relapsing flu  
    here's my calling card no matter what you know  
I'm in my prime new loafers Roosevelt  
    peeps into as befitting a cannibal gutting a deer  
to chase where the words lead.

## AGING HIPPIE ON CENTRAL AVENUE

Though I've been trying to revisit  
hunting wild asparagus by the book  
I still use Dr. Bronner's peppermint soap  
to anoint Utopian prophets.  
So what if I don't leave the light on?

Through the night, I'm not quite that desolate.  
After being absofuckinglutely joyous, these days  
you still see me grinning as I journey home.  
Besides, I'm not taking any more of that crock  
as a loser, I'm not a slut turning vintage.

No matter what, when I'm shabby  
I'm not a bimbo. Even Swami Sandalwoodananda  
bespoke how I was flaming. So what if it felt good?  
Carol swears I've been guilty. At least  
I dig the ocean from an upstairs porch and window.

## DAIRY FARMWIFE AS A SET OF NESTING BOWLS

How dare you say I'm not hot in your throat!

You, who said I hope to become Swiss?

Not that I've been sunburned

I'm peeling. I can't help it,

I'm an ingrained Anabaptist by default.

At least I'm not ringing

but rebounding

as Aunt Jemima ratifies I'm inclined

toward Plain witness.

No matter what, I'm not hunky-dory

even though I've been a squatter

seeking Gospel Canon. See,

once you break the chain of man-made religion,

you're no longer a dead frog or a toadstool.

## BOSS IN THE TOWER

Since turning into a sandbox maestro I'm more inventive  
than a locker room habitue on a diet.

Of course I've been a tyro charismatic, no matter what,  
to be fiery is not simply kick-boxing  
dictatorial, as you say hoping to infuriate me.

Now that I've been thirty I'm not water skiing  
into any La-La Iacocca who equates my power-walking in  
public  
with a zig-zag intellect playing with implements  
that become a missing turn-on  
for former runts like me between chance encounters.

There's so much you missed  
back when I was doing acid  
and the gilt-edged slut in patchouli  
I should have married.

## UNDULATING POODLE WALKER

How could I enjoy  
    sniffing this lamppost  
passive-aggressive  
    smoky doormat  
abandonment  
    when Oakley accepts  
I've been balanced  
    on a rail  
sledding  
    uneasily  
manipulative  
    and you say I'm not  
all that attentive  
    bolting doors  
right or wrong  
    up or down  
making little sense  
    of my outstretched wings?  
So just who's on a leash  
    if I'm befuddled

uncorking

a great departure?

## TEMPLE MONKEY AS A THIRD-GRADER

We went on a boat.

We went on a plane.

We took a train to Chicago  
where I saw a man cut up into a thousand pieces.

I'm going to be an astronaut or rock star  
if I grow up. Did I say I like big roller coasters.  
'cause I like to scream, but I'm no ninny?

My daddy, my mommy, my sister, my brother,  
my grandpa and grandma  
are all scarier than Halloweening.

Can anyone tell me why bird poop is white?  
My teacher put me in a corner.

Tina is fat.



I'm hungry.

## NEWBORN ON A PEBBLED TERRACE

I don't scratch a floor  
of haunted resentment  
like the baby next door.

No doubt it cries all night  
after watching your show.

When I kick the wall, you say  
I'll become a major sports figure  
rather than answer the ringing.  
Me, I'll be thinking of redwoods  
in morning mist as you chop firewood.

Maybe the Big Guy won't keep in suspense  
that I peed on the rug  
before he dumped the trash.

At least when I'm not breaking a glass  
or launching tornadoes  
across the big sky

I could pose for a postal stamp

## NANNY FROM SAUSALITO

When my talons grip authority  
as I huddle over a book, no matter what,  
I've nearly been obliterated by despondent cargo.

Already, I'm silvery, even though Barbara remonstrates  
I've rarely been ugly. Frankly, I'm not street-wise  
and Nixon tags me as a suicidal prototype  
I'm so old-fashioned you can forget the next century.

Oppenheimer knows I've been bohemian while appearing  
uncommonly traditional I'm not playing Ping-Pong  
or tennis but rowing into snagged undergrowth  
until the storm passes from early childhood.

## HIGHLAND AVENUE WHOLESALE

Can you guess my ancestry  
if I'm not a London interior  
with clothes scattered across the floor?

At times Scarlett supposes I'm magnetic  
confused and dawdling  
after I've been categorized as a Taurus.

Just because I collect compact discs  
you say I'm not a Beatle  
adding another Diebenkorn to my holdings.

No matter how jagged I've been  
with my real dad in federal prison  
under the starch I'm bound to be roguish.

# INDUSTRIAL ENGINEER WITH A ZOOM LENS

I know just enough to be dangerous  
on the drawing board or in the sauna.

No matter what I'm worldly  
and never return austerely  
from New Orleans or New Harmony.

At least I've been in paradise  
as much as a self-made human  
at the center his own cerebral circus.

This organic fluid's anything but smooth  
or success-oriented  
so by hitching a whitecap mischief  
to luxuriate in a perfectly dreadful weekend  
of churning apprehension  
where you say I'm not hot  
under the noose bureaucratic.

Nina will insist this is love.

## RUNWAY MODEL

You say I'm a one-liner  
after I've been strung along.  
At least I'm not eating beets.

No matter what I've been black cashmere  
who's not bouncing checks  
and so I'm a cotillion.

All over the streets I'm an organic process.  
Since I'm not kiting or knitting  
I've been horrified and wear nothing white

into a low-pitched line in the chorus.  
Even though I'm a result of misguided mothering  
I'm not a cactus Georgia composes in her big picture.



