

Collateral Damage

*Collateral 1a: accompanying as a secondary fact, activity or agency
but usually extrinsic to a main consideration; similar but subordinate*

Once she pitched a softball,
 but seldom won a game
 once broke a window
 mixed watercolors,
 sometimes her colors bled
 into each other
 kneaded bread
 let it rise all day
 baked in the cool of evening

A tan stucco house
 shaded by olive and lemon trees
 on the patio a calico cat slept

She stroked her child's brown
 hair, held her tiny hands
 looked in her hazel eyes,
 sang lullabies—
 a little off key

Two in the morning
 a bright flash
 no time to cry
 or to scream
 drone
 explosion
 windows shatter
 hands, eyes, hair burn,
 stucco crackles
 crumbles
 scent of freshly crushed lemons

Collateral damage is regretted and, while
similar, is not the same and was unintended.

Who Knows Where He's Going

Snow is dirty milk today,
sun barely over the spruce,
cars splattering slush on the interstate,
temperature just above zero,
even at eleven it's dark as dawn,
feeble sunshine.

Sheriff's car sloshes up the passing lane,
prisoner caged in back
probably on his way to court or county jail—
did he toss a chair through the bar window
or slam his car into a truck after ten beers?

Maybe he did nothing (his brother did it)
or bashed his wife with a wine bottle
fucked a fourteen-year-old girl
robbed a doughnut shop of sixty dollars.

The police car gets stuck
behind a truck, the handcuffed man is right
next to me, separated only by smeared windows.
He turns, smiles, raises his cuffed hands and waves,
wiggling his fingers, puts his hands together
like praying, glances my way again,
opens his mouth like he's calling me,
then bows his head.

Villanelle for Fallen Apples

Over snow and apples they crawl,
one by one, keeping low,
in the snow a broken doll.

In the autumn apples fall,
red and wrinkled in the snow—
over snow and apples they crawl.

His face in the snow,
where he fell against the wall,
a little blood, a curious crow.

Over snow and apples they crawl,
whichever way war will blow,
whichever way the bloody fall.

In the snow a broken doll,
on the wall a watchful crow,
apples shake, cannons growl.

No difference but time. Musket ball,
or cluster bomb, they fall and blood flows,
so they crawl face down in the snow
or lie face up as sparks and snowflakes fall.

A Drowning in Wardsboro Brook

Police: Vt. mom drowns self, 2 daughters USA Today 4/13/08

Nicole comes before dawn
with her daughters; she holds
Dakota and Grace until they're blue
with cold. The brook waits as
she lifts Grace over the water
then hurls her into the current.
The brook can't give Grace up,
can't halt its flow.

The brook waits until after dawn
when Nicole grips Dakota's hand
and wades into the stream,
many people are watching now—
some scream, others try to reach
her, rescuers pull on boots
and helmets—then Nicole loses her
grip and the brook throws
her up and down, slams Dakota
into stones and carries them down.

There are only sounds of roaring
melt water and sirens wailing from
all directions; the water gushes with
shattered ice, tangled limbs and hair.

April in Vermont is always too cold,
the brook always roars with icy snow
melt, so loud it drowns out everything;
patches of snow remain on the bank
and the brook still carries Nicole,
her daughters and her despair.

A sodden mitten, a limb
of white birch, an old board with
rusty nails all wash past and some
siren wails far away but nobody has
an answer—there is only
the sound of Wardsboro Brook
roaring with icy water.

Ford Galaxy Sestina

At the Jupiter Drive-in Theater, cars
glide in from across the universe,
Ford Skyliners with V-8s defying gravity,
finned vehicles glowing like the Milky Way—
in chromed Comets, in gleaming Ford Galaxies,
in Mercury Meteors, lovers wait in each other's arms.

Meanwhile Jupiter missiles wait in silos, arms
forged from the same metal as the cars
we drive from across the galaxy,
all smelted from the stardust of the universe,
Skyliner, Comet, Galaxy, Meteor, Milky Way
candy bar, Jupiter missile, lovers— all resisting gravity.

On the screen Richard Burton plays Marc Antony with gravity,
warm in our Galaxy we watch the stars, your arms
around me as we nibble a Mars Bar, a Milky Way,
the asp bites Cleopatra— we're safe in our car,
and Elizabeth Taylor is right here with us while the universe
grows darker and windows fog over in other Galaxies.

We make out, imagining we are two of the galaxy
of cinema stars; if it weren't for gravity
we'd be gone, floating in our Ford across the universe—
snuggle closer and hold me in your arms.
How could Shakespeare have known? In our cars
we weep for Antony and Cleopatra. Show me the way

to kiss! Want another bite of Milky Way?
We make out and turn up the heat in our Galaxy,
forgetting we're at the drive-in surrounded by cars,
forgetting we're prisoners of gravity—
If it be love, indeed I'd die like Cleopatra in your arms
your kiss is all I want in the universe,

your chocolate breath is all I want in the universe.
After the movie we park far out in the Milky Way,
Comets, Meteors, stardust, spiraling arms,
taillights of Skyliners, Meteors and Galaxies
twinkle red; you kiss me with gravity
as we watch the taillights of distant cars.