

BREAK OF DAWN

Decoding

Kindergarten is hell
or so it seems:
slide your glasses under your nap mat,
roll over and they are crushed
again;
and those problems of others,
falling asleep, can't sit still,
or trying so hard they nearly explode,
a sister refusing school taken home,
you dragged along,
and that's just the start.

Days move on, letters jumping around,
bounding out of order, often never saying
what they vow, like *though* and *ouch*
and other misnomers
again,
in those teachers' bags of tricks,
so why believe anything
those wizards have to say.

Then one soft spring day
someone says,
this won't last forever;
we'll graduate.
And you do,
from one year to the next,
again
too tall too smart to be held behind.

Then the tenth year, just beyond the bell
Ms. Stonewall Jackson
grabs your collar,
pulls you back in the classroom,
again
demanding your confession:
You're right, I can't read.

At fourteen you are stunned
that she knows
though you will not shed a tear.
Even today still astounded
that she unlocked those codes
and sent you on a path
deep into the written word,
with a way to speak your heart
to the universe through acumen and tears.

Rapture

It's this living inside a gangly teenager
who'd disappeared years ago
yet her longings and omens hang on
as though she owns every last part of you.

She sits in that over-stuffed chair
brushing through gleaming strands,
feeling life's reward might appear any moment
and perch itself boldly on the windowsill.

She tossed out her fashion models long ago,
tired of trying to heed their perfect being
and now wonders in what package passion arrives
and why withholding so tends to tantalize.

Yet as any religion it slips by
when you turn your head,
makes its appearance
the moment you blink,
floats through the pane,
mingles with the dust
and mocks all that you anticipate.

It's those wily ghosts that get you every time.

A Mojave Moment

In a Benz canary yellow
as the sun you no longer need to follow,
you break through the lingering mist
of a Pacific dawn sky,
Laguna now far behind,

nothing ahead
but desert reserved for those
seemingly so immovable.
These goings east to west
then west to east must appear
such an oddity to those remaining
smack in the middle.

And hadn't it been a van blue as the sky
that wisped you to that coast
back when Eagles swore you could never leave?
Yet now you are somehow persuaded that
maybe you have fooled them.

Creative Nonfiction

for Danny made infamous
in *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil*

Say, there's this account of a young fellow
who lived and breathed his life raw and real,
his story told over and again, sliced and pureed,
spread smooth from reel to reel
until it seemed we knew him intimately
and he came calling, *I am here*.
Yet, when I reached for him, he *was* not there:
he'd been banished away,
locked deep in slivers of trees
taken from his own reality.

See, his mama, his true author, told me how
as a small boy drawn to all things of art—
a musical toy, crayons, puzzles,
he'd play in their yard
that must've seemed as boundless as his liking
for the yellow jonquils and particularly
the tiny white snowdrops he called bellflowers
for their shapes. She said his love of beauty
was likely the one thing that eventually drew *him*—
not the invented Billy the Bull Street Hustler,
but Danny, to that Mercer Mansion.
She told of his first steps, clearly pigeon-toed,
and his ash-blond hair that curled with ambition
when damp or too long, and thick brows
with long dark lashes over big azure eyes,
and how his lips arched upward on the right
when he smiled: young Jude Law a likely rendition.

Look, it seems there'd be a thicker line
between what was and what wanted to be,
though Danny's story's been surmised,
nothing is sure and there is no one left here but me.
And try to write on *that* thinning line
and not fear your tight rope will snap.
Yet what does it matter—there's little to say
for I really doubt we are even here at all.

Listen, those storyteller's tales
I'll chew them up and swallow them all,
or lay them all out, dice them with a knife,
and son of a gun I'll just make up my life.

Old Order Brethren

You and mine they fell out long ago—
long before I could ever recall—
over something someone
did or said or didn't believe.
Must have been a grandmother's thought:
the blood's so thick it is best we cut it,
perhaps from all misdeeds of our far-off kin,
or was she purely filled with unfounded misgivings?

I myself am more than just your portion,
yet you remain close beneath my surface.
Change my name or chop it to bits
and we are not linked, though I'll always miss you.
You, your long dresses and Sunday black—
I'd mourn too until I got you back
if I didn't know surely you'd then only shun me.

Still, when you pass by clouded dim in your carriage,
I hold up one hand knowing you will never
acknowledge my gesture of "We'll see!"
And I feel your sharp catching eye as hoofs clod on,
your silent words, their Old World lilt,
"*Ya, vee vill see, von't vee!*"