## INNKEEPER ON THE MONUMENT OVAL

Since I'm not waiting for a fishtail train crash  
lost and found until I melt  
I've been golfing, no matter what  
Benny's Zulu eclipse affords me.

So I'm peripheral distillate cosmologies  
when I'm not an antiques barn rooster.  
Admittedly, I've been a Middle Ages economist  
since I'm textured and count menacing time.

You say I've been dragon-claw metallic  
even though I'm not playing French horn  
any more than usual. Until I've been bubbling,  
I'm not riding a snarling steeplechase. Yes,

I do have trouble repeating folks' names,  
especially when I see their scrub-the-tub faces.

## SUNDIAL WIDOW

When I'm not erasing the burnt ends of my silk wrappers  
I'm a dead seersucker haddock. It's true I've been at least ultra  
honeycomb wallpaper after rediscovering applications of red  
in a monochromatic French door wardrobe. Listen, I'm

not your squawking waitress, and that's a blue-ribbon fact.  
With the cunning of a stiletto crocodile, Cowboy Bob divines  
I'm not playing the rodeo sex lottery. No matter what,  
I'm not spiral-bound water-sprinkler jewels gleaming

on a yeehaw summer afternoon. Truth is, I've been cloistered  
in an iron-cross darkroom bracing for another dynamite blast  
now that the whistle's sounded. With stone blades  
rather than feathers at his shoulder, Bruce has wings anyway  
and flies through all the emotions of a waterspout.

These days, dove gray is my color.

## COFFEE GRINDER IN A SNOWSTORM

Thomas looks at me as a percolating roadster  
    with double-locking knock-knock features  
after I've been rope-a-dope railroaded  
    and then you say I'm good enough  
since I'm not a boxing-champ redneck  
    and besides, I'm Quebecoise by way of San Juan  
Parker accuses while blinking digital cameras.

At least I have rib-joking inner freedom  
    and embody lyrical power but not commitment  
when I'm not surrounded by bulletproof children  
    I've been saffron, an archetype Gates prognosticates  
as raspy. Best of all TV's Dr. Johnson says I'm not addicted  
    to daytime soaps or another onion  
somehow, I keep leaping the prevalent trends.

## COUPLES ON THE LEFT-SIDE OF A DUPLEX

1.

Generally, we like to party all summer.  
Especially when the grandparents show up.

2.

In newly green unpredictable silk  
she's told she can't go clubbing.

Now to dampen her no matter how spotless  
spirits or legal rights, she's not calling a taxi.

They turn blindly  
sub-continental, not having sex.

3.

I survive his low-pitched band of woe recollecting  
I've been exquisite mechanical motions.

4.

“Did you call the police?”

“No, what good would that do?”

## *Act IV intermission*

“I still think Shakespeare’s a committee  
with the Bard at its heart  
of all the players and their improvised roles.”

“When we descend past sub-sub-atomic particles  
we’ll step into the black hole  
of the super-universe  
we’ve yet to discover.”

““See, this is *my* part,’ or particle, ‘truly.””

As for the future, just remember,  
the light at the end of this tunnel  
is only rain.

*Body & soul*

ACT V, SCENE I

## STORYTELLER AS A PENNYWHISTLE PIPER

My best friend accuses me of intensity  
and idealism to the point  
I can't stand masks or surface clutter.

I hate it when she calls me scattered and spacey  
having overlooked the betrayal of an ideal  
or the muddy villain. Or even lost  
my new eyeglasses again.

How can once upon a time ever be impractical  
or economically frustrating or entrapping?  
The children you follow are always the prettiest  
or most handsome.

It's the adults who are high-strung, emotional,  
with buried anger, hurts, and resentments  
in a troubled kingdom or forest.



If it weren't for a band, I'd be arranging wildflowers  
or pouring tea into fine porcelain  
alone in my home garden.

But listen, now, to all that comes forth  
on a cheap penny-whistle in my hands.  
The way these old dance tunes tell a story.

## SECOND-STRING QUARTERBACK BEFORE THE ACCIDENT

In the middle of nowhere Leontine commands

I at least pretend to be a teenage Prince Valiant  
not burning or shitting Godiva in a scrimshaw boardinghouse

there are implications in a fatal stabbing but once  
I've been a backpacker, talk about a close call

of self-reliance, no matter what, I'm a rite of passage  
wondering why my neighbor's new van runs noisier

than a pine tree. When I've been lonely on the field  
I get concerned about my own car's overheating.

You say I've been angrier than another poinsettia  
but after I've been jubilant, Joe has in mind I'm not a hatchet  
beginning another week of drills. Because I'm not an  
airplane

I hope he'll just up and die when he sees me laughing.

## CATERER FROM MIDWAY

My father was a man of the sea  
who always felt confined ashore  
and so he chose to retire to an island  
between sailings.

My mother soon left for the plains.

The therapy started as a mansion of rooms  
of my interests and it now appears  
I've unlocked the central chamber,  
the one that kept all the others disconnected.

I've found bodies not quite dead  
but definitely decomposing  
or not exactly human in their suffering.

We were moving into another Greek Revival house  
needing repair, after leakage on our sleeping bags.  
A group of four, my sister was one, on the floor.

“It doesn’t have to be this way,” Lala purred,  
meaning us, as I nuzzled an earlobe.  
Someone we knew, a friend of her father,  
or mother, was getting married.

“They’re so close, the other couple  
won’t even get them a present”  
– much less help with the cake.

The flowers on our street side  
stood to impress the public.

## PIANIST WITH COTTAGE CHARM DRAPES

A passerby told me listen from the sidewalk.  
Bach, Schumann, Debussy, usually,  
so I throw in some Gottschalk and Beach.

What's been lost is a sense of beauty  
– or an orderly life in our era.  
The war lust produces trash.

