

Windfall

We are all owed
few are paid
Yet when the letter comes through the postal slot
sailing to the oriental carpet
it lands like an ample flying insect

For my eyes only

Slit it open
the Noble Prize? I had no idea!
the winner of the Belmont
golly, really...
I'm far too zoftig to have ridden that thoroughbred - Cavafy
into a million dollars
and my whimsies do not constitute any sort of swag
not even a plaster bust of Mozart
on an upright piano

Oh, but you built a ship of sticks
and nursed an old lady who floated on a sea of confusion and dreams
houses, faces and dinners long lost on shore
You swept the home with pine needle bundles
and put together a wall of fitting stones
with a moat full of frogs and yellow fish
for a little girl
surrounded it with blackberries, gooseberries and currants
in a garden of apothecary roses

The paper that flies in is an oil bill
something to do with custody
and the eye-darting shame of AARP's monthly magazine
Highlights For Children (since 1946)
and the rare handwritten note from... anyone

There is no postal slot ...

It thuds when Maria
the postal lady tosses it to the porch
unromantically thrown with catalogs
Then a call comes over the line:
a recorded spectacular opportunity to Disney Land

from a lady named Lisa

Fame is a stick of incense
figure it out

The newt under the leaf on the path round the lake near the development where the
coyotes howl with anger and the beavers are trying

I saw a hummingbird moth

hermaris diffinis

That was a first for me

It was so big

Let It Sing

The pacing dog who expects her brew
by sunup

And the guy who'll want his cold
when the sail reaches the top of the
mast and the bells ring

The horse who has never seen a corner
because all her life she goes round
and round the mill stone

I will not despair

For the junk birds come each winter
and the song birds build nests
come April

and their music fills the morning
with glorious sound

Some call it the grind

But I will not be daunted

Onion grass, aconite, narcissus

Condensation, precipitation

drawn out by hand

on the wall of a child's classroom

Low clouds and high

A smell so deep

and yet still an inexplicable memory

was it a train, a janitor's hovel,

a mine shaft going down down

down into darkness

Dig with your shovels

Throw the seed to the ground

Put your coin in the slot

Pull the rope

And let it sing

Let it sing, let it sing

Let it sing

Morning in Sicily

Coming down the mountains
of Sicily
hairpin after hairpin
through a mist of clouds and sunlight with every turn

views revealed then stolen away
Until on the right
contained by a drooping wooden fence a flock of sheep asleep

in the early morning sun
As I pulled over for
a closer look at their blonde curls
in blissful balls of sleep
and to take
a deep breath of lanolin and
dust
straw, shit and grass
their keeper, their herder,
their mistress,
their lover -
a dog the self-same color
awoke to the sun and my presence squinted twice
then called out to me, at me -
Nature is God
God is nature
Can't you see, woman?
As the road slipped down to the valley

The Pumpkin's Head

As she lay dying
the world went on with its
tomfoolery
Cheating killing making babies
The night sky was full of fire
climbing over and tunneling under
fences

As she lay dying
with booties on to protect her feet
and salve to sooth her bottom
Christmas Valentines and Easter
came and went

Summer burned the grasses
while we waited for a let-up
and some rain
which finally came in
Overflowing

Puddling
Birds drinking
and blue heron waiting

Soon the days grew crisper again
as she lay dying
Browner
Then cold-handed leaves blew
against the sky

She asked for her parents
She asked for her husband
She guessed my age at 22
All those things long long gone

And this went on

Following the progressions of the seasons
as she lay dying

One October morning
she spoke
she asked me
Have you found the pumpkin's head?

My mind soared over valley and meadow
through fields and fences
through sun and shade

Tears of disbelief

I wanted to cry out, yes!
but I could not

Polite Society

for Willa

Of a winter evening, beside the fireplace
what is *virtual*, my daughter asks.

The New York Times like a pup tent
over my vision.

Virtue? I myopically reply.

Must I go into virginity...

Like being a decent person, I say
clean and sound of mind and body

non-violent perhaps

but I don't mention

James-Bond-type-violence

which is very different

entertainment

than Nazi violence

shooting the ceiling

(meaning the floor)

of the attic where the Jews

are hiding and the blood

drips down.

And I lower the paper

meet her deep dark eyes.

She rolls them.

No, I said *virtual*...

Oh, *virtual*. That's different.

Relieved

that sex hasn't come into play

Although they make those glasses

where sex partners appear

in a make-believe harem, etc

Virtual, well, that's like a store

where you can buy stuff

but the store

has no actual embodiment.

You can't visit it.

You can't arrive
And unlock the door
in the morning, for instance
or roll down the awnings
sweep the front stoop
make it (or refuse to make it)
handicap accessible
pay the one-legged man
to wash the windows once-a-month
watch for perpetual shoplifters
and answer the phone
make recommendations
be saddened by beloved customer's deaths
from a disease that devastates a whole community
gift wrap
cash out
cut the boxes down
sweep the stoop again
roll up the awnings
(under which in the rain
people once fondled...)
set the alarm at dusk
and double lock the door
head for home or the nearest bar.

My daughter scans my face
for signs of disturbance
pats her thighs with both palms
and grimaces
Awkward, she says.

Back to the paper I hide
wondering if bi-polar is real
does it come on fast?
and how we get it
why some memories stick -
some don't.
I'm hungry she says.

A log on the andirons slips forward
with a burst of sparks.
Victuals, I pronounce this word with
gravel in my voice

just the way my father used to
and drop the paper to the carpet.
Yes, let's go get some victuals.
And the world of words
with all its misunderstandings
and profundity
with all its love
flows round and round
on a Lazy Susan of salami and cheese.