

## Creation

What can you do with  
a line  
in your mine  
Of your mind mined  
maybe full stop  
where else  
would the line lie  
What can you do  
with the line for  
a poem you are  
sure has a place  
on the page  
where else would it  
go asserting affirming  
confirming  
declaiming at times  
Ascertaining  
what you feel or  
what you know  
Or think you do  
but now aren't sure  
What can you  
do with the orphan line  
certain it has a place  
in a poem of  
uncommon greatness grace  
and what can you do with the  
unwritten poem  
planned scanned  
no, not scanned  
scansion great word, that  
and what can you do  
with a life  
lived largely in the mind  
but largely lodged there  
stashed tucked away  
walnut like  
canals no cracks  
dislodged with a nudge  
from the tongue

try it I warrant it works  
consider the poem  
contained on the page  
in the person of the poet

need to thump my chest and  
say whump I am here for  
myself on a ledge  
near a hedge not high  
Just high enough  
To hie and soft-safe land  
Sustained by filament  
held tight  
to a stalk  
to a pulpy morass and it's  
gooey  
integument and its  
Good and it's pure  
Not purloined  
Not combed through  
Being worthy of  
Myself all and you  
or as the Germans might say  
All ist gut  
Pardon my wan  
multilingualism  
Pardon my  
Lack of indecision  
Slapdash yes  
But well phrased  
Pithy even or  
Aiming at same  
Firm purchase  
As it were  
From ensconced perch  
Have I then yes  
Arrived  
Yes  
I gainsay  
I have  
Or will soon  
Or will say adieu  
Not metaphorically-

(Ellen Pober Rittberg)

Speaking  
To self  
To you  
To the broad band  
of humanity I seek  
to reach myself in-  
to. Adieu and  
pardon the redundancy  
Adieu again.

## Poem 2

Family Secretby Ellen Pober Rittberg

I am small  
The house  
Blanketed in quiet  
My older sister  
In school  
I'm in bed  
Morning  
And you are  
In your bedroom  
"Eep" you squeal  
Pretending to be a mouse  
And "eep" I squeak back  
Sometimes you spin me around,  
smile.

One night  
In my room  
I hear a sound  
Loud like thunder  
You've fallen  
On the green  
Linoleum floor  
You're large and  
I'm frightened  
Years later you  
Tell me your brother  
Rooted through garbage  
But I don't know

Maybe it was you

You had no mother  
No explanation given  
You never asked  
Understood it was best  
Not to --  
You worshipped your father  
Tall dark wavy haired  
Factory worker  
Hat maker  
Handsome silent  
As you became  
The only man  
You ever loved: your  
Brother your father

You couldn't ask  
The woman he married  
Or pretended to  
Who felt no need  
To act motherly  
Who one day set upon you  
With an object  
It was as if she couldn't  
Stop you told me  
You missed school  
a day or a few  
told your aunt  
Moved in, paid her rent  
A boarder.

Your aunt's husband  
Did not want you  
Wanted your room  
You showered elsewhere  
One week he asked for the rent  
You already paid  
You did not argue paid again  
Once you came in  
Saw your uncle's  
Fish tank broken  
Water dead fish everywhere

(Ellen Pober Rittberg)

Bad tempered he died  
Carrying a stove up  
A flight of stairs

Your aunt shooed you  
"Go, meet people"  
You went alone to a dance  
Told some girls you could not  
Find your friends  
Asked could you  
Join them  
One summer night  
Everyone away you knocked  
On another aunt's door  
Asked if you could stay  
Explained some men  
Chased you, she refused said  
you're not such a bargain

Succumbing to longings  
Was not salutary  
But the subsequent  
giving up the tamping down  
Wasn't easy either  
You went to work  
Invented yourself  
Brick by brick  
When asked where you lived  
You said  
Sarotica Heights  
which did not exist  
Saratoga, your street, did  
But men believed you

A vine with  
Nothing to cling to  
Life pervaded, a too-hot sun  
You learned what you  
Needed to:  
Invisibility your cloak  
Your friend  
Embraced routine

Ellen Pober Rittberg

The uneventful  
Until one day  
Men noticed  
Until then you did not know  
You were alluring, an  
Ingrid Bergman

Learned your beauty  
Had power. Suitors came  
You chose my father:  
Blond blue eyed  
Impeccable dresser  
Adoring ambitious  
Your wedding night  
His brother took the  
Car keys in error  
Left you both stranded  
The next day, driving  
Got lost, ended up at  
The Catskills  
Instead of Lake George

How I wished when I was young  
You would disgorge  
What you learned only when  
You were already fully-grown  
It ground us all up  
Into a fine dust  
Walled you in  
The not-knowing:  
you lived behind scrim within a sea foam  
In the end, in sum, you lived long  
Lived well,  
Lived to tell it  
To only one soul:  
I bear it well.