In my world, “greatness is simplicity”  
and frugality can sharpen quality.  
But I've been such a maniac hammering away

my husband accuses me of unhappiness  
behind the perennial smile  
as I play a pinball machine of particulars.

# ALZHEIMER'S HOSTAGE

## APPROACHING THE TERMINAL STAGE

1.

Where am I? I want to go home.

Who's paying for this meal? For this hotel?

What does my wife mean, she has the checkbook?

Why does she laugh when I tell her not to bother  
visiting tomorrow, I won't be here, no sir,  
but on my way to the moon.

Where were you? I haven't seen you for days.

"I was just here at lunch." Oh, that's all right, then.

2.

It's the nightmare you can't quite awaken from.

"God!" I'd cry, seemingly to no one.

As for me, I'd hoped to die before my mind quits.

## ORCHARDIST IMAGINING SURF

Ives prefigures how I warp

reading a Bible of types and shadows

since I'm not crying wolf

I've been Evangelical United Brethren

not stealing your bicycle

until I'm in several quandaries

when I'm not blazing this trail

look for lost parts of myself

among Hutterites and blue-collar Dunkers

singing baritone I'm no longer a child

no matter what, I'm not torching

all that debris, so let's forget what you say

naming that seminary after Euclid.



## TEEN IN A SHOWER

Moving at the speed of youth  
means I'm cool  
between explosions.

Never mind the steam bath for hours  
unimpeded and with the door locked  
the hot tongue caressing my skin, my hair,  
my anticipations when the mirror defogs  
who's there with a gross blemish?

When it's Saturday, and you know  
what that means.

Given a wish to be anybody  
I choose to be far from here.

I never read the instructions.

Rolling hard-boiled eggs and then shooting them

with a cue-stick to the opposite end of a billiards table,  
I was brilliant, one after another regular pool balls  
until one cracked open, oozing yolk on the green fabric.

It kind of says all you need to comprehend me.

How should I know just where we're going  
or what time I'll be back?

## AMETHYST DAUGHTER

Since I'm not on this year's mint chocolate track team  
I've been in alpaca clouds, coconut drizzle, even  
raspberry fog  
requiring a slight familiarity with Spanish and French  
in compounded mysterious interviews on four-barrel  
radio.

In the middle of my answer, he'll ratify being published  
as a fully charged alumnus of the Wright Brothers'  
legacy,  
this wide-angled designer who's not limping through galleries.

Naturally, the mind has to go somewhere when the  
body's  
running or leaping or shot-putting around the moon of pain.

At the moment, I wash and stack restaurant dishes  
and on weekends  
help in the family's old print shop as well as school vacations.

You can say I'm not becoming your typical Tiffany ringmaster  
even as I envision ways to embark on the road Daddy blazed.

**WEAVER, ADJUSTING THE TENSION  
IN A FOUR-HARNESS LOOM**

Hungry again

drumming

I'm not selfish

stretching catgut

any worse

than appearing

oh so serious

watering succulents:

Still I'm dissatisfied

with today's communiques

and am rarely a Mercedes

no-show

breaching the ocean.

You say I'm confused

no matter that I'm somebody

Uncle Ozzy expects

to bankroll everything these days  
I still crackle with righteousness.

Look at all the gifted men I've loved  
who have gone nowhere with their talent.  
Except as I argue with Rumi  
the answer to pain is in pain, opening.

My chest and upper arms were covered  
by a fascinating checkered pattern.  
What a great tan I had.

## BROADWAY FAMILY PHYSICIAN

It's true, I'm not getting enough gleeful sleep.  
The phone keeps ringing and I'm always on call.

I feel it in my thick columnar neck mostly,  
the winged apparition that eludes my intellect  
and volcanic growl. Garb me in a black cape  
to dash asymmetrically into the ivy-covered night.

But I'm mercurial, with all of its brilliance  
and barometric variation. Too often, in thought,  
I'd say I've been glued to the Middle Ages.

Duke intends I'm not precisely money-savvy.

## HAWTHORN AVENUE SURGEON

I'm buoyant when Nightingale sinks  
in reawakened love  
there's royalty where you find it  
still you say I'm not satisfied  
until broken-hearted words of wisdom

are read with dark-roast abed  
though I'm principled kinetic energy  
Mrs. Vanderbilt announces I'm not entitled  
to Key West and Provincetown sanctuary  
so I'm behind in my starry reading

after steering a rented Moped on Block Island  
I'm not thinking of you  
ever again. What I want now  
is a vanity plate to rival  
the eye doc's UCME2C.

## DENTAL HYGENIST OBSTRUCTING A BLINKING ANTENNA

Trying to stay in touch at least  
with those who counted for something  
more in my estimation than a jeweler opening wide  
Twain opines I'm an orchid  
invitation just for beauty's sake

when a mustang, delighted in springtime  
presents the big eyes, high cheekbones,  
small chin and broad lips of childlike  
facial features, I know it's in the hip-to-waist  
ratio I'm not keeping up with the little Joneses.

Reflecting the complex interplay between the face  
in the mirror and the inner life lurking behind it  
I'm soaked to the bone in summer cloudbursts  
confessing I'm not Mediterranean, though I've come close  
as smooth pebbles in the scalloped river.



## PINE STREET THERAPIST

I've gone haywire just listen  
to the washing machine motion of my heart.

It's not the beat of Africa.  
Listen, I'm not a milkshake  
or a necessary prelude.

Admittedly, I'm seen as rather impersonal  
even though I'm outwardly friendly

and nothing French even though  
Matilda would judge I've been in a few  
too complicated relations.

No matter what you say, I do help others  
through what I thought was no-nonsense canniness.

