wooden teeth

Rebecca Brown
Herman the Frog

Most frogs are scared silly by the idea of a one ton metal object, but once upon a time there was a little frog named Herman. Herman liked to play with cars, not under them. He would wait until a door opened, then he would hop up, and hide under the seats. Occasionally a door would smash him in the butt, and he would go flying across the floor of the car, but that only added to the fun. Herman liked the way that cars bounced around as they were standing still, and how it made the world change around him. Not only did he not realize that the world was still basically the same, and that it was the car that moved, but in addition he did not realize that it was the road that made the bounce, not the car. Had he known these two facts, perhaps he would not have been so partial to cars that he hated buses. He really did not like buses; he felt that their intimidating size, and lack of single hinged doors took away from the fun, and the fact that they kneedle down for him only added to the bad karma.

Sometimes for an added kick Herman would run around the floor of the car, always being careful to avoid the funny congruent lines that ended in rounded blocks of leather, as the last time he encountered one of those, his fun stopped as he found himself stack up against the floor that curved up under the pedals, which is how that area became Herman's favorite part of the car. A lot of people tend to overlook the importance of the floor that curves up behind the pedals, but Herman owes his life to that particular part, and as a result he has started a small campaign on its behalf. He was going to call it "Justice to the Floor that curves behind the pedals," whose main goals were awareness and beautification, but then he remembered that he could not speak English, so he called it "ribbit." He walked around all day saying "ribbit," in fact it seems that with the exception of a few croaks, that was all he said. A few of his friends got a little worried when one of the female frogs confused his political chant with a mating call. They were worried, because Herman's mission would definitely be sidetracked if he got caught up in the family scene.

Unfortunately their attempts to keep the female away from the young radical failed, and he now lives in the small pond at the end of the road with four taddies, as he calls his offspring, and 40 more on the way.

—Matthew Sancomb
Prose Poem

The sun burns low behind a line of faraway trees, leaving a mist halfway between grass and sky. I am strangely awake at this hour, his body crammed against me in the too-small bed. Goosebumps dot my arms and legs. He has stolen every inch of comforter, cocooning against the wall. I shivered through most of last night, blaming the broken radiator. We Americans can't bear this kind of cold in July—thin blood, I told him. A sweatshirt lies crumpled beneath the desk so I put it on, step over to the window and hanging over the soccer field are two hot air balloons. Nearly touching, their colors make a faded rainbow in the fog, blue blending into green, yellow, purple. Orange red licks of flame leap into the air. I can imagine standing in the wicker basket, rushing waves of heat holding me aloft while fields rush beneath me. I see no people in the balloons, and for a moment I wonder if they have drifted away together, escaping, fires lit by sheer will.

—Danielle Bottinger
Moonlight Sestina

Winter sucks when you're a slave during Christmas.
"Row harder scum," spits Captain Stubing from America
not to be confused with The Love Boat, shiny and white.
Rats lick bleeding toes, an occasional nibble, the children
Don't mind coach class. Rotting wooden hulls sardine black
Epidermis. Sixty percent will survive, so relax about payment.
You toss ninety dead to the sharks, tidy payment
For unwanted escorts. Ghosts of Christmas
Past murmur more unheed advice. Ocean black
Stirs to ocean blue as an orange moon spotlights America.
Hordes rush toward the dock with their children
Watching enameled slaves march quietly past white
Sailors on deck. No longer is their underwear white
and fresh though. Coins clink clank in your hands, payment
Failing snow cleanses their parch tongues, a cold Christmas meal. Welcome to America.
Land of the free, home of the brave, gatekeeper to the black.

Things have changed since then, sort of. Now black
folds have the NAACP. David Duke speaks for white
Malcolm X has returned to more than the theater, with payment
long overdue. Tit for tat and all that. Merry Christmas.
Black kills white kills black kills white kills black kills children.
Harvard's prospectus harbors many flavors of children.
A virtual rainbow coalition border most pamphlets, black
(a token?) always smiling, always present! Cold eggnog for Christmas
tastes like shit in Harlem, but great at Country Club for white
Man. Ha! Black attorneys, white clients, green judges, payment
is a blonde glued to a Gore-tex string bikini. How do I get to America?
AAA refuses to highlight a Triptik for destination America.
ACLU offers a Long Island Iced Tea, but my children
are around and the taste from Harlem still lingers. Payment
is automated with my Visa Gold, but I'm black
so Sport checks my secondary ID. "Druids" in white
robes still dance beside burning crosses this Christmas.
America: did you know some photos color Jesus black?
Children present long lists to a Santa draped red, and white.
Payment spills to next month so relax, and enjoy Christmas.

