

NEW POEM SUITE

The Kuyker House

At the end of the first stretch
of Adeline Street,
where the houses shade from
old and stately to
old and worn out,

Where the long leaf pines begin
to overtake the live oaks
with wisps of
Mississippi moss,

Sits a white structure with a red tiled roof,
Spanish Mission, distinguished yet dowdy,
to us kids always the Kuyker House-- somehow
it made our blood run cold.

No clear reason why this should have been,
except the Kuykers were believed
to be old, unmarried siblings,
had *always* lived there,
and, we were sure,
it was also full of cats.

Only two Kuykers were ever seen
outside the place:
there was Fanny, frizzled red hair
old, we thought, at least 50,

Not that she weeded
the garden or fed
those felines on the
crumbling front steps, no

Fanny, when I saw when I saw her,
was simply studying then lettuce or
cucumbers at Delchamps
just like anybody,

or quietly
waiting in line at Woolworth's,
and, if I was right behind her,
smelling faintly of cat.

I would sometimes see her,
with an ancient woman, silent
dressed all in black, eyes vacant,
terrifying.

Yes maybe her mother or aunt,
but somehow out of place
looking mournful and Italian
more than 'Mississippi',

Rumor had it that the family,
behinds those old stucco walls
were all odd like that. And,

Rounding the corner on my bike,
tossing the *Hattiesburg American*
into yards, but not theirs,
a wet yellow October leaf
floating down
to a carpet of pinestraw,

I felt proud sometimes
that the dull drowsy block
was blessed by
this house of ghosts.

1957: Two Scenes

I Hattiesburg

In 1957 my mother's lavender gray eyes were the color
of soft summery rains that
brushed the days
one after another
in Mississippi—
March, April, May,

The patio behind
the big house on Adeline Street was
muggy and puddled —the birdbath seemed superfluous.
The laced patio chairs caught pink mimosa feathers
as they fell—
a perfect place for cardinals

But my grandfather, leaving nothing to chance
tossed sunflower seeds like confetti
from a brown paper bag,
and the right birds always came
two or four at a time
poking around for every one of them on
the damp flagstones Bobbing
between the white wrought iron legs
of the patio table where

My young mother sat in her blue housecoat
and slippers, nursing an Old-Fashioned
her gray lavender eyes
burning through the high bamboo hedge.

II Family moves north

In 1957 there were rows of red apartments
each with a glowing Halloween pumpkin
staring at the others across the lawns
as cold night fell
And small dime-store fairies and pirates,
skeletons shouted in bands
bags rustling with Milky Ways and Kandy Korn,
And the icy eye of Sputnik stared down
from its slow sweep
across the faint starred Maryland sky.

What If the Moon

What if the moon just disappeared? —vanished
Not from Shakespeare
or the Bible
or the ship captains' logs,

But now—or last night
cloudless, purple
lit with tiny stars, as if
we expected the gibbous light
of the night before

No, we were not dreaming,
the December woods were
bathed in soft silver
as we climbed, crunched the familiar icy path.

But tonight the moon was not there
Venus, Sirius and the other turned on
as the sun left and

what did the Icelandic fishermen think,
expecting a bit of
help from the sky?

Indonesian women leaving
their looms to breathe green air
outside the stifling mills?

Vermont villagers coming out of
each other's shops, pubs,
looking up, puzzled about something,

And the oceans crashed confused,
the tides shimmered, stilled
off Chile and Tasmania,
Barcelona and Cape Cod.
Everywhere.

Dream Filtered Blue

Cerulean irises, cyan reeds
Fringe the black pond,
as we step gingerly
down the pondpath.

The hemlock and cypress
glow green enough
flecked by shadows
as the five o'clock sun
turns their cones to gold,
not 'gold-like' or golden,
But Gold itself,
so breaking

all the natural rules
slaking my thirst for
transport, for wonder.

No reason to ask
if we are inside a painting
it doesn't seem so,
and yet almost everything
adds up but
the colors,

I let go of your moist hand
this last fifty feet
steep and fast
both arms
needed for balance,

and in doing so, catch your eyes
widening, quizzical
your face more amazed
than disconnected--
but a little of both,

Red winged blackbirds
always welcome, just two really,

glide above cattails
some brown some black, some silver--
What gives? But the birds are
almost as they should be,
maybe scarleter, maybe more glossy indigo
than black.

