



In the Clutch

by Kathleen Winter

As my Wills and Trusts professor said,
When you carry a hammer,
everything looks like a nail.

When your hammer is poetry,
everything's a poem,
even the horrible pet-store rabbit

loosed on Sonoma Mountain,
furtive but bright white, elliptical,
low to the ground, scuttering--

not exactly greased lightning
on those rabbit's foot feet--
across the road at dawn.

Last week, my husband spotted it
against the autumn weeds.
How that rabbit survives

from one day to the next
is mystery to me,
and how it came to be here

and what furred or feathery inevitable
will snatch it up
to feel the shudder of its misplaced life.

Parthenon West Review, Issue 3, Fall 2005

Present at the Creation Anthology, ed. Vilma Ginzberg and Doug Stout, 2006

Eastern Shore

by Kathleen Winter

In a corn crib with rusted roof
I put my torn heart to bed
with anger, not quite believing in defeat,
how it hunts like a four-legged creature
the barrens of winter Maryland,
prostrate landscape holding up houses
sullen, static among splintered
peninsulas: Talbot, Queen Anne's counties,
two-minute towns of cornermen
with views of perpetual blur.

Near the shore, impoverished children grow
like weeds among touristic businesses;
in cold light, in the state park pond,
they fish for leaves.
For miles, for hours, the only color
the red half of a bobber
lost among cattails.
Back in town there are grandmothers
in all the houses, in every yard
the same starved birds.

Wrong Sonnet: Multiplicity

by Kathleen Winter

My husband asks Why don't you write a poem
about why you like Virginia Woolf when
nobody else does.

The excruciating detail of a marriage
is what I like, I say, the drifting
in and out of Clarissa's mind and into Peter's,
how they notice the flow of London traffic
as a living animal, how they feel
themselves distributed in sub-atomic
bits into each other and over the city's squares
and towers, out into the hedgerows, the waves.
But Clarissa wasn't married to Peter
he would say, if he'd read it, she was
married to Richard. And I'd say
maybe she was, maybe she was.

The New Republic, September 23, 2009

The McNay

after Kay Sage's self-portrait, *Le Passage*

by Kathleen Winter

The trouble is, I always want to go there
with you. When we exit the museum into the devil heat
I place my hand in yours, your sockless loafered steps
are slow. You know your shins are sticks,
your mouth is dry, your elegant, strong feet
and hands now oversized like the Burghers' bronze ones.

We angle into shade to talk about the work:
Sage's canvas with her back turned toward us
as she faces a featureless plain,
paint's language singing her dirge
for Tanguy, her vision landscape nightmare
monotony upset by the beauty of the back
of her left arm, the beauty of her naked back,
her self understanding.

We know you're going;
how can anybody help it?
I know despair's pathology,
that the world could never be
so bland, so flat as that suicide
scenery, yet I still can't see
how it will ever be okay for me
for you to leave it.

Ekephrasis, vol. 3, no. 6 Fall/Winter 2005

Mitosis

by Kathleen Winter

Roads below are hieroglyphs,
traceries spun by New Mexican
necessity: one-horse town to hitch
its ice-house to the truckstop.
Clouds distill their surfeit shadow,
crepuscular and effortless,
momentary as a hare on the road
before the dogs see.
My love, an accident

attaches to the bones.
It permeates the layers of skin,
the mat of veins, it dawdles in the nuclei
of cells that must divide to continue.
When we come together, I'm broken
as I hope I'll ever be.
Let us always share this mystery,
this salubrious traveling toward
again dividing from each other.