-Anurag Agarwal
It's a Form—A Jazz Poem

I don't need Jazz.
When I am sitting
in a slow brown sun
or under a shadow of dust.

I don't need Jazz.
When they cut me open
smelling like formaldehyde
my skin green like urine.

I won't be in pain
from the cold metal table,
no taste of my swollen white tongue
in my mouth and no needs.

It's not in my bones
or my fingers, scaring me
to moan or sing and dance,
jump or see Eelope
    in trumpet screams.

Well,
I'm not into chicks.
   Ngeors or my axy can.
and I'm calm,
because I don't see Jazz
like red neon streaked
along a brass trumpet that almost reads
    Lost
or   Cock
or   Push
nd I don't need Jazz.

—Jeff Sank
Thief of Colors

Take my eyes.
I won't need them.
String them up
on silver chains,
blue and white
flag of victory
proudly circling
your neck. Toss them
in a dusty leather
pouch filled with
dry chicken bones.
Call it a voodoo charm.
Give them to
that old woman,
lids drooping low
on milky white spheres,
restoring her vision
like some pagan Jesus.

Take my eyes.
I don't need them.
I can slip
inside your head,
pluck the half-formed
visions, still
upside-down
from your retina's
hot red curve.
—Danielle Bottinger
i dream of you kneeling over me all day
you crouch above the earth/universe
expanding inside/brown globe of my belly
comb your fingers through your hair
loose golden strands tumble onto mexico
then slip down vanishing into the amazon
i wake into cool shadows spun by evening
still you toss your hairs across my body
sunless/showering over my skin you
(i can not hold your face together/scatter
i am too weak to wrestle with the memory
i follow you down to dusk behind my eyes
—Maryann Mannell

Absolution Mine
When walls flicker vanilla white
Bed checkered tiles turn black,
And cracks don’t show in the candle light.
Shadows stop twisting my hands at night
In cold blue knots behind my back.
When the walls flicker vanilla white
Bespeckled eyes blink, lose sight
Of me creeping, sweating, crayoning walls black
So cracks don’t show in the candle light.
The rat that gnaws my fingertips at night
Cowers and whimpers and turns its back.
When the walls flicker vanilla white,
Dancing flames from the candle ignite
My phantom curtains; char them black.
The cracks don’t show in the candle light.
That I watch as I fall from my bed with delight
And throw the straps from across my back.
When the walls flicker vanilla white
Cracks don’t show in the candle light.
—Robyn Bright
I see my emotion, crystallized, ordered.  
A composition of clusters  
touching  
Amid myriad replications of  
Senior feelings;  
Complicated connections,  
Organic even to the plane of  
molecular structures;  
I trace relationships of  
component particles  
That assign causes and  
Characteristic  
Behavior.  
Carbon based, but ethereally  
Detached.  
Able to be transmitted  
by sensory interface;  
Identified but not understood.  
I see causes of action not  
Grasped  
or  
Tossed away if unpleasantly  
Obvious.  
I attempt manipulation, if not  
Engineer  
Virus molecules of logic--  
Turned loose to succumb  
Renegade superior  
Manifestations  
of feeling.  
Factored with your  
seemingly  
Destructive strains--  
Deployed carelessly  
As response to overloaded  
Productivity.  
—Derryn DeBlitz
Blackwater Wildlife Preserve, Maryland, June 1993

Ninety seven degrees,
and the mud crawls up through my toes,
pleasantly cooling,
the seductive lick of a young lover.
From the marshes’ edge,
I watch the cranes wade through the still water
and am insanely jealous.

Horseflies buzz by my head and nest in my hair
as I pull off my shirt. Glistening like a dead corpse,
I watch a mosquito, alighting gently on my breast,
I crush it between my fingers, and feel the grit of its life.