## WEIGHTLIFTER, CONVERSING WITH A COMPUTER TECHNICIAN

I majored in philosophy  
which hardly provides a living.

It's a lot like pressing three hundred  
or delivering drywall in the rain.

The first time I felt melancholy was adolescence  
returning to my bedroom on a rainy night

after the family dined out in an old gristmill.  
The new vinyl disk on the turntable was Chopin.

The pensive or wistful terror or blues has taken  
many incarnations since, and I've learned to lift them.

“So how's your social life?”

I bought a fishing boat. I enjoy the quiet.

## CRYSTAL VASE MASSEUSE

Ready to go back to sophisticated improvisations  
since I'm not a humming banker

but, as you say, a weapons system  
is not a car salesman

or a rough

boundless energy mechanic  
spoilng the hieroglyphics

when I doodle into the limitless void  
consider these pale hands and comprehend

at least I'm not another limelight hardship  
caked in shining ochre.

## BRUNHILDA, BUILDING A BONFIRE

All this junk adds up to something.

I keep asking how it is you summarily dismiss the operas  
of Schubert and von Weber based on their speculative fantasy  
plots,

yet so fully embrace this Wagner? Don't you see  
this Ring Cycle is a sixteen-hour mad scene  
capped by an act of sane sacrifice?

You'd hardly expect a Druid conflagration  
to blaze that long, but it does, decade after decade.

Missouri was a violent land  
I trace in my mother's ancestry.

The dancing goddess will never know my sorrow  
in the exclusion from the magic circle.  
Indecision, regarding my own worth. There's no Cambridge  
or Oxford education here, for the country hick or her family.

“Name your neuroses”

as protection from self-rejection.

Excellent control is something different from perfection.

You think I’m going to get a permit  
from the fire chief for this production?

Not on his life or Valhalla’s.

Let me panic when I say  
it’s never going to happen:  
the children. The marriage.  
(In the gut, when I whisper  
before screaming.)

## AMATEUR THEOLOGIAN CLAD IN MAY FOLIAGE

No matter what, this neo-Grindletonian  
admits Mennonist a cappella harmonies

into the social hour. Even with these neighbors,  
your call is inconsistent. Where's the discord? I ask.

Even though I'm primitive, who would expect  
such ambiguity and nuance to fill me?

While I'm no fragrant gardenia, I never intend to litter.  
See how little I discard. Stick to essentials,

and stubbornly, yet be agreeable at the table  
after my garden and orchard germinate antiquity.

In the marketplace, life's too short to stand in the slowest line.  
So what makes you say I've been way too serious?

## VOLUNTEER AT THE WEEKLY SOUP KITCHEN

A regular came in at the last minute and was irate we had run out of pizza. “Why didn’t you come earlier?”

“I won eight thousand dollars and was buying a BMW.”  
So he should have been able to go out and buy his own pizza.

“No, I spent it all on the car. Which is why I’m here.”

And then I was in the middle of conversation with one woman when she looked at the clock and said, “Oh, I have to go,” telling me of a movie she wanted to catch on the TV.

“What channel,” and she told me it was cable.

After she left, I realized it was on a premium station I can’t even afford.

I guess it’s just a matter of your priorities and perspective when we pass the plate.

## MARKET STREET PREACHER

I'm hard to pigeonhole  
at least when I'm not at the cemetery.

Where I've been trumped  
and wheezing

you say I grin  
until I'm not anything.

She foretells  
I'm not two-headed

when sneezing  
on muscled haunches.

Even after I clean my lenses,  
why should I always

be the one having  
to say "I'm sorry"?



Try finding that passage  
in Holy Scripture.

## NEIGHBORS

To the north, with Vanessa turning  
    voluptuous and driving,  
athletic but reflective Noa guides the posse  
    into uncharted weeds  
    behind the brush pile  
before quiet Olivia kicks the can  
    in twilight celebration.

With Zach beating time on a dinosaur skeleton,  
Danny, maintaining due stealth, captures  
    garden snakes before the cats do.  
Mary's the unflappable tap-dancer.

Newest to the block, Ellie  
    cries and rails for an hour after midnight  
    but is quite the charmer come noontime.

To the west, Jack and Josh sword-fight  
    with their father's graphite golf clubs.

With a huge grin, Joey takes a long pee  
from the front porch. Jake means they'll move.

To the south, Emily has the names  
of all the roving felines and canines  
plus their owners  
and maybe the chickens.

To the east, Heather sunbathes on the roof  
in a string bikini.

Running in circles, Bean  
has never brought the ball back.

## MORTICIAN

You say I overstock.

Maya obligates me to not come late for dinner

and so when I stretch out

no matter what, I'm not a turtle and so

I've been in the county morgue

when all the coolers were full

sometimes I am a Welliver beaver pond

with a lotus unfurling

even though I rub my back against a tree trunk

as befits a grizzly.

I'm not a cup of java but

have been at an Alcohol, Firearms, and Tobacco investigation

of a suburban bank robbery.

I'm a blue mussel shell with a silver clasp

the Gay Bishop found ominous when I was a chemist.

Since I'm not Catholic  
you say I've been birdlike. When I'm not fat, I branch  
into other branches.

My father buried your father  
who were friends –  
so we are,

## ***Fifth intermezzo***

Here we are again  
not just changing a calendar page  
but rather the whole calendar.

*Obituaries & graveyard*

ACT V, SCENE II

## VALKYRIE AS A FIREFIGHTER

Why not buy a motorcycle  
when it's cheaper than a car  
and more exciting?

Never mind I know nothing of riding one  
any more than how my great-grandfather  
drove the team of bay horses and copper-kettle wagon  
when all firemen had gorgeous handlebar mustaches  
like mine.

They may have had bells but nothing resembling  
my wailing horns or red lightning.

