

Open toAll



poems by
Kenneth Pobo

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Rapunzel Under Care

Years full of eyes
looking for the well hidden,
like Gretel, dead
of cirrhosis at forty,
and nobody knowing she drank,

it was said. The doctor
gives more pills to make
my bones floating balloons,

lips red coals. The house
needs cleaning and my lover
who calls me emotional
when I curse
likes it neat: another pill.
A blocked road suddenly

open. I've tried them all
and still it's another
prescription—they know me
at the pharmacy,
at least that's something.

Orchard

1.

The cherry blossom
and the moon
form a bent white bow.
An arrow of red cherries
sinking over a hill.

I am falling in the pit
of a cherry, dreaming
of death.
Scent of tall grass.

2.

The Mogul Emperor Akbar
loved mangoes.
He ordered 100,000 trees.
More than the fruit,
he craved the space
around each green
planet in the copper night.

Aziz said he saw
his master run naked
in the orchard

whenever the dark leaves
glistened in the rain.

3.

In Door County, Wisconsin,
the apple orchard
flung along a highway,
pieces of Stonehenge dancing.

I remember a gnarled tree.
Shrunken green apples rolling
on a gray table
cloth with four crows.

4.

Five sparrows drunk from
grapes lying on sticky grass
like open bottles

5.

Come to the orchards!

At dusk
roots suck up the red
water of the sky.

Trees are vapor
drifting across
early leanings of the moon.

More Crocuses

I'm not ready to say
I've got enough bulbs
to make spring

zing—as for crocuses,
only a billion will do,
each a purple, white
or yellow Oz. Even
in winter an African
violet can give a glimpse
of any number of heavens.
When I die, which heaven
will I get? So many

to end up in. Mine
had better be loaded
with crocuses or I won't
budge from this lousy
planet which can still
birth one flower

after another. Hell,
a budless Earth—thin roots
sent deep into muck. Buds

that promise color
but when they open,
snakes twist out.

Poison for your eyes.

Petunias Out Back

Jennifer says it's easy
to become sentimental
about petunias. Sometimes
she looks quickly
away from them,
but admits she'd be
lost without each one.
She is not well
and petunias give no
sympathy—with plants,
it's everyone
for herself.
She may die yearning
for a moth between
petals striped red
and white, the return
of seedling after
she has emptied
her hand of the trowel,
guardian
of the sweet growth.

Open to All

My morning garden,
a city at rush hour—
blossoms popping into place,

jostling for the best look
at the sun. Some plants
fight—a purple coneflower

so dwarfs my Tropicana
rose, it hardly buds.
When it finally gets one,

it hangs right into the
coneflower bevy, staking
a fierce claim. I read in

a glitzy gardening guide
that gardens are peaceful.
Death is peaceful,

but a garden is alive,
the way a city is, different
each second, open to all.

Cricket Killings

1.

A black sky of crickets
behind stairs. Feet
like lightning over cement.
Small legs rub, sound
of a screw
which won't turn right.

2.

Hunting them, his vision
vanishes along shelves.
He hides
behind a smokescreen of white
insecticide. A shot,
then another. The cricket's
legs surrender like flags.

Shells of the cricket dead
at his feet.
He's taut, a violin.
He crawls between
paralyzed tendons. Night
surrounds him
with high notes driven down.

3.

Hidden in
his cellar, a lone
cricket calls to her ancestors.

Drumbeats tap in his skull.
Millions are marching.
By morning he'll be driven
mad—black rifles
pointing at his white
and twitching head.

Key West Cemetery

Sun on stone,
humid names drip.
Flowers. Memory
needs a bouquet,
a place to rest.

We walk slowly past
these bodies,
take our time.

The sea is kinder,
covers bones
with coral and sand.
Our salt veins
flow back under fins,
turtle shells,
pulsing anemones,

but among graves,
grief has an address:
mother, father, lover,
less than photographs,
a few stories told
which can't be proven,
like faith or love.

We listen for a voice
that cannot speak,
grow more aware
of breath. The cemetery,
a community.
Stars petal the ground
with light.

Ballet: Birds above the Ship

1. First Curtain

Four women stand
in white. An electric line
halves their bodies. Men in black
dance by them. Bodies melting into
a sea between joints.
Everything crouches. Slides.

2. Second Curtain

On dream geography, we hold
Time to our throats. Broken glass.
Dancers collect the pieces.
An arm becomes a chest. Moment
widens into a year. Year sinks through
an eyelid.
We remain at a border.

3. Third Curtain

Swan Lake: a junction of weather. Sun
deep on palace steps. Rain in secret notches.
Then light again. As they dance
a silver vessel enters a dark
impatient sea.

No one knows its destination.
Narrow moon: the dance
is over. Flame is/in ash. Phoenix.
Birds above the ship.

Two Owls

Two owls look at me
like I'm only a thing
too big to swoop down
and carry to a nest.

I feel naked, usually
an ok feeling,
but not before them—
they judge, look for vermin.

I am just an entertainment,
too silly to be dangerous.

Needing Orange Blossoms

Your face is a wad of crumpled
paper; your body
is deep into the recliner.

I don't know what to tell you—
everything sounds like pennies
falling into a tin cup.

I want to send you a crate
of orange blossoms from Florida
bursting open between slats.

My bag holds the usual lies
that never bear fruit or the smell
of fruit forming in the bud.

Gourds

In the back yard
on the fence
they lie on leaves,
Indian pottery,
no two alike,
some with fat bottoms,
vegetable Buddhas,
others twisty-
o and elegant.
Even in December
when they fall
they melt over soil,
completely original.
but you can gather
up the stragglers,
shake them to hear
the rattling
of paper clips,
bring them in
at dawn, frost
in crevice lakes
melting, gourds
laughing till they roll
off the shelf.

Autumn Hive

Most of us are already dead. The rest can barely move.
Ice forming on our wings. Snapdragons. Sedum. Clover.
Flowers and bees. Always on the same luxury liner
captained by Falling Temperatures.

One of your poets asked, *Death, where is thy sting?* Our
stingers turn to powder. Dark skies. A sudden freeze.
These sting a whole population. A child takes us to
show-and-tell. She holds a cemetery sixty eyes visit.
Sixty blossoms.

Frost

Clinging to window frames,
burnt into doorknobs,
the dawn frost settles.

The weigela bush has gone
green red yellow
and black outlined

in silver. The japonica
tree with tarnished pots
in the empty fragrance.

These I saw flaking
with butterflies a month ago.
The frost cuts in,

a more dangerous beauty,
photosynthesis leaning
toward crystal, bright

ice pods cracking open.
Starlings at the feeder.
They will remain

all winter. I will be
sorry when robins
outnumber them in

spring and frost
disappears: the early blossom
on the japonica orange-red

in early heat,
clear and heavy,
strain of unyielding bud.

Garden Under Snow

The garden holds way
too much February.
It has a snowskin
that ought to melt right
off the bones
of that clunky month

but doesn't. Gray
sombros of rose cones,
I-died-green weed stems.
Sun should be hard
at work, but it's only just
turning on. Under

white, perennials plan
a revolution
they're sure to win
for a while.

Trina and the Light

Married for nineteen years,
she still sleeps

with the light on, believes
monsters under the bed

thrive on the dark,
their pupils growing,

claws thickening. Frank
holds her but knows his skin

can't stop her trembling.
When they make

love, she keeps her eyes closed,
she hardly knows how

her husband looks naked.
He sees all too clearly

her taut face
in his hands,

her fear that in the midst
of joy

something will come
and ruin it.

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