

LACKING AN EASEL

The compulsion to capture two children
geysering up and down on a seesaw
balancing precariously on the air
overwhelms me.
If only I were an artist able to quick-sketch the silos
wobbling behind them
or draw the wheat field shrinking to stubble
beneath their feet.
Or paint the color of their squeals.
The boy reaches for a rooftop,
straddling the wood shed
with red and blue shouts.
The girl lifts bare legs
shrieking purple cries
at the puddle drawing closer.
Two children divide the light
each rising and falling with exultant yelps
that swoop like swallows into the hay loft.
But the exuberance of such a vision
can never be painted but only kissed.
And I
rather savor it,
keeping my hands free to catch them
should one of them fall.

LOST LOVE

It's disconcerting to glimpse the features
of a forgotten love suddenly more delicately carved
on some passing dark-eyed youth.
You can neither stare
nor stop the remembrance.
His stepsô tauntingô awaken her walk,
momentarily confusing your senses.
And though you turn away
to deny the resemblance,
it's there: his strut mimics her steps.
And the reasons you desired her
dart swiftly to mind
before he vanishesô a lost apparitionô back into the crowd.

THE BALLOON MAN

Across the plaza of stone pathways he floats
haloed beneath a crown of balloons.
Child-likeô his taut arms outstretchedô
his body anchors the wind-filled mast
rounded with color.
Once he stops, upturned facesô expectant, enrapturedô encircle him,
imagining he's a king attentive to their shouts.
The children plead with open palms
while he labors to redeem their innocence.
Light strums through the silk threads tangling the afternoon air.
All day the garland hovers like a rainbow
above his head
until the sun completes its journey.
His face glistens with beads of sweat.
His steps shuffle to a limp.
Dusk falls, cooling the air.
The swollen clouds darken and drain of color.
The crowd abandons him.
In the shadows, one young waif lingers
as he calls for a star to tug him home
before rising into the star-lit sky.
That night she waits at her windowsill,
praying that she, too, might sail
to the moon land above the rebuffs
of the scoffers who weren't there
yet claim she never saw
what she holds in her heartô
a gift eternal from the balloon man.

WAVES IN MOONLIGHT

Old loves have a way of slipping out at night
to meet where the waters darken,
letting ancient currents carry and dump them
into pockets that empty quickly
beneath rocking spheres that buckle and ache,
before sending them sleepwalking back over sand
without ever engaging the desires
that once bound them.

WHEN THEY TORE DOWN THE ABANDONED CHURCH

When they tore down the abandoned church,
the homeless angels had no place to go.
Some wandered through the streets.
Others begged for alms to quell the children's whimpers.
Two sat hunched over like bookends cornered in a doorway.
A toothless angel rocked an orphan against her emaciated chest,
shielding the child from the mad cries of her deranged mother.
Retired from the belfry but still flying high
the free-basing horn player danced around a garbage can
until he collapsed in the gutter.
The babbling one who claimed some schooling intoned:
"I shoot up I shoot up I shoot up to feel the sky."
In a back alley, his sister sold the little she had
the warmth between her thighs.
Her scarred face draws disgusted stares.
But when she walks barefoot with shards embedded
in her pale feet, her calves still allure.

Oh you who pass the outcasts lining the street,
you know of the fall that crippled their wings.
Nourish them.
They need your words;
you, their prayers.
And notice, for once, the basement angels
whose breath seeps out from beneath damp walls.
Their imprint will soon grace your headstones
united beneath a common dust.
Be aware.