Still, our masks and air tanks are better suited  
for outer space than a foretaste of Hell.  
Ours is a brotherhood of bagpipers, after all.

In the end, I was fighting a kind of arson  
with Lala as a vampire or insomniac ghost.



With her ropes of hemp hair, she gussied past  
the clump of people I was with. “Who was that?”  
a young woman said to me. “Oh, just someone  
I used to love. Used to love very much.”

In the end, Lala failed to be Lala.

## FROG-EYED FINANCIER

Even though I was well endowed  
I never put all my cards on the table.  
You say I've been forgiven. Whatever that means.

I had no reason to suck up. It was just  
take it or leave. I knew many things prove useful.  
Joe Lewis applauds how I resisted being bullied.

On occasion, at least, I was bullshit.  
Still, I was never an ass-kisser. There were those  
who had plans if I was decapitated. No matter.

It hardly matters, she was nude, descending a staircase.  
I would stir another martini and add two olives.  
Played golf on another Indian summer weekend.

## CLEANING LADY ON RESERVOIR

Sure, I knew their secrets, but kept my lips zipped.  
It all vanishes, that incense my Thursday lady ignited  
apprehending she'd been trashed by some demon.

No matter what, all her brown-glaze doorknob rituals  
left me huffing, much more than his after-shave  
or the black-key honky-tonk the next morning.

Just getting out of bed was a family reunion,  
a deranged card game of misshapen cheaters  
all aware of their evolving deception.

So I went through the motions, sweeping and mopping.  
Besides, who'd believe anything, even if I sprouted horns?  
No one ever saw I left no footprint in snow.

## ACADEMY HEADMISTRESS

When I was black-shutter agitated, my students said  
I wasn't their only calming influence.

Yes, my faculty became Surf City discouraged  
each time I was confined to a dusty crate of crab shells.

The trustees knew, at least when I walked the Scottie  
I wasn't spinning a sleepless dime.

My mother recalled even when I'd been stone green,  
I wouldn't join yonder aviator forces  
without an escape hatch.

I crammed self-imposed obligations and  
unfinished tasks into my house and office.

When I fell asleep, a thousand books  
and seven hundred albums  
would watch me. And you wonder why I drank?

There was no flight once we entered  
except up those stairs, to start working.

Still, I knew how to manage the phone or a room  
on behalf of my mission and avoided my aunt's inevitable  
coffee blot when I entertained or redecorated.

Now what did I do with the mail?

**MR. FIX-IT  
FOREVER**

After I was in prison  
visiting or repairing whatever

“in reference to their last domestic”  
I’d be in a snap-on mood.

Now I’m working on La Vida Loca  
who was a nasty slampig.

No matter what, see,  
having fun means having fun.

## MIDDLE STREET JUDGE

When I played checkers with bad theology  
Barbara professed I was checkmated by a statue  
of Moses. At least I'm not a leering Hindu deity,  
except in a full-lily pad spirit.

Once and for all, I'm not sipping religious tea  
as I await a directive on a fistful of homework.  
Sometimes a pair of treys  
will win everything, at least for you.

No matter what, on the weekend  
I would head for a second grocery cart.  
After becoming a political laboratory technician,  
I finally appreciated small luxuries.

I never shot billiards to impress just anyone.  
I suppose you know that, don't you? As I recall,  
in the divorce, the big question was, Who gets the dog?  
It would be tough on him, losing his best bitch.

## CHIMNEYSWEEP ON RIVERSIDE

Standing below my ladder Liza mandated  
I close both baboon coupling windows  
as if it's a counter where she needed to be told  
I'm no longer grinding cold pork  
or brushing off an overlay of *Brady Bunch* reruns.

Until I locked the simple cultic doors on the fireplace  
you said I was an iridescent gate-crasher  
in the morning glories or rooftop.  
At least I wasn't a rotor-blade lullaby  
when I snored but was never not quite Amish.

Someday I thought I'd own a tuxedo.



## SUMMER RED TRASH COLLECTOR

You say I fancied black-eyed corn

way over the top of any flash fantasy

I'd stuff into the bearded Captain Midnight

International Harvester pandemonium hatchery

week after week without fat brown dog holidays

but you know I wasn't always shooting craps

with rice and beans for a boondocks chaser

when I could have disclosed all your secrets at curbside.

No matter the intensity of baby fat,

I wouldn't get around to this every day.

I always hated weeding.

**SPRUCE STREET  
GREETING-CARD CLERK**

Because I was an offbeat adventure  
I meditated regularly

Once I started thawing  
I wasn't an expensive restaurant.

Listen, that bastard even sent  
a note of condolences.

Assuming it's true, your ocean  
is the color of a storm cloud.

I could be clever or observant  
except where they overlap.

Which can't be said regarding  
the sympathy cards that followed.

## WORKING-CLASS VIOLINIST

When I fiddled you said I lacked self-assured  
Indian summer cornsilk on my strings even though  
I'd filled jars of sunflower honey on slatted hoppers.

I don't take those remarks personally, should I  
have carved pumpkins rather than backing out  
of polished jade in the apartment next door  
or my galleries of crystallized inquisitiveness?

All along, looking on the devil in your angel's face,  
I wanted you to believe I was the answer your dreams  
on a bed swimming through the crack of night.

## GROUNDSKEEPER IN A BONY MIST

Since I wasn't all that Italian  
my voice floated on the popcorn ice  
of the ghostly trout pond.

What Christina saluted  
during our beautiful wedding reception dances  
was an Inuit universe of ice cream.

Honey, I wasn't anyone's real uncle  
among walruses on your lordship's wet lawn  
much less strawberry or tutti frutti.

