

Lower Manhattan Pantoum

Elaine Sexton

Always a bad sign L1
people on the sidewalk looking up. L2
A crowd forms, cars slow L3
then stop, L4

people on the sidewalk looking up L5/L2
I step into a pool of them L6
then stop. L7/L4
I gape like the others. L8

I step into a pool of them, L9/L6
become the pool L10
and gape like the others. L11/L8
Mothers, peddlers, suits L12

become the pool L13/L10
of a wreck. L14
Mothers, peddlers, suits, L15/L12
my super, my neighbors L16

a wreck L17/L14
unfolding, undone. L18
My super, my neighbors L19/L16
no one is not stunned. L20

Unfolding, undone L21/L18
we look at our watches, L22
stunned. L23/L20
Some one says *let's pray*. L24

We examine our watches. L25/L22
A crowd forms. Cars stop. L26/L3
Someone says *let's pray*— L27/L24
always a bad sign. L28/L1

A Ride in the Rain

Blas Falconer

The driver has no knife. He has no knife, no,
you think, and lower your head into his car.

A ride in the rain? The dark clouds bellow.

You saw him drinking at the local bar,

you think, and lower your head into his car.

Rain taps on the roof, falls on this familiar man:

You saw him drinking at the local bar.

He shrugs and offers up his empty hands.

Rain taps on the roof, falls on this familiar man,
and sugarcane stalks bend in the breeze.

He shrugs and offers up his empty hands.

As sewer pipes burst, flooding the street,

and sugarcane stalks bend in the breeze,
machetes swing into the green stems, low.

As sewer pipes burst, flooding the street,

bile is a blade at the back of your throat.

Machetes swing into the green stems, low.

A ride in the rain? The dark clouds bellow.

Bile is blade at the back of your throat.

The driver has no knife. He has no knife, no.

Another Lullaby for Insomniacs

AE Stallings

Sleep, she will not linger:
She turns her moon-cold shoulder.
With no ring on her finger,
You cannot hope to hold her.

She turns her moon-cold shoulder
And tosses off the cover.
You cannot hope to hold her:
She has another lover.

She tosses off the cover
And lays the darkness bare.
She has another lover.
Her heart is elsewhere.

She lays the darkness bare.
You slowly realize
Her heart is elsewhere.
There's distance in her eyes.

You slowly realize
That she will never linger,
With distance in her eyes
And no ring on her finger.

My Brother at 3 A.M.

Natalie Diaz

He sat cross-legged, weeping on the steps
when Mom unlocked and opened the front door.

O God, he said. O God.

He wants to kill me, Mom.

When Mom unlocked and opened the front door
at 3 a.m., she was in her nightgown, Dad was asleep.

He wants to kill me, he told her,

looking over his shoulder.

3 a.m. and in her nightgown, Dad asleep,
What's going on? she asked. Who wants to kill you?

He looked over his shoulder.

The devil does. Look at him, over there.

She asked, *What are you on? Who wants to kill you?*
The sky wasn't black or blue but the green of a dying night.

The devil, look at him, over there.

He pointed to the corner house.

The sky wasn't black or blue but the dying green of night.
Stars had closed their eyes or sheathed their knives.

My brother pointed to the corner house.

His lips flickered with sores.

Stars had closed their eyes or sheathed their knives.

O God, I can see the tail, he said. O God, look.

Mom winced at the sores on his lips.

It's sticking out from behind the house.

O God, see the tail, he said. Look at the goddamned tail.

He sat cross-legged, weeping on the front steps.

Mom finally saw it, a hellish vision, my brother.

O God, O God, she said.

She Put on Her Lipstick in the Dark

Stuart Dischell

I really did meet a blind girl in Paris once.
It was in the garden of a museum,
Where I saw her touching the statues.
She had brown hair and an aquamarine scarf.

It was in the garden of the museum.
I told her I was a thief disguised as a guard.
She had brown hair and an aquamarine scarf.
She told me she was a student from Grenoble.

I told her I was not a thief disguised as a guard.
We had coffee at the little commissary.
She said she had time till her train to Grenoble.
We talked about our supreme belief in art.

We had coffee at the little commissary,
Then sat on a bench near the foundry.
We talked about our supreme belief in art.
She leaned her head upon my chest.

We kissed on a bench near the foundry.
I closed my eyes when no one was watching.
She leaned her head upon my chest.
The museum was closing. It was time to part.