The water moves lazily through the channels,
and the patches of wetland, thriving with life,
ilike a French garden,
ending and beginning with curved, perfect edges,
Dragonflies hover above, pausing before diving back into the metropolis.

I dream for a moment of rubbing the cool mud on my face and hands
and plunging into the swamp, savage,
insensate to the horseflies, ignorant of the malarial stench.
Daringless, I swat away the flies and
they run and scramble through the air before regaining their footing
and shooting straight to the sun, confident that the wetland
will be there, quiet and empty and alive.

—Jeremy Lowry
Untitled

I've got it all down
What I need you to tell me
so I'll stop thinking,
stop dreaming,
hoping...
feeling.
How true,
as creative as I might think
I am, I've fallen in the trap—
my heart is holding me
back. So just recite the enclosed
remarks and maybe it'll put me on track—
kill the sparks that burn my soul
and scar the most sensuous parts.
I'm sure I misconstrue
everything you say,
what you do without thinking.
(I'm thinking too much.)
You're forgetting
I'm a fool.
Accepting your hugs
for more than they're worth.
Taking them like drugs to feel
what I know isn't real.
I suppose I'm addicted.
So please, just say,
"They're placebos."
—Leah Ann Hill
12621 Three Sisters Road

Two hawks with glazed eyes circle the mist,
and the raindrops fall to the dirt road like sequins.
There are acres of buffalo grass,
combed to the side by the wind
in a green and tousled part.
They cover the hill along Three Sisters Road,
to the cliff along the edge of the sea.
I hibernate here the summer alone,
never seeing another person to defile it.
Crouching by the cliff’s edge I braid
handfuls of the grass-hair into ropes
and lower them into the denim blue saucepan
that is the sea.
The wind blows with the smell of the schooners
I have read about in books— their decks
tossing with salted and pickled men.
It smells of seaweed,
and approaching rain.
There is a narrow shack here, two stories,
one painted yellow— the yellow
of egg yolks— with scars
of smooth wood laid bare.
It lists to the left,
and its roof holds a cormorants’ nest.
The house has no garden, because I cultivate weeds.
The porch is wide, the inked sky above opened
to moonlight and rain. The waves storm the sand
in single file, but they are as different as driftwood.
Their calls are like thunder, and they
follow my thoughts, anticipating.
The hawk above follows its mate in a tidy circle
until it wings off suddenly with a tender cry.
Like someone who has just discovered
what it is to be alone.
—Paul Gachet

the infinite frog

Shortly after birth an infinite frog hatched in my stomach
pecked his way eggfree like a chick and lodged himself
beneath my lungs where he spent a tadpoleless youth
ballooning into a mushroomsmooth-textured infinite frog
who yesterday leapt up and planted himself in my throat.
His boggish breath flooded my nasal cavities with vapor
and though i choked clawed at my neck performed
the heimlich over a chair i could not dislodge the infinite frog
who yesterday hopped up into my mind where his glassy eyes
shattered(exposed to the seastrength pressure of my thoughts).
Yes, the jagged shards of crystal pain who squirm and sliver
through my brain are the exploded eyes of an infinite frog
who hatched in my stomach shortly after birth.
—Maryann Mannell
Location

After being properly altered
and moved
by a performer who gave trance
like a rare's aim or an enclave
of big, true
voices,
transparent, I floated
passing breathing
colors, and reached my wings,
chariot to escort me promptly
above the concrete scene
in my forest, enchanted
to my steamroom, a dome
where I passed water over hot
coals and listened to the water
fall near as I purified
my spirit, dreaming awake.
I knelt at my altar, an oval field.
I lit a single white candle where carvings
of past spirits rose alive
in rings.
I drank my morning coffee in my light
house, the enchanted kind, on a hill
and rushed

outside– An old woman between worlds,
screaming in the quiet, native tongue.
I danced barefoot spirals in my white gown
blessing the land with my pulse and flow, red.
I didn’t answer my phone:
"Hi! This is Debbie. I’m not home right now.
Please leave a message at the beep."
The walls were white
my view: a city
my dress: Ann Taylor.
I had: no field,
a telephone to sing to,
a Safeway candle, a Diamond Cab ride,
the splatter of the shower.
Were I to run through my field
I’d be dropping
eight
floors onto concrete
Icarus
D.C.
1984.
—Deborah Jo Shachnow
Crows in utero

Right now her legs are up on the counter, calves wrapped around a register, black skirt hiked up a little. A silver bottle covered with Hebrew or maybe Arabic writing hangs like a comet tail between her black-sweatered breasts. She's rubbing lotion on her thighs because it's dry here in the record store, despite the April showers. Watching her rub, the whole month seems less banal.