We would play along, of course, when  
belching, and bawdy, high-summer aristocrats  
retreated to watch fireworks in my shaggy hedges.

Yankee Doodle, tra-la-la.  
You still expect me to repeat  
their flat singing amid obituaries read in a graveyard.

## MAJORETTE AS A DANCING PEAR

I was wearing all my dental braces  
fully embroidered  
when Jack O'Diamonds saw at a glance  
I wasn't always objective.

You called me a delicate alloy chain  
not blinded by anger  
but in Wonderland disquiet  
crying for help – yet  
helplessly

ever so timeless  
as the swift kick of a daydream  
at the fringe of the downpour  
you saw approaching.

**A VOYEUR CONFESSES  
HE WAS NO PEEPING TOM**

Without the social strata, you told me to just listen  
to what people said and then match it against their actions.

You found similarities in daily worries, their self-denials,  
their aspirations. Their love lives, especially.

You insisted we're all alike, once we got past  
the job descriptions or ethnic and religious distinctions.

That's what you said in this hamlet, but I saw otherwise.  
One woman left every light on since childhood.

Another was adept at covering up shame.  
With one newly met couple at the bistro bar,

his hands roamed all over her with wealth and ease  
while telling her he'd be away, working, all the next

Saturday, so they must move with all speed  
all the while her smile grew ever more welcoming  
in the available glow.

Our wounds and reactions make us different.  
Our clothing and bandages. Our secrets, especially.

Just look, discreetly. With or without the field guide.  
Or the rooster in my dreams that disturbs me.

## MERCHANT OF CANTERBURY

Suppose Chaucer had looked at his neighbors  
instead of his band of wayfarers. Their Halloween costumes  
or masked ball or Mardi Gras or the prom.

The identities we donned from our closets. The artist  
with his tie-dyed underwear or gaudy shirt and beret.  
The banker in a Jos. Banks pressed wool three-piece suit.

The women and children, especially, or laborers.  
How much did he observe himself when investigating  
these pilgrims? The masks they sport prove telling.

The bright Hawaiian shirt worn with Jimmy Buffett  
or Warren, on the weekend. Their choice of wine in the bag.  
Their heroes and villains. Their lists of people they hate.

The stories they repeat for generations.  
Some are just mean. Or fearful. Irritable. Restless.  
Their style. Their lie and denials. All ticking unevenly.



No matter what he wouldn't write was that I was a free-gospel minister who rehashed showering outdoors naked while the deer watched.

## PLUM STREET HERBALIST

A gourd where birds dwell  
commemorates I was still alone  
rather than waiting for hell to freeze over  
or casting repulsive spells.

When I signed the lease for another year  
I vowed not to be burned out again.

Stonewall construed I was leasing  
cedar shake in retrograde  
rather than a new fragrance  
rethinking the details.

At least I'm no longer guessing  
where the month's gone.

# JAPANESE ARCH BRIDGE CHEMIST REGARDING THE FLASH

Through unemotional contempt  
where the dipping bowl ferments  
Emma assumed I'd been spilling Chardonnay  
over my watercolor field notes.

I didn't buy tarot-card insurance  
behind a Sumerian bronze disk  
no matter what I dominated  
in a beaker of green-flame transmutations.

Instead, we distilled wicked superstitions to a formula  
resembling a reflecting pool where you spun  
torpidly against the shrouded bullfrogs,  
free of the paper deck the lady fanned before us.

## SEVEN-PIECE DEN MOTHER

Who, me, fiercely independent  
or just a telephone operator  
jolly  
changing loincloths?

Either way, I wasn't stodgy  
but practicing cerebral foreplay  
with a packet of sunrise hybrid winter squash  
and ever so sensitive  
to not just whistle Dixie  
when I was tipsy.

The very thought of Christmas cookies  
will sadden me.

## CHAPEL STREET CRIPPLE

Once I stopped mowing the yard  
Cal diagnosed me as altruistic.

No matter what, as a touchy workaholic  
subscribing to the opera, I responded  
when a porn superstar insisted we make peace.

So I stopped trimming the willows  
or washing her sanctified dishes  
but called the police to complain  
about the freeze-dried rosaries and prayer beads  
punks were selling on our sidewalk  
on behalf of some dire charity  
related to their own addictions.

All for the salvation of their pocket.

## RASPBERRY PATH GEOLOGIST

Until I reached the mountaintop  
I wasn't fully awake for the year.

You said I could star without shoes  
in the places we're our own worst enemies  
tripping over our own goblets.

Mariah was convinced I yawn in the cascade  
of evasions, and a sly one at that,  
as well as while riding the railway.

Mr. Jobs defined me as molten lava  
without essential shorts or making whoopie  
whenever I unpacked my trilobite suitcase.

Repeatedly, I crawled through  
luscious smelling caverns  
typically on my own terms.

## KINDRED SPIRIT

Kilroy enjoys eavesdropping in a bar or diner.  
Bragging, especially, proves instructive.  
Pays attention to what they claim they are not  
and you'll find half the time, it's true.

When he observes people at the mall  
or on the street, they become  
cartoon figures. Sometimes he starts  
seeing himself, too, fishing in a rock-dry stream.

Even though he said I was ugly  
I never ignored the arrival of spring.  
The truth is, I was beautiful beyond words  
thrown from that bronco called devotion.

## REVIVALIST

Let me tell you about Jonah, swimming in deep water  
when I suddenly panicked before resigning myself  
with a strange kind of calm and accepted survival as  
a gift inevitable for those who keep their wits and  
instead let the shark decide with undue temptation.

The horrible surprise was the feminine face of death.  
With her hairy nose, almost like a mustache.

It was quite different from helping someone  
with the zipper on her dress. Someone  
with so much bottled up, secretive, and guarded.

