

VAGRANT MOON

28 days and you bust out of jail,
brazenly swaggering about on the lam,
prowling the streets, demanding carte blanche.
Laughing, leering, luring open virginal flowers.
Rising above deserted lanes.
Rollicking in lovers' arms.
Stirring heartbeats beyond repair.
Exposing your backside to near-sighted swain.
Lurking in alleys. Stalking shadows.
Vaulting over white-washed fences.
Corrupting courtyards:
furtive trysts in every corner.
Lifting slats; peeping between blinds.
Slipping through shuttered windows.
Police! Arrest the intruder!

And, oh! At the beach!
Spreading naked across the shore
in blatant disregard of posted signs.
Modesty's not your trick.
Caressing waves
as you pickpocket the oblivious sea.
Raising breasts and buttocks to foamy heights.
Five years!
Ten years!
Fifteen for enticing a poet and abetting a thief.
Order! Order!
A life sentence for seducing
then walking *à* heels and spurs *à* on a solitary heart.

AND TO THINK JUST A MOMENT AGO

A moment ago she introduced
her best friend to him.

A moment ago she wanted them
to know each other before the wedding.

She was sure he'd propose tonight.

Now she sits outside their flirtations,
watching their bodies shift and balance
in a courtly dance that a moment ago was hers.
She fidgets.

Her new perfume seems too strong.

She digs manicured nails into her own flesh.

Who can undo what she fears?

And to think this was the night this was the night
that they would take the next step.

He turns, awkwardly, and offers her a cigarette
though he knows she doesn't smoke.

She excuses them. They step outside.

She stares at her pallor in the pocket mirror.

Smoke drifts past like the scent of lilies
like the muted music seeping from another room.

But it's the way they laugh that makes her regret
her next thought.

It seems a moment ago her mother's sudden death
stood alone inexplicable, opaque.

But now the horror returns compounded
as she sits alone, suffocating, and waits.

WINTER THAW

Just when we've all but surrendered to darkness,
our spirits bullied into submission,
a daffodil pokes its yellow head
through the wire fence
a match flaring from a dungeon,
letting our dreams escape
from the caverns of sleep.
The bright tongue swells with the taste of sunlight,
awakening the soil
our cast-off skin.
Its delight with creation invites us
to join the dance of breath
before the return of the fixed season
stitched loosely together
by long-stemmed needles and green thread.

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'd rather savor it,
keeping my hands free to catch them
should one of them fall.

MY PUREST MEMORY

When my father sat reflective late at night,
the Bible open on the kitchen table,
I wondered what he thought.
I knew he wished to waylay me with a bowl of ice cream
and then cajole me into a discussion.
So I continued tiptoeing around my room,
searching for a sheaf of poems
that a well-scented angel might have tucked
beneath a flower pot.
Mom was like that.
Night after night I spied on him
while he munched his bran,
his gaze wandering as he composed a litany
of questions to ask me.

Hunched, gray hair, green eyes,
his body bentô a trigger to the moon.
I avoided him for as long as I could,
knowing he was sure to trip me up.
Instead, I distracted myself in dirty alleyways of play
exploring, again, the first white passages of flesh
I kept hidden in a thrown-out magazine
I had snatched from a patch of weeds.

Tonight, looking through that empty window,
I realize why I stared at him with such misgivings.
The darkened paneô like a mirrorô has turned on me.
I'm him; he's me.
Equally distant, matched in a terrible silence.
Hisô now permanentô mine but a faint scratch of words
like his stir of dry cereal in the bowl.
While he's wandering through stars
in search of her,
I'm stuck with sour blossoms that catch
like dust in my throat.
Out of breath, I'm unable to shout at the book
on the table taunting me with its blackness.
I'm left behind, still searching for my poems,
burdened further by what I dismissed:
those compounding questions he willed to me.