

Perseveration and Other Poems

Perseveration

drawing a house, mixing the paints
coloring it red, purple or black—
she'll color it green,
coloring house after house
until the teacher says stop

coloring it crooked
and old,
always the same,
a cross on each window,
secrets to tell:

ghosts, ghouls and hobgoblins
live there and a princess
under a spell coloring so many houses
with no grass, flowers or trees,
no cobblestone path to the porch—

just a child coloring
her secrets, telling her story
until the teacher says stop
telling that story;

building a fence post by post,
a white-picket fence
nine thousand feet high,
it'll border the house
shutting everything in—

she'll break all the crayons
coloring outside the lines
and spilling the paints,
scribbling all over the pages
until someone stops to listen.

Gritter

mind playin' tricks—
zoned out and virginia wolf in',
just a time-raped beeper on a cheap high
oblivious to all hell done brok'n loose:

a total rock junkie, she be trippin'
sayin' prayers to a god she don't even know,
askin' for things from her santa claus list
as if sobriety could be given as a gift;

queenie's all swagged out in her rag-tag
dime store hand-me-downs pulled taunt
over a heart hardened from too many
years on the streets,

she say: lace up! no half steppin'!
god, it's cold! time to get on the bus.
her hand slipping onlookers the finger,
now she the one givin' them the evils.

she a ghost speakin' in riddles wit' her
goose-step thoughts zooming
frenetically into non-sequitur babble—
son-of-a-bitch poured out from a can of sterno
wedged deep in a brown paper sack—

her life's a cardboard house-of-cards,
how she got here's not important:
her merciless companion
how to keep warm in the cold.

Cross Purposes

i love you

sandwiched between politics,
damn world affairs, and sports'
teams winning super bowls—
inconsequentials replayed back to me.

am i the joke or is this just you
at a loss being you,
reaching out to capture me
with the unspoken encrypted
into everyday monotony?

supposing others know
more than you about me,
gossip mongering
their soup-of -the-day;
my thoughts, my feelings—
cannon fodder.

i see the way you duck and run,
us strangled by a ligature of words
misconstrued or never spoken—
code-talking and bloody reticence,
the cyphers for a once high roller
fallen prey to irreconcilable differences.

if you look up and find me gone,
what excuse will there be then
for hedging bets?

do you love me

say so with words that talk to me
in a language i can understand.

Muskeg

Summer rains wet-on-wet
a deluge of cerulean
and viridian hue washing
variegated and transparent
into the mudded brown
of Autumn's watercolor
tannic:

Van Dyck's ochre
decomposing
into kobachi, chestnut,
sepia and desert sand—

brown's palette a quagmire
of family, old friendships,
responsibilities and

happy-ever-after's segueing into
broken promises, slamming doors
and babies crying—

going *up* the *down* and *in* the *out*,
getting all the mail on Sunday
and telephone calls when no one's home,

clump-forming sedge
from an aquatic squall of tears
thrusting seamlessly into the hollowed
abyss of bone-chilling cold
nestled cozily in Winter's first frost,

only a vague hint of Spring's promise
of renewal and better days to come
reflected off the frozen tussocks
of brown's marshy bog.

Counting Down

One, two, he'd married a shrew;
Three, four, he's shutting the door;
Five, six, she's beaten with fists;
Seven, eight, dinner is late;
Nine, ten...

Roses wrapped in green tissue paper
Chrysanthemum, iris, and daisy chain
Lady Jane, my baby fist full of dandelion
A chocolate milk moustache smiles at me
Happy birthday with a bouquet of goldenrod
Mom, are you allergic to these?

A face so much like mine, I say,
Don't be like me, pretty thing—
With tears that pay for all of my mistakes—
Smile like sunshine.

Roses tied with red grosgrain ribbons
Say what he couldn't; just as beautiful
As the child littering my lap with clover,
Blue bonnet, hibiscus, and green gladioli
Remind me of all that is past.

He always brought roses—pale and pink
With the first breath of spring on their lips
Whispering promises there for a moment,
Then gone...

To digging, delving, gasping for breath,
Begging mercy from a booze-soaked alky
On a bender who has morphed into fiend.