

Shopping Cart Woman

She was brought in like a stray dog,  
one past the use of breeding.

The young men shifted on the beds.  
They had never been in this position before.

But she had. Minimally at first,  
a way to make the occasional end meet.

Back when she was beautiful, back  
when no one let her believe it.

Fending Off Loneliness

There's always a cliché to cling to.

Hair of dog and keep scratching.

Tie one on and get loose.

Off the wagon and hit your head.

I put a record on the player;  
the grooves deepen.

I crack one open.

The singing comes first -  
that I understand.

The reading aloud  
is reasonable enough.

But this talking to walls?  
I don't know when it happened,  
but it's happened.

Each night my feet paces the distance  
from Binghamton to Syracuse.

The floor's wood is testimony  
of this delirium, of this trek, of my tongue  
moving like a train full of philosophers.

I've answered questions put forth by phantoms,  
reminisced at length about my childhood to the face in the window,  
drank until I became incoherent.

I've sat on the rocking chair to make it nod,  
strained my voice at the curtains to make them clap.

Each night is a compulsion for company,  
an argument to be put to sleep.

Gravity

I stare out my bay window, a little drunk  
(it is Tuesday but not too early)  
at a young girl who tilts her head to the street.  
Both her feet straddle the blue-grey stone  
that borders my neighbor's driveway.

She must be the granddaughter  
of the old couple I saw planting  
yellow flowers, side-by-side,  
not speaking, burying roots deep enough  
to stand the storms of spring.  
This would mean the little girl  
recently lost her youngest uncle,  
but she does not look concerned.  
With her chest puffed out,  
she jumps with legs straight  
like fresh cut branches.  
and sticks the landing, a slight give  
in the knees. She does it again - again  
with the same seriousness of an Olympian.

She faces the street  
and seems to consider the weight  
of her body on the elevated plane.  
Satisfied, she hops off. Heels kick  
the space between us.  
She dances to the mailbox.

I keep very still so she doesn't see me  
staring like a fool with tears jumping  
from my upper lip; a tall boy crinkling in my fingertips.

She comes back from the (unopened) mailbox  
and leaps over a bed of black-eyed Susans  
onto the lawn. She throws out  
her arms and holds a triumph poise  
for an imaginary audience.  
In the stunned silence, the young girl stretches  
her stomach back by the upward  
and backward pull of her palms.  
Her exposed belly button  
gathers a droplet of sun.

Her body is a bridge.  
A golden anchor of a leg  
shoots from under her -  
then falls.

## Shopping Cart Woman and Other Poems

She tries again, kicking  
with more force and confidence,  
(a touch of desperation).  
In an instant, her body is upside-down,  
wavering, as if calculating  
the distance from sun to toe.

One of the Good Ones

Eileen and I drank from tiny bottles,  
while dressed in knee-length skirts  
and low heels.

*What really bothers me is that he was one of the good ones*

Then she goes on about a cousin-in-law – Jimmy -  
who had the same addiction. Jimmy: deadbeat,  
father and son, a motel room,  
maybe an extra woman or two.

Eileen sighs.

*Bausch was looking for help ... There were no  
beds available.*

Sitting in the passenger seat,  
I sip at a 99 cent bottle  
and imagine Bausch at the kitchen counter of a one-story house  
on his cellphone, trying to make sense of himself  
as a teacher and addict while two large dogs busy themselves  
sniffing the floor. (I have no reason to believe  
he owned two large dogs).

In the coffin, his body looked over-stuffed as if with straw  
or like his organs were forgotten inside and engorged.  
A fireman's medallion was neatly clasped in his hands.

His mother, like the other mothers I've seen before,  
was composed, even smiling as if in satisfaction  
as a mother would in any event her child is party to -  
if that party is innocent.

*When he was little, he was so shy. I always had to push him forward  
(the mother mimed her mothering) and tell him to smile.*

The plastic teeth to another tiny bottle breaks the silence,

*He was one of the good ones.  
And that's a shitty thing to say.*

Drinking Cures

by erasure.

Suffering makes us whole;  
there are parts about myself I had forgotten about,  
the bridges are down,  
towns move in.

The whirl of sediment in the yowling mouth  
of the toddler,  
her fingers clutching her father's body,  
the way she clutched his thumb  
as an infant.

The young learn  
by touching, the old learn  
by being burnt.

I am not ashamed. I cried, that night,  
sobbed, rocked myself on the toilet,  
begged for the bottle.

Unable to dislodge  
the fantastic death  
and worse  
the image of the girl's diaper,  
squared to capacity  
the way my son's gets  
after a long nap.

But whatever urine was there  
was washed out by the pull  
of the Rio Grande,  
forcing both parent and child  
face down – dead - on its shores,

as if insulted: *these people  
are yours.*