Invisible Pictures, chapbook, Finishing Line Press, 2008

Morning Poem

by Kathleen Winter

Yesterday I asked myself again if life can be corrupted by what you don't remember. Greg was on the phone waiting for my steel cut oats to simmer for the minimum half hour, to collapse and dissolve. When he told someone *she likes the oil paint version of oatmeal and I like the acrylic* I thought it might fit into a morning poem that spoke about the Steins' long-haired trophy cows, how the puny straw-colored cow had looked like she'd just woken up, the forelock veiling her amber eyes and clumps of coarse hair stiffening all over her torso into peaks pointing different directions, whipped-hard egg whites, and me sliding past the field on the way to class comparing the car clock to the clock on the tape deck to the wristwatch, each set ahead of reality in varying degrees. On the winding road I tried to remember how easy it would be to kill someone accidentally and how the time I did I hadn't been in the car at all and it had been empty, slowly rolling heavily backward and she much older and perhaps not hearing it at first, walking away outside as I was reaching for ice cream, for a loaf of bread. How she hadn't looked dead but only pale and almost naked as they tried to save her with their bare hands, then with a kit of blade and sparks, while I watched from a few yards apart as she lay still and more still and more still.

Field, vol. 80, Spring 2009

Eschatology

In the long run, we are all dead.
--John Maynard Keynes

by Kathleen Winter

Gray pelt of mouse limp in injury
beneath the kitchen's leaking ceiling,

gray subtraction. I crouch in a cramped
room displacing my mind, trying to put it

for an instant into your body.
The bait was irony working again,

you can taste the bitter end.
Perhaps you somehow know

there's nothing to be afraid of:
the irony of nothing, taking

so much of our attention,
power of the vacuum

ripping us again and again
out of our upholstered moment.

The New Republic, September 9, 2009

Morning

by Kathleen Winter

they come as promised
and fractional gifts

our dreams of the dead

we live with them
to lose them over again

to hunt them in the skittering
instant of waking

as owl scours darkness
for quick tendernesses

our parents' careless faces

explain themselves in terms
invented by our longing

The Legal Studies Forum, vol. 31, no. 2, 2007

Incarnation

by Kathleen Winter

To make meat, body, of this yearning seizing me,
I say you must hold my heart
Between the roof and the floor:
Between yawning gates,
Hinged jaws of where it waits
Like something on the way to gone,

Half-swallowed, irretrievable, fuchsia-
Sodden heart of the cactus fruit,
Denser than a fist of obsidian.
Your teeth rear up around it like Stonehenge stones
Like mah-jongg tiles like terrible stiff
Blond pompadours hard
Hard white chocolate rectangles.

You, too, yearning, toes hooked over
The edge, center so far forward the swoop's
Inevitable, my cactus heart in your mouth
Quivering, leaking out over everything--
--Purple lip, Yosemite chin,
White shirtfront residue of life before.

Invisible Pictures, chapbook, Finishing Line Press, 2008

The Gender of a Cow

After Olena Kaltyiak Davis

Catch the swing in the middle of the middle class.
Should I be this jazzed about being understood?
It's a small discrepancy, the gender of a cow.
Nineteenth century, an acre cost less
than a mule. Is cheating to concentrate
on looking at his eyes?
When trying seems too much to ask.
No computer program's going to make
him reappear. I can be jejune for only thirty
minutes at a time. Catch the swing in the middle of the middle class.
Should I be this jazzed about being understood?
Nineteenth century, an acre cost less
than a mule. It's a small discrepancy,
the gender of a cow. When trying seems, is cheating.
To concentrate on looking at his eyes. Too much to ask.
I can be jejune for only thirty
minutes at a time. No computer program's going
to make him reappear. Catch the swing
in the middle of the middle class. Should I be this
jazzed about being understood? Too much to ask. A small
discrepancy, the gender of a cow. Is cheating to concentrate
on looking at his eyes?
I can be jejune for only thirty
minutes at a time.

As I lie in the dark and swear to remember
the words, am I lying only to myself?

Tim House, Winter 2007

Snapshot of a Boxer

by Kathleen Winter

You sat with your back to the baby,
guarding him against the color green,
the insistence of steeples.

The eight a.m. sun moved out from clouds
like a well-trained MBA
adjusting to changed conditions.

A fleck of earth's veneer of life,
you had your memories, your desires,
your sensitivities to sounds, to smells,

to expressions like the British "barking mad."
No one had to tell you
cleverness is not a virtue.

In the quick distance,
playground's empty geometry
stood by to be embodied.

You waited silently, knowing
the creation is troubled in a way
that means no harm to anyone.

You waited for one of those people
who think they own trees,
own animals, to look in your direction.

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