

Song of my battered soul

*temi rose*

I must lose this sadness

Take it deep in the woods

Make sure it has no bread

To crumble on the ground

It must not follow me home

Again

I must lose the sorrow

This weight I carry in my thighs

In my heart - the song

That presses joy out and moves

Me towards ledges, bridges and razors

I must lose this sense of being

Unequal to the situation, incapable

Of living a good life

I must lose this sadness

Come home alone in peace and tenderly

Caress the night and my solitude

I must lose this sorrow

Bathe myself in light and forgive myself

My trespasses as I have forgiven others who have trespassed against me

I will lose this sadness

*From an ontology of everyday things to an epistemology of desire.*



# Perceptions

Perceptions

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*women's poetry for a change*

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temperance

*rochelle hope mehr*

I am suffocating on your good intentions  
they cut off my air supply  
what have you done?  
nothing so awful  
on the face of it  
but I wear down so easily  
when your hands grind me  
to a fault

I know you mean well  
but I can't change my face  
my way of looking at the world  
it may not please you  
but it's mine  
and I cling to it  
I won't put on the blush  
or cosmetically remove the scar

to appease you  
leave me the bar  
leave me this last semblance of my sanity  
of my sanctity  
let me retain  
freedom so precious  
my own measured thoughts  
unfettered by exuberance

can I call it poetry?

*margaret boles*

sometimes I feel  
bombarded  
with the weight  
of words  
waiting  
to be woven  
into a mosaic  
of sound and form  
the pressure of this task  
at times confuses  
as this jagged jumble  
erupts onto my page  
and then I wonder  
can I call it poetry?

chandelier

*rochelle hope mehr*

it seems as if you can't get anywhere  
in this world  
except by crowding out others  
I can't grab opportunities  
like balloons  
and flit from job to job  
from man to man  
not if it means lording it over  
friends and loved ones  
those I've a loyalty to  
better than I  
I can't crowd them out  
let them capitalize  
let the balloons explode  
in their faces  
leave me safely, quietly  
ensconced

the woman and the moon

*margaret boles*

the woman and the moon  
they are opposite sides  
of the same coin  
both are kin to the tides  
moon governs  
while woman is controlled by the  
living tides of life

silly

*temi rose*

in the middle of the night  
while we spend time dreaming  
and you sit alight a star  
and sing your darkness feeling  
sad and all alone don't despair  
silly one I am there and you are not alone

not right

*margaret boles*

I can not 'not write'  
for writing helps me  
to make sense of 'we'  
for you do not  
know where you end  
and  
where I begin and  
togetherness  
we find  
so hard to  
accomplish for  
it seems when  
we are together 'I'  
am wiped out

you are you  
and I am me  
and writing helps  
me makes sense  
of me and of  
we

here I am again

*temi rose*

I came here looking for something  
I came here looking for something  
I found more than I bargained for  
I came here to shed my skin  
I came here to begin  
by ending something  
what's it for?  
accumulation of property  
accumulation of experience  
practice  
practice on the tight rope of existence  
out from nothing  
into emptiness  
I came here looking for something  
the city of light  
longing longing  
that's what I remember  
my baggage: twenty three years of desire

the ribbon of the day

*kathryn paulsen*

Each morning Angela tied her hair in the ribbon on the day. She didn't have just seven the way girls have panties. She had colors and patterns, some of them raveled at the ends, all of them bent at the spots where the knots came, none of them washed in months or years. "I like you," Daddy used to say. "I like you with a ribbon in your hair." Yet he had never bought her one. She picked them herself. There were some so beautiful she hadn't dared wear them.

She liked to imagine herself in a dress of ribbons, all draped from one winding around the top of her bodice, blowing in the wind, exposing her thin flesh. But it would be expensive, so many ribbons. Sunday's was turquoise. It didn't match what she was wearing, but no matter. It was her mood. With a brilliant sky, as hot as hell, she flouted the clouds. She stroked and twirled her scanty pony tail and the rich, ridged grosgrain. That afternoon, she and Lela had had a fight over a toothbrush. Later they would wonder why. Later they would drop their eyes and apologize and put their heads together as if they were telling secrets and even kiss and let a tear or two paint pink lines on their cheeks. It was all show, purely for Daddy. Lela had a weak chin and was from Boston. Angela didn't like her.

Monday's was yellow. If the other girls condescended to criticize her, they might have said it brought out the sallowness of her complexion but she knew they wouldn't bother. She thought instead of velvet, toasty butter