

From *Delirious Night*

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Adjustment

In springtime
For eighth grade social studies
I teach the Shoah
And every year

Around the second week swastikas
Start to show up
On everything: on backs
Of vocab sheets, in the

Margins of pop-quizzes, a handout
With the president's face on it--
In pencil, pen, in milky
And stone-black ink. Quietly,

They crawl into corners and hole up
For me to find while grading
In my home. Like everything at that age
This phase either passes

Or becomes a profession,
Like throwing rocks
Or throwing rocks through storefront windows.
So shakily drawn, too expressive

To signal actual belief, I usually
Shoo the little things away
And then in class show
A grainy black and white film,

One with the bulldozers
And the faces pressing
Through boxcar slats
That shrink into the darkness

To which our eyes
Never adjust.

Letter

Last Christmas, when we met at Dietle's
You told me

That your father turned your old room into
An entertainment center

With a tube amp, subwoofer,
And an eighty-inch plasma. You said

That your little brothers,
Pried the bed from its place, found

Bouquets of shrunken tiger-lilies, roses, baby's breath
And one of your old boyfriends

Shriveled down to a leathery pouch, still clinging
The underside of your box springs.

Like all of us he said he loved you
More than the last guy, and maybe this proves he

Did: you
Can listen to Astral Weeks for ten years

And never change, though
You did--the way

You do your hair and wear your jeans.
Now, there are holes through the knees.

Given the chance,
I'd reach to pluck

Those cotton lyre-strings
Stretching across your skin

While you coo to the chords of that Irish mystic
Which I'll bet sound great

On your dad's new system.

The Incredible Shrinking Man

My uncle
Doesn't eat

Or speak much
Anymore,

So we direct
The conversation to

My aunt
And the aid

Who bathes him
Then clothes him

In buttondowns, which have started
To outgrow him,

Making him
Look as if he has

Shrunk
Away from himself.

His body
Simply could not

Accept both its longing
And its shrinking. Too much

To say
Even aloud

*I'm not
Hungry.*

Poem with the Dog

What the dog wants I want, too, more or less.
Dozens of frozen, muddy, dung-spackled
Tennis balls balding in sockets of untilled earth
Like cruddy fruit; the dog barely
Stands for it, sniffing them out for minutes, days
In doggy-time, one ball to the next before
Settling on the one she, or I, will think
Is best. Once, I caught her sitting
In my desk chair, staring out the attic window.
With a smack she was gone.
But every now and then, I catch her
Slinking down the stairway as I'm
On my way up. I'll plunk down, a mound
Of papers ahead of me and turn to see
The window, fogged up except for one wet
Spot, made clear by nothing but a dog's nose.
So I started looking, too. And as the weeks passed,
I saw what she was staring at:
The ever-changing constellation of paw prints
Forming in the mud: a pyramid, a rabbit,
What the rabbit might have looked like
After the dog had gotten to it. She claims
She's given it zero thought, that it's just
The tennis balls she's after, but I know
We all see what we want to see or are
Afraid to see in stars. She comes inside,
And I am not downstairs to wipe her paws,
Her belly, tease out her ruff; I am not
Downstairs and so I must be upstairs, in
The study, the can, the bed. I'm neither downstairs
Nor upstairs. I must not exist. She doesn't know
The solitude of rocks beyond the wire,
The singularity of current, to be of one mind,
The slow gnaw of nightfall on daybreak.

Memory

Rifles through closets, dresser drawers
Flings open the armoire. Sleek,
Sharp as wire, it makes
Two piles: the useless, the useful. The youth group dance,
To the left; the brooch she wore,
To the right. The village clocktower, left;
A foxtrot in the rain, right. The barns,
The horses, right.
A wedding dress borrowed for the ceremony from a cousin
Hanging in a garment bag standing in a line of garment bags,
Awaits selection, awaits the heap
Upon a heap of hair, spectacles, of teeth, gold.