

## WINTER THAW

Just when we've all but surrendered to darkness,  
our spirits bullied into submission,  
a daffodil pokes its yellow head  
through the wire fence  
a match flaring from a dungeon,  
letting our dreams escape  
from the caverns of sleep.  
The bright tongue swells with the taste of sunlight,  
awakening the soil our cast-off skin.  
Its delight with creation invites us  
to join the dance of breath  
before the return of the fixed season  
stitched loosely together  
by long-stemmed needles and green thread.

## VAGRANT MOON

28 days and you bust out of jail,  
brazenly swaggering about on the lam,  
prowling the streets, demanding carte blanche.  
Laughing, leering, luring open virginal flowers.  
Rising above deserted lanes.  
Rollicking in lovers' arms.  
Stirring heartbeats beyond repair.  
Exposing your backside to near-sighted swain.  
Lurking in alleys. Stalking shadows.  
Vaulting over white-washed fences.  
Corrupting courtyards:  
furtive trysts in every corner.  
Lifting slats; peeping between blinds.  
Slipping through shuttered windows.  
Police! Arrest the intruder!

And, oh! At the beach!  
Spreading naked across the shore  
in blatant disregard of posted signs.  
Modesty's not your trick.  
Caressing waves  
as you pickpocket the oblivious sea.  
Raising breasts and buttocks to foamy heights.  
Five years!  
Ten years!  
Fifteen for enticing a poet and abetting a thief.  
Order! Order!  
A life sentence for seducing  
then walking heels and spurs on a solitary heart.

### FAKE OUT

The loosely-buckled subway cars cinch up their belts,  
posturing in tough-boy stancesô shadow boxing in placeô  
tossing mock punches  
before lunging into dark tunnels.  
Though they pretend not to be scared,  
they shake and scream  
until finally braking to a halt  
in a well-lit station.  
Their doors bang open.  
They manage to swell with braggadocio  
exhaling sighs of relief.  
And not a single New Yorker is the wiser.

## THE MUSIC SALESMAN

He only hears the rain after he's dripping wet.  
Passing over a NO PEDDLERS sign,  
his finger pushes the bell.  
A child opens the door: "She's not home."  
He grins, holding out his card: PARTIALLY DEAF.  
"Mommy said we don't want any!" the child shouts.  
House by house, the block slams shut.

He remembers sneaking into the music room  
to watch the frail girl's hands drift back and forth  
like wisps of fog across the keys.  
He felt himself dancing with her.

Standing on a WELCOME mat, he presses another button.  
Chimes reverberate, scampering up the scale,  
as though scolding him like the music teacher  
for being tone deaf.

He backtracks down the driveway of the seemingly empty house,  
certain he's seen a curtain move.

Lumps of gravel press through his worn soles.  
Determined to make his first sale,  
he knocks until his knuckles sting.  
A shrunken eye blinks within the thick, varnished wood.  
But the door remains shut.

At noontime he wanders into a playground  
and dumps his samples on a bench.  
Unfolding a paper keyboard, he pushes down on the keys.  
His hands flex, his body rocks back and forth,  
scattering the clefs into shadows.  
Children encircle him and chorus:

Go away.  
You can't play.  
You're over thirty.  
Your nails are dirty.  
And there's nothing audible you can say.

He nods in time to their shrieks,  
eager to share their rhythm  
while agreeing that the deepest music  
can only be felt.

### AT THREE IN THE AFTERNOON

Hunger walks the street hidden  
beneath the sweetness of her heavy perfume.  
Urchins taunt the blind man,  
until he swings his stick in futile circles.  
The white dog spotted with blood rips loose raw flesh  
in the pen behind the walled church crumbling from within.  
Dust covers the concrete garden, choking the withered flowers.  
Shadows crouch, waiting to take new positions.  
It's the midday hour.  
The vaults are full.  
The murders can begin.  
Assassins, take aim.  
Holding up trinkets, hunched targets trudge the beach fronts  
staked out with condos.  
Back alleys choke with children.  
The drunken woman pukes up her misery  
before collapsing on her knees.  
Her neck still burns from last night:  
the rope too frayed to hold her,  
the rafters too low.  
All will have to wait  
until three in the afternoon  
when the shadows shift behind your back  
when you look away from death crowned with the sun  
and the boulder moves, fitting tightly into place  
all at three in the afternoon.