I really did meet a blind girl in Paris once.
I never saw her again and she never saw me.
In a garden she touched the statues.
She put on her lipstick in the dark.

I close my eyes when no one is watching.
She had brown hair and an aquamarine scarf.
The museum was closing. It was time to part.
I never saw her again and she never saw me.

Pantoum

Randall Mann

If there is a word in the lexicon of love,
it will not declare itself.
The nature of words is to fail
men who fall in love with men.

It will not declare itself,
the perfect word. *Boyfriend* seems ridiculous:
men who fall in love with men
deserve something a bit more formal.

The perfect word? *Boyfriend*? Ridiculous.
But *partner* is . . . businesslike—
we deserve something a bit less formal,
much more in love with love.

But if *partner* is businesslike,
then *lover* suggests only sex,
is too much in love with love.
There is life outside of the bedroom,

and *lover* suggests only sex.
We are left with *roommate*, or *friend*.
There is life, but outside of the bedroom.
My *friend* and I rarely speak of one another.

To my left is my roommate, my friend.
If there is a word in the lexicon of love,
my friend and I rarely speak it of one another.
The nature of words is to fail.

Station

Maria Hummel

Days you are sick, we get dressed slow,
find our hats, and ride the train.
We pass a junkyard and the bay,
then a dark tunnel, then a dark tunnel.

You lose your hat. I find it. The train
sighs open at Burlingame,
past dark tons of scrap and water.
I carry you down the black steps.

Burlingame is the size of joy:
a race past bakeries, gold rings
in open black cases. I don't care
who sees my crooked smile

or what erases it, past the bakery,
when you tire. We ride the blades again
beside the crooked bay. You smile.
I hold you like a hole holds light.

We wear our hats and ride the knives.
They cannot fix you. They try and try.
Tunnel! Into the dark open we go.
Days you are sick, we get dressed slow.

Pantom of the Great Depression

Donald Justice

Our lives avoided tragedy
Simply by going on and on,
Without end and with little apparent meaning.
Oh, there were storms and small catastrophes.

Simply by going on and on
We managed. No need for the heroic.
Oh, there were storms and small catastrophes.
I don't remember all the particulars.

We managed. No need for the heroic.
There were the usual celebrations, the usual sorrows.
I don't remember all the particulars.
Across the fence, the neighbors were our chorus.

There were the usual celebrations, the usual sorrows.
Thank god no one said anything in verse.
The neighbors were our only chorus,
And if we suffered we kept quiet about it.

At no time did anyone say anything in verse.
It was the ordinary pities and fears consumed us,
And if we suffered we kept quiet about it.
No audience would ever know our story.

It was the ordinary pities and fears consumed us.
We gathered on porches; the moon rose; we were poor.
What audience would ever know our story?
Beyond our windows shone the actual world.

We gathered on porches; the moon rose; we were poor.
And time went by, drawn by slow horses.
Somewhere beyond our windows shone the world.
The Great Depression had entered our souls like fog.

And time went by, drawn by slow horses.
We did not ourselves know what the end was.
The Great Depression had entered our souls like fog.
We had our flaws, perhaps a few private virtues.

But we did not ourselves know what the end was.
People like us simply go on.
We have our flaws, perhaps a few private virtues,
But it is by blind chance only that we escape tragedy.

And there is no plot in that; it is devoid of poetry.

September Elegies

Randall Mann

in memory of Seth Walsh, Justin Aaberg, Billy Lucas, and Tyler Clementi

There are those who suffer in plain sight,
there are those who suffer in private.
Nothing but secondhand details:
a last shower, a request for a pen, a tall red oak.

There are those who suffer in private.
The one in Tehachapi, aged 13.
A last shower, a request for a pen, a tall red oak:
he had had enough torment, so he hanged himself.

The one in Tehachapi, aged 13;
the one in Cooks Head, aged 15:
he had had enough torment, so he hanged himself.
He was found by his mother.

The one in Cooks Head, aged 15.
The one in Greensburg, aged 15:
he was found by his mother.
'I love my horses, my club lambs. They are the world to me,'

the one in Greensburg, aged 15,
posted on his profile.
"I love my horses, my club lambs. They are the world to me."
The words turn and turn on themselves.

Posted on his profile,
"Jumping off the gw bridge sorry":
the words turn, and turn on themselves,
like the one in New Brunswick, aged 18.

Jumping off the gw bridge sorry.
There are those who suffer in plain sight
like the one in New Brunswick, aged 18.
Nothing but secondhand details.