

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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