"What's in it?" I ask, looking up from her thighs for our glances to meet, hers an detached acknowledgment, mine a studied work of self-art, deep blue eyes gazing soulful and abrupt from behind some strands of greasy blond hair. Like I feel, like a visionary must in the haggard days before he shoots himself, alone in the mass of voices and opinions, I look. Neither's more important, and the rain pours down outside.

"Perfume?" a customer asks paunchily, baldingly. You can see he wants her in his shallow little love life, maybe to fuck and maybe to iron his rumpled Bill Blass dress shirts. I start to hate the little caps inside the machine. I continue hating their obnoxious intrusions into my pathetic outside. "Bubbles? You know, like one of those uh, bubble-things, you know, to blow?"

"I don't know," she says slowly, breathily, "what's in it. It's never been opened."

"You should rub it and maybe a genie'll come out." My voice surprises me, I hadn't been thinking in words. I stand, I reach out innocent as a wheatfield and hold the bottle in my hand, the barely tactile back of my hand brushing a hollow, a just-discovered country between me and her heart. Any piece of god in me would know that she shakes at that touch, that she flutters when I put myself in that space, but I'm not yet ready to admit imagination is its own sort of divinity. If I were I might stake out a little ground there where it looks so barren, and grow us all an open heaven.

I rub the tiny bottle between my thumb and forefinger, three times in a circle. I know what my wish is for.

—Brian Fannin
Poem for A Lover Dying Young

for Paul

The hours of quiet always seem to come when they are not wanted.
The weariness which reaches out and shakes my young man’s body and
leaves me broken and sobbing an vomiting on the floor.
The bitter smile of a woman I took everything from when I told her years later
that I had no use for it.
The tenderness of a boy who is desperately trying to be a man but can’t help but fail.
The unending hymns of the old homeless man who can’t stop and has stopped trying.
The single moment when I realized that his young chest has stopped rising and
falling and in a flash of selfishness saw my own face and then realized that
everything that would come next would be to the conclusion to a book I had just started to write two weeks before.
The river that rolls past and over and through dykes and levees and brings with
it the promise of destruction and the hope of redemption.
My little sister, almost a woman now, smiling like she did when I read to her.
The City, its madness, a maestrom of whirling diamond and cubic zirconium, its
piles of human garbage blowing like gun dust before the awesome storm.
My heart beat and its majesty and the small sad knowledge that its beat
inevitably heralds my death.
The touch, so gentle, of his lips to mine and the tiny tremor in his eyelid as we part.

—Jeremy Lowry
Thinking Back On It

Nights capsuled in the back seat of your baby blue station wagon.
You said your mom and you took garbage to the dump
to exercise the black ghosts of your picture perfect house.
You were so small you slid from your mother's side
when she rounded tree lined neighborhood corners.
And now there's garbage here again on this backseat pew.

It gets so hot you drip drip pour your salty sweat onto me.
We smack against one another
and the vinyl seat and you smell like sour sex
and the acidic stink of all that old mold sitting in these heavy weeks when we've nothing to do but work
and swim and fuck.
When you are pumping me like your father showed you how to pump this family car full of toxic that you shouldn't like the smell of but did, All I am thinking of is how the car is rocking rocking me creaking and shaking like I am when I fake it.
And how the water from the world has made air bubbles on the fabric roof that is so close the top of your head makes it disappear when you come up for air.
And how I'm really rolling in the shit now cause all I am is a lump a fucking lump on the seat your family carts away its garbage.

And when we're done I have to get out into the dark air full with bloody bugs who would drain me if they could like you do.
My knees shake but I've got to pull up my stiffened jeans before you see me naked to the trees who whisper like old women looking down and waving their green handkerchiefs and dismissing drips that roll down as far as my knees.

And you you war trained man lose that Trojan coated inside and out with you and me back like a piece of sweater lint onto the seat Where all the garbage goes.

—Mikaela Lidgard