

Childhood

Back and forth back and forth
Swimming the long channel of the avenue
More times than you could count
Looking ahead now
Recognizing people now
The world grows smaller and less manageable
The mother
The lamp-lit room
The yellow liquid
The stories — stories she knew
But did not know
picking up variations until she
could not tell if she knew
the people or only knew the stories

The mother's glittering gaze
The too-short flannel nightgown
Her crossed white legs
Her knitted slippers their vinyl
bottoms pumping pumping
Crossing and uncrossing reaching for the glass

Where were you going?
Where is she going? A pattern
must be repeated and repeated
One thread is not enough to tell

— ELIZABETH ROMERO

Getting Ready to Kill Carol

foot comes out of the shower, bare flesh
touches cold tile and steam
oozes from her skin like
it's escaping. Such pink.

I wonder why she never smiles when she sees me
in public, it's those evil looks and my own angry
questions
that brought me here tonight.

second foot joins the first and
the steam is not as obvious.
her whole body is exhaling smoke now
standing
by the sink.

I've never understood her animosity towards me, why
we've never become close friends. Maybe it's because I'm
just average
or maybe she's just shy.

I suck my own stomach in
the way she does
before the mirror. Young for two seconds.
I see her fall an eternity before
she sees me standing behind
her reflection.

— HOLLY DAY

Adventures in Poetry with ©Dr. Wes Browning



The good news: Saddam Hussein is effectively gone. The bad news: Bush and company can't tell the difference between doing something good and doing something good in a way that doesn't screw up everything else in the world.

You can't learn from a mistake you can't see. The administration is too busy dancing around the ball to realize they're in the wrong end zone. We haven't stopped terrorism. We've gone begging for it.

Meanwhile, I have a cold. I had this cold two weeks ago, see, and I didn't want it, so I gave it to Anitra "on whose kitchen floor I have sometimes slept" Freeman. I gave her my cold in a duck-licking frenzy. I am not proud of it, I'm

only reporting the facts.

But then, two days ago, Anitra gave me my cold back. No fair! She was supposed to pass it on! Now I will have to punish her by holding the cold just until she loses it and then giving it back to her again. That will teach her not to break the rules.

I'm just kidding, of course. The only rules here that matter are the rules of viruses and bacteria and immune systems and biology in general. This, however, brings up the subject of homelessness.

The crime of allowing homelessness to happen is a form of rape. Rape occurs when someone's own body and bodily functions are turned into weapons against them. Rape doesn't require penetration. It's already rape when you tell someone that they can't use your bathroom, forcing them to go in the alley and get arrested. It's already rape when you refuse to let someone sleep even in your cold doorway, so they have to sleep in the colder alley and get run over by a truck.

Boy, there's nothing that brings the humor level of a conversation down faster than the word rape, don't you think? Rape, rape, rape, rape. But what can I do? It's a fact. Sleep, urination, and defecation are physical necessities, and if you deny them to people it's no different than forcing them to partici-

pate in one of your BDSM fantasies without their permission.

Evidently I can complain about the crime of allowing homelessness to happen for 77 years, and no one's going to do anything about it just because I say they should. So I keep looking for ways to make the point that it's wrong without sounding like I'm complaining. Maybe appealing to people's sense of self-preservation is the way to go.

You can't learn from a mistake you can't see. If you've never been homeless you probably can't understand how it could be regarded as a form of

rape. The lesson may be lost on you.

But, hey, you have a vulnerable

body too. You are not invincible.

Have you been following the

progress of SARS? OK, maybe SARS

isn't the plague that's going to do you

in. But the CIA says SARS is just the

beginning, so get ready for worse.

Here's a heads-up for everyone:

when a disease becomes endemic

you are only as safe as the most vul-

nerable populations among you. If there are people among you whose health

is consistently neglected, the disease will spread like wildfire among them,

and you will be in line for it.

Boy, there's nothing that brings the humor level of a conversation down faster than the word rape, don't you think?

My biggest fear right now is that SARS will spread to third-world areas of Africa, for example, where there is inadequate medical care. There will be no controlling it globally at that point. My second greatest fear is that American homeless shelters will be infected with it. Then there will be no controlling it in our cities.

OK, suppose you don't have that much sense of self-preservation. How about Wes-preservation? I live directly across from a mission. If you don't care about whether you get SARS or not, please have a care for poor highly infect-able me. Please help eradicate homeless shelters by replacing them with homes so there are fewer opportunities for viruses to attack my tender air passages. Thank you. ■



FALLEN ANGELS

Sad
I have again
found my rhythm
behind these crumbling walls
that stretch so high above my life
within the games of spades and the plastic cups of coffee and
the sisters who cradle the
streets as easily as they welcome me.

In
this day
at this moment
I am no different than any other
my beginnings and endings blended into red felon's cloth
and the metallic glimmer of handcuffs... but at night, this night
I dream of God's strength and I read the words embedded into
these walls
by those whose deaths were foretold by the judges and the
jailers and the system that
barely knew them.

I
have knelt
in the silence of the indifferent
no one believing that anything of value was left inside of me.
I have been gutted and lain open like a fish by those whose eyes
have refused to meet my
own because in all of the days and months and years of my life's
desecration I had fallen so
far and so fast and so hard it was believed I could not survive
and, thus, deemed worthless, it
was thought best simply to cut the loss of me and to turn away.

I
don't
deny my past
but neither have I perished.
I may scream. I may be silent.
I may simply set my sight upon the furthest star above the
darkest sea but as I swim I will
gather my dreams and upon them I will build an island.

I
am imperfect
and I am alone
and in the sands of sleepless nights and winter dreams,
outside of this mortar, beyond the alleys of my despair I walk
with eyes held high. I am
poised to find those, who like me were given up for dead or
declared missing in action.

They
too have
unfinished dreams
amid the shadows of fallen angels
lost long before these walls made before me.

—CYNTHIA LEE OZIMEK

That's How It Goes

my first memory of my father was him
kneeling on the ground before me, car keys
in hand, smiling and asking
"Should daddy drive into a lane divider
tonight? Smash up his new car? Then you
and mommy will be rich, can move out
of this dump and have a real life" and I

remember grabbing the keys from his
hands and giggling, "Silly Daddy,"
hearing my mother somewhere behind me, saying
"That's not nice" and not being sure who
she was talking to

I'm still not, really

— HOLLY DAY

FREE-FALL: to GEORGE

There comes the (inevitable) Moment
of free-fall

from trapeze-to-trapeze
the autumn leaf from-tree-to-earth
walking out of your house
learning to ride a bicycle

taking a chance to trust
(my father inspiring me to jump into deep water:
SINK-or-SWIM...
his arms outstretched waiting to catch me...)

AND

finally
from Life-to-Death

NO SAFETY-NET
save

Momentum and FAITH:
your only comfort
COMFORT ENOUGH

— MARION SUE FISCHER