

FRIENDS DREAMING

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Clowning in a shop, I close my eyes
and roll on the water bed.

At night they reappear:
our bodies rolled to the charnel

house in the plague year slop
and quiver like jelly water beds.

Half-timbered houses lean out -
no lights now.

Carts come in - French
back from the guillotine,

bodies rolled off like balloons
half filled with water.

Last a liver: slick
and glistening in a wet film

rolls in on a wheelbarrow,
thick yellow-brown lobes: my animal.

When they dump it in,
it crackles and burns

like the bodies, gone
as fast as a Christmas tree.

Returning to the scene:
sanctuary, marsh, water

split by a causeway
where watchers group

to see a snowy egret.
White face, white hair,

lavender sweater pinned together,
she comes down the path.

When I bend down to touch
her dog, patting and scratching

through the thick tufts of white hair,
the way I used to, the way he loved,

I see her blue felt slippers,
and my dog, who is dead, becomes my mother.

Dressed in grey flannel and a pullover
I stand on the kitchen table touching her

My father leans against the sink
waiting to take us for our sunday trip.

They look at each other after I touch her.
I remember that look for a long time.

Our house is a box
set on a mountain

glassed in on one side
where the sun comes in

hot at noon off the snow.
Sky: azure, sapphire, cloudless.

I stand at the wheel;
I am not tired;

I am not hungry;
no one cries.

The walls are lined with what
I have made at this wheel.

When you come in
we watch it all:

the shelves of curving pots,
the wheel going round,

wet clay turning in my hands,
a shape rising.

Mother is in her kitchen;
father is in his black woolen suit,

short jacket, stiff white shirt,
no collar, buttoned to the neck.

Too clean for my eyes,
he sits at a wooden table

cracking nuts, wooden man with brown hands.
A fire burns in the open hearth

where I could stand upright.
My brother oils the black spit.

The walls turn red, a heated grate,
air, hot and close, a furnace.

Upstairs in the loft
my sister lies on her stomach

looking down through the boards.
Mother is in the corner -

I see her back, apron bow,
grey bun stuck with tortoise shell pins,

yellow and brown, streaky.
No one listens.

My eldest brother, father's henchman,
executioner, takes my hand.

I don't know what I've done
but I know I am bad.

Red clay paths twist and wind
like markings on an old map.

Robed figures incline their thoughtful heads
like The School of Athens.

Red, blue and gold: a burning glass.
Along the path the thick grass

glows like a jewel - I
don't know how else to describe it,

a garden of art, but alive!
We walk and hear the water; closer,

we see the silvery ripples lap
where a boy in a sailor suit

unwinds a ball of string
letting his toy boat drift out.

Why should we dream like
art we know? A Dada nightmare.

Is vision a mistake?
The inner eye - I'll show you mine:

sliced in two like a hard-boiled egg,
the pupil lengthens to a yellow tunnel.

At the end, a windowless room.
Behind my eye: yellow clay,

bulging walls, chains and pulleys,
a coil of copper wire unwinding

shaking in space
like the branch of a tree.

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In the room at the top of the stairs.
Heavy rain, the windows shake;

wind blows; bottom door opens;
someone is creeping up.

I reach for my sister;
she isn't there.

Sitting up, I see a chinaman,
black braid, black silk cap

small yellow hands,
face I can't read, a cliché,

but the carbon steel cleaver
in his rising hand is real

coming toward me.
My own scream wakes me.

Father closes the window
against the rain.

His schoolmaster's face is patient.
"It's only the rain. Were you afraid?"

Out in the cold -
the Alps.

A cul de sac of ice.
Four on a ledge.

Steel blue, grey and white,
the sky so blue

it could ignite and smoke
like a car lighter.

A star swings toward us;
the blond grabs on,

swings out in a long slow arc,
falls as my mouth stretches to an O.

I don't know the people I am with;
I don't know who died.

I see his legs twisted under him like a doll's.
Now we are three

walking to a phone booth:
enameled red, bulging fender, fire engine.

Call after call.
Ear-piece like ice.

The answers to our questions
have nothing to do with our situation.

Best to keep quiet,
best to say nothing.

We know each other now:
my husband, my sister and I.

In the middle of the night
in the middle room,

less than three,
crosslegged, small pink feet,

eyes dark and clear as a lemur's,
pale blue lids, lashes' penciled shadow,

holding my soft pink blanket
rubbing it on my upper lip.

The parade begins:
mother first, hair in curlers,

a pink wrap, bunny slippers,
panic stricken; in comes father:

"Trouble! Trouble! Don't ask her;
she never tells us anything."

Did I ever touch his faded
blue and grey plaid robe,

cracked leather slippers?
Why are they so ridiculous?

Their arms jerking, pulled by strings,
stop when grandmother comes in:

"Who could live with him?" she booms.
Her suit is like armor,

a double-breasted tailor-made.
Pulling my thin father to her chest,

she strokes his head, rocking, petting.
"I understand, I understand," she says.

I wrap my pink blanket around me.
They take hands and dance around my bed.

The sun breaks in,
spotlights in a long tunnel.

The path is clear, but
pressed with growth so rank

I can't see beyond the tangle.
A thick slant of amber light

in the meadows opening out
in another kind of weather

where the watchers stare:
my chorus, my mourners,

eyes without bodies.
My feet step to the rite,

my stomach heaves and knots.
Then it's there, so soon.

Down on my hands and knees.
Dry roots, dead leaves,

roots and tendrils growing down
toward the bottom, out of the stones.

The more I look, the more I see,
my replica staring back at me,

sickly, fish white, out of
a laboratory jar. The eyes are grey,

pebble color, bulging, pinpoint irises,
flesh falling away, decayed,

blaming eyes of a foetus idol,
the face of an old baby, myself.