

Brilliantine

It was more than fathers.
Or brothers. Much more—myself
alone, watching him shift into third,
his Chesterfield on the wheel, smoldering. Adult
but as much a child as anyone,
such little interests.
And me, filled with dirt, not enough soap
to clean. Mouth. Mind. It seemed
a hopeless task, this sour
love. I was scared, still
I waited: How to win the man's
heart? Yes, it wasn't supposed to be.
Not this cloud that wouldn't rain,
drinking all my years.

The Locker

It wasn't that important. Just to store my gear.

I'll keep carrying it instead.

And I hate to say it, but the guy who handed the rental form to me
was hot. I'd have more than just glanced his way, down in the shower.

Ok, I look—that is, I see. You can focus straight ahead,
yet see. But nothing public. I work out; I shower; I leave.

Could have been my voice. My walk. Even the way I just stood then,
waiting. Though I think it was a jock thing.

Assume. Assert. Intimidate.

And me? I fill out his form. I leave. The elevator arrives. Its doors open.

From down the hall behind me, his voice to someone, echoing:

Can't stand them. And the sound of that paper sheet
ripped up, twisted in a knot, then the slam
of the elevator doors as it lands inside his trashcan.

All By Her Lonesome

Out there it's just the three
dimensions, while in here these

strands keep separating, who
she thinks she is and all that

scuffling before thresholds
that once led to church or

a hospital or that bedroom,
its lime green spread washed

free of color, random carnal
streaks aimless as the day is

long, short, no day at all lost
beneath the covers fetal

in a living room, outside
the whoosh of whirling brushes

idling in the gutter, her vagrant
chevy plunked down curbside

while up here she lies, dying.
Fears it. Dreams it. Wishes.

Hemmed In

It all comes down to edges, an endless
creeping in until what I'm left with is
no longer mine, assumptions breaking down
like when I turn on the tap and out comes
a hiss of air or, no, more like subway,
the ads I can't help reading all gone blank
but the words were there once, now blown away
on the squeal of air sucked through a crack of
open window I can't close, although it's
summer and does it matter way down here,
next to me some poor soul scanning the black
headlines in her *Daily News* as I watch
her little toes squirm inside her shoes, such
little shoes, but then what makes me the judge,
edges ever nearing till I can't stand
to read the news or even watch tv,
though I do both so doggedly then walk
away, well, stunned—by history, by what
we're told about as if it all takes place
so clearly when in fact it happens just
like this, a nibble here, a full bite there,
me going about the life I'm used to
amid these down-winding expectations,
gasping for a distance to surround me
as the fray creeps ever closer home.

For All Time

I hear a voice a man's voice a boy's well maybe not
who can tell it's coming in like shortwave through bad weather
out here in the North Atlantic the thinnest
strip of land holding me in tow
to the continent we lived on together this voice
and I landlocked dead center and I know the voice a boy's
a man's a friend's a soldier's a
dare I say it lover's voice
as I waken now and it crashes on me like the car he rolled
off the gravel on Route 1 the father's car the teacher's car the enforcer's
where I see this boy this man in its front seat blood on his forehead
though he survived we all survived depending on how
you measure it but then who stays intact
not the lover not that love
the tease of it a morsel suspended
before my eyes my lips he standing naked in the steam
behind the bathroom door showing me the enormous red
boil high on his thigh below what I can't
take my eyes from or stretched out on his bed combing the hair
on the legs of the man he's so proud to be he lets me see
but I never dare to touch or in truth never succeed
in touching until he touches me yes he did touch me in that dream
I know is real the touch at last the sliding down and around of it
so unexpected and sweet but before the pleasure
can be real that burst and its wordless
ending behind a wall my wall hard for me to talk
those silent years of shock and yet a thawing is that
love the moving on from a sore limb
to a good one we two eyeing our
faces our shared faces eyes father mother bed
I curled on my couch he and his wife in my bedroom brand-new
pillows too when she tells me I sleep like a little boy
and he smiles those days before he's shipped away way out way
over though he will come back he
does come back finally back a profile on white
satin framed in wood.