

My Tumbly Down

My tumbly down the mumble stair
 Ten spindly seashore toes at most
 Aghast my looky pertful hair
 Toward a Sufi churning coast

Ten spindly seashore toes at most
 Once caught beneath a clowny shoe
 Toward a Sufi churning coast
 Beside the arcky mountain flew

Once caught beneath a clowny shoe
 A chalky boy of three or four
 Beside the arcky mountain flew
 Just like a buzzy bee upon the moor

A chalky boy of three or four
 Aghast my looky pertful hair
 Just like a buzzy bee upon the moor
 My tumbly down the mumble stair

—james burdick

Cusp

In a gentle breeze it is raining
 Poplar, maple and oak in the yard,
 Linden, catalpa by the driveway,
 Down the street, feeling its way along
 A curbstone, piling memories.

Look back softly, shadow,
 See when the sky dropped words
 Hurlled themselves groundwards
 Onto shoulders, heavy with need;
 Hatted, gentle people, yearning,
 Now
 Hooded against the chill, lost in day-
 dreams
 Of when you looked back
 So softly

—james burdick

Happy Marriage

Willard collected
 magenta plastic Christmas trees, dented coffee pots, shoes rubbed to a powdery brown,
 truncated golf clubs, wheel-less bicycle frames.
 Driven to a state of rapture by garage sales, flea markets, country auctions, quarterly
 town trash pickup
 he gloated orgiastically over boxes and boxes of things he could carry home
 push into the crammed garage,
 the packed cellar, hoist onto the drier along with a torn economy size Cheetos' package,
 mold-etched crackers, half-eaten salami sandwiches,
 his eyes caressed a ravished taxidermist's raccoon, a broken laser printer,
 his hand lovingly stroked a rusted bicycle pump.

Shirley didn't mind his collection at all.
 She collected men.
 The UPS driver hunched over a packing box,
 the side-burned teenager pumping her gas,
 a pudgy Chinese waiter at the Pagoda House
 "LoMein? Fortune cookie? You want?"
 The mailman inserting letters,
 the butcher guarding sausages and meat loaf at the deli, "Next!"
 A uniformed cop who arrested her, siren blaring, for rash driving.

Willard and Shirley went out together Saturday nights
 to a grimy tavern on the main road.
 His eyes eagerly scanned the Hershey bar dispenser,
 the live-bait vending machine.
 At the bar, he secreted swizzle sticks, napkins,
 palmed shot glasses and beer nuts,
 ketchup-stained paper plates.
 She lowered her cleavage to the bartender,
 crossing her legs provocatively for the truck driver on the adjacent stool
 while slipping her phone number to the bus boy.

Toward the end of the evening she disappeared for an hour or two,
 emerging joyous, rumped, with lipstick-smudged teeth
 from the cab of a semi.
 His pockets were gorged with empty bottles, martini glasses,
 an old baseball cap he found in the men's room.
 As they contentedly rode home, her hand patting his knee she asked:
 "Did you have a good evening?"

—joan fitzgerald



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