Poem 3

Birth not necessarily in sequential order  
gravitationally bound  
The form ploughs  
imperceptibly down  
Head's precise location

not fully known  
Chute bone  
Ridge mound  
Pubic bone  
One slope surmounted  
Then a halt, a going backward  
Must push more and  
Harder!  
A worried voice  
announces. Mine, someone  
else'  
The mother confounded  
the body lulled and dulled  
By modern contrivance  
a pain killer  
where sensation is needed most  
The mind, body confused  
as to its part  
In the almost-arrival

Then  
Stasis  
Standoff  
O K Corral  
No progression  
forward  
Understandable:  
Why leave  
Why go  
To roiling parts unknown  
When within is  
loam  
Pupa  
Puerperal warmth

The membrane gelatinous  
Thick unyielding  
Out pops a color chart of sorts:  
Barn red gentian  
mustard yellow  
what once contained,  
sustained  
forms eddies

Unpurposed disused  
Thus booted

Hair appears  
Or head, hard to tell  
Of this furtive one  
Expectations smashed  
Pardon the pun  
Crowning they call it  
Funny the dub  
As in regal  
As in to the purple born

Encyclopedic this love  
That comes like a clap  
The child's head held aloft  
With magisterial flourish

The primitive eye  
Gazes levelly  
The power of one  
The power  
Of the infinite  
Wizened.  
This beauteous blossom  
Full open  
Fully formed and  
Arrived  
And very much present  
and accounted for.

#### Poem 4

Forest (see next page)  
Carolina wren I beg you  
Show yourself  
Your liquid pure sound  
From highest arch  
Has song ever been this clear  
This sound discernment-judgement  
Not like the mockingbird  
Tail high prone to pronouncement  
Why imitate at all



When your repertoire  
Is so varied  
Piano player in large hotel.

There's a special place in my heart  
For fungus  
Spectral white or buttercup yellow  
scalloped capped or cupped  
And clouds that hover  
Devoid of omen  
And rocks ragged jagged  
Some composite  
Once pyroclastic  
Waldeinsamkeit  
My natural juice  
My equipoise

#### Poem 5

If you get into your nineties  
If you get into your nineties  
largely without a hitch your  
mid 90s will feel like a 20 car pile up  
guaranteed  
even if largely painless  
things collide  
things you never had  
Like hemorrhoids  
who knew  
Or didn't know could go wrong do  
marauding conditions team up  
With footfalls fast  
Some swiftly retreat  
Or return  
An eon of your life later  
Some, raucous:  
whooping cough  
Or internal bleeding which  
they're not sure from which —  
but still still you go go on  
keep it all together  
don't we all mostly  
or others do

In ones nineties living well  
the phrase — oxymoronic  
But still there are small pleasures  
Fresh berries  
Things that grow  
Things farmed yoghurt basic  
You deal  
Or don't  
Others do do for you  
Custodians of your body  
There's a symmetry there  
You did for yours they  
do for you  
map out plans  
scuttled daily  
tidy up your clothes your person  
Arrange your glasses  
Perpetually askew  
things once taken for granted  
Are no longer granted  
Ambulation  
steps remembering how to  
What do I do now you ask  
A ringing refrain to me your daughter  
Bafflement your companion  
But unvarying you still still  
Unvaryingly  
Ask about your new grandchild  
"How's the baby?"  
Once engaged  
you recognize an actor Brian O'Hearn  
in ancient period piece movie  
You sleep a lot you do not know  
where you live,  
speak of your life a  
half century ago  
Brooklyn the Bronx  
Death skulks  
Curtained in the wings  
The shallow breathing  
a fooler  
a previously victorious army  
retreating

(Ellen Pober Rittberg)

Your breath returning  
Still you know things  
On a good day  
Can answer questions  
You used to read a great deal  
Until one day you couldn't  
your gaze pellucid  
Your hair black in front  
Hereditary anomaly  
The face devoid of  
Time's tincture  
on your worse day  
I ask you who I am  
You answer  
"Your cousin?"  
Fine, I'll be that  
if you'll come back  
Shard  
Precious relic  
Dear mother  
The pain sharp enduring  
Even before your passing  
Passing: how apt the word the state.