Let me tell you about Jesus and the Disciples  
carrying lawn chairs to watch fireworks  
on the high school lawn on the Third of July.

And then that's it.



## *Nightcap, with the surviving actors*

Take any three of these characters  
and you could create a novel.

Invite just seven of them over  
and there's a dinner party.

Sell new cars to them all  
and you could retire.

# *The play bill*

## **ACT I, SCENE I**

### **HAMLET, AN INTRODUCTION**

Avon, Anon ...  
Resettlement ...  
Park Bench Regular ...  
The Current Mayor's Wife ...  
A Somewhat Liberal Accountant ...  
Calico Florist ...  
Steel-Hearted Reporter ...  
The Avocado Hair Stylist ...  
One-Truck Carpenter ...  
Seated Ex-Cheerleader ...  
Overtime Plumber ...  
Komodo Gymnast ...  
Granite Street Pyrotechnician ...  
Ne'er-Do-Well ...  
Lensgrinder on Elm ...  
Spring Street Social Worker ...  
Railroad Street Gambler ...  
Jazz Singer Over Salad Nicoise ...  
Mail Carrier With a Trumpet ...  
Recluse in a Barn ...

## **ACT I INTERMEZZO**

### **ACT I, SCENE II:**

#### **HOUSEHOLD COMMERCE**

House Guests ...  
Roofer on Jefferson ...

Fortune Teller at the Bank ...  
Washington Street Detective ...  
Clock Alley Nun ...  
Lexington Avenue Clothier ...  
Sallow Tone Stockbroker ...  
Postal Worker at 4 O'Clock ...  
8<sup>th</sup> Hole Native ...  
Brass Battery Switch Translator ...  
Landscape on Hickory ...  
Night Watchman on Depot ...  
Fancy-Star Quilter ...  
The Coffee-Color Cat Owner ...  
Ticket Seller at the Orpheum ...  
Figure Behind the Window ...  
Under a Crescent Moon on Cemetery Hill ...  
Nebula Shucker ...  
Waitress on Oak Street ...  
Checkout Clerk Beside an Ionic Column ...

## **FIRST INTERMISSION**

### **ACT II, SCENE I:**

#### **IF YOU'RE NEVER SAD, YOU CAN'T SWALLOW**

The Blue Deacon ...  
Deco-Charm Clerk of Court ...  
Rabbi After the Divorce ...  
White Steeple Registered Nurse ...  
Matriarch of Concord ...  
Lincoln Boulevard Elementary Teacher ...  
Her Own Best Friend ...  
A Not-So-Evil Stepmother ...  
Sunburned Auctioneer with Sideburns ...  
Rainbow Awning Maker ...

Circuitry Technician ...  
Gray Figure in Fog ...  
Exterminator Wearing a Scarab ...  
Paid Escort on High ...  
Union Jack Custodian ...  
Deli Counter Worker on Court Street ...  
Rolled Pig Iron Retiree ...  
Beech Street Video Addict ...  
Silver Street Toymaker ...  
Trouble Brewing ...

## **ACT II INTERMEZZO**

### **ACT II, SCENE II: NINTH INNING, IN THE STANDS**

Generic Embezzler ...  
His Campaign Manager ...  
Weathervane Historian ...  
Video Store Assistant Manager ...  
Makeup Saleslady Between Twin Posies ...  
After-School Gift Wrapper ...  
Ad Agency Schedule Buyer ...  
Candy Vendor in a Tapestry ...  
Third-Term Tax Collector ...  
Bearish Auto Registrar ...  
Woman at the Corner ...  
Taking Time Off ...  
Lifeguard on a Sailboat ...  
The Living Dead ...  
Hawk-faced Naturalist ...  
Fiberglass Cutter ...  
Pallid Locksmith ...  
Convection Steamer Social Activist ...

Hinged-Cover Folksinger ...  
New-Moon Tea Drinker ...

## **SECOND INTERMISSION**

### **ACT III, SCENE I:**

#### **STIFF AND SORE, THE MORNING AFTER**

Regular Mechanic ...  
Heavy Equipment Operator ...  
Carbon-Arc Welder ...  
Long-Haul Truck Driver With His Shoes Off ...  
Nonstick Demolition Expert ...  
Keystone Road Cement Mixer ...  
Chestnut Street Fur Trapper ...  
Cedar Lane Stonecarver ...  
Hill Road Electrician ...  
Developer on Cherry ...  
Utility Linesman Facing a Nor'easter ...  
Surveyor in an Alley ...  
Snowplow Driver ...  
Butcher Preparing to Strike ...  
State Street Chef ...  
Sunrise Pasta Maker ...  
Maple Avenue Fumigator ...  
Millworker in a Rusty Box ...  
Meter Reader in Edwardian Shadow ...  
Down at the Lodge ...

### **ACT III INTERMEZZO**

**ACT III, SCENE II:  
WITH A GROUP YOU WOULD ORDER FOR  
BREAKFAST**

Retailers Dipped in Butter ...  
Vine Street Banker ...  
Arch Street Insurance Agent ...  
Art Deco Jeweler ...  
Lingerie Emporium on the Square ...  
Bombay Tailor ...  
Tenor Shopping for a Silk Shirt ...  
Peach Street Baker ...  
Church Street Gunsmith ...  
Consignment-Shop Owner ...  
Bookseller on Laurel ...  
Firefly Grocer ...  
Old Post Block Cobbler ...  
Valley Road Realtor ...  
Sycamore Street Printer ...  
With a Mill Street Matchmaker ...  
Medieval Cage Lantern Receptionist ...  
Crabapple Lane Travel Agent ...  
School Street Pawn-Shop Owner ...  
Front Street Bartender ...

**THIRD INTERMISSION**

**ACT IV, SCENE I:  
WITH A RUBENESQUE GIRL PLAYING  
BEACHBALL**

Goldfish Painter With a Gazebo Mermaid ...  
Interior Designer Draping a Celtic Cross ...  
Walnut Street Gallery Owner ...

Set Designer in a Covered Wagon ...  
Tourist With a Briefcase ...  
Rare Maps Collector ...  
Trifocaled Reference Librarian ...  
Community Theater Director ...  
Gazing Globe Dance Instructor on a Pedestal ...  
Bronze-Framed Swimmer ...  
Corkscrew Jogger ...  
Shooter in an Empty Boat ...  
Coach With Red Balloons ...  
Grand Boulevard Cabinetmaker ...  
High Plains Choreographer ...  
Dogwood Trail Gardener ...  
Hot-Air Birdman Opening Sardines ...  
Magnesium Flame Motorcyclist ...  
Birdwatcher ...  
Potter ...

## **ACT IV INTERMEZZO**

### **ACT IV, SCENE II:**

#### **CHANCE ENCOUNTERS**

Fifth-Term Legislator at the Wishing Well ...  
Orange-Breasted Parrot Owner ...  
Flag-Waving Panhandler on Congress Street ...  
Dragonfly Keyboard Operator ...  
Dwarfish Sand Digger ...  
Gold Knife and Spoon Lawyer ...  
Aging Hippie on Central Avenue ...  
Dairy Farmwife as a Set of Nesting Bowls ...  
Boss in the Tower ...  
Undulating Dog Walker ...  
Temple Monkey as a Third-Grader ...

Newborn on a Pebbled Terrace ...  
Nanny From Sausalito ...  
Highland Avenue Wholesaler ...  
Industrial Engineer With a Zoom Lens ...  
Runway Model ...  
Innkeeper on the Monument Oval ...  
Sundial Widow ...  
Coffee Grinder in a Snowstorm ...  
Couple on the Left-Side of a Duplex ...

## **FOURTH INTERMISSION**

### **ACT V, SCENE I:**

#### **BODY & SOUL**

Storyteller as a Pennywhistle Piper ...  
Second-String Quarterback Before the Accident ...  
Caterer From Midway ...  
Pianist With Cottage Charm Drapes ...  
Alzheimer's Hostage ...  
Orchardist Imagining Surf ...  
Teen in a Shower ...  
Amethyst Dreamer ...  
Weaver, Adjusting the Tension in a Four-Harness Loom ...  
Broadway Physician ...  
Hawthorn Avenue Surgeon ...  
Dental Hygienist Obstructing a Blinking Antenna ...  
Pine Street Therapist ...  
Weightlifter, Conversing With a Computer Technician ...  
Crystal Vase Masseuse ...  
Brunhilda, Building a Bonfire ...  
Amateur Theologian Clad in May Foliage ...  
Volunteer at the Weekly Soup Kitchen ...  
Market Street Preacher ...



Neighbors ...

Mortician ...

## **FIFTH INTERMEZZO**

### **ACT V, SCENE II**

#### **OBITUARIES & GRAVEYARD**

Valkyrie as a Firefighter ...

Frog-Eyed Financier...

Cleaning Lady on Reservoir ...

Academy Headmistress ...

Mr. Fix-It ...

Middle Street Judge ...

Chimneysweep on Riverside ...

Summer Red Trash Collector ...

Spruce Street Greeting-Card Clerk ...

Working-Class Violinist ...

Groundskeeper in a Mist ...

Majorette as a Dancing Pear ...

A Voyeur Confesses ...

Merchant of Canterbury ...

Plum Street Herbalist ...

Japanese Arch Chemist ...

Seven-Piece Den Mother ...

Chapel Street Cripple ...

Raspberry Path Geologist ...

Kindred Spirit ...

Revivalist ...

#### **NIGHTCAP, WITH THE SURVIVING ACTORS**

...

## *About the poet*

What began as a set of exercises in self-identity quickly turned outward with questions of what makes a community and who the neighbors might be in private as well as in public. In the background as he shaped these poems, Jnana Hodson was also pondering just where he might choose to live in a more supportive turf than the apartment complex atop the hill where he was. In the end, he relocated to a small city, one where he frequently crosses paths with individuals who just might have stepped out from this collection. Might we add he's fond of jazz?



## ALSO BY JNANA HODSON

### Poetry:

- Blue Rock
- In a Heartbeat
- Johnny Badge
- Harbor of Grace
- Waves Rolling Too
- Returning to the Table
- Elders Hold
- Winged Death's Head
- Green Repose
- American Olympus
- Over the Mountain
- Back Pack
- Susquehanna
- Riverside
- Rust & the Wound
- Long Stemmed Roses in a Shattered Mirror
- There Is No Statuary in Our Garden Except for the  
Plastic Spacemen Occasionally Surfacing
- Home Maintenance
- Rat-Tat Oscar
- Fiddler Crab in the Score
- Six Partitas
- Motets and Psalms
- 50 Preludes & Fugues
- Ripples in a Bejeweled Prayer Flag
- Braided Double-Cross

## **Novels:**

- Big Inca Versus a New Pony Express Rider
- Hometown News
- Promise
- Peel (as in apple)
- St. Helens in the Mix
- Kokopelli's Hornpipe
- Daffodil Sunrise
- Hippie Drum
- Hippie Love
- Subway Hitchhikers
- Third Rail
- With a Passing Freight Train of 119 Cars and Twin Caboose
- Ashram

## **Non-Fiction**

- Embracing Eden
- Revolutionary Light
- Seasons of the Spirit
- Religion Turned Upside Down

JWANA HODGSON

Thistle / Finch Editions



Dover, New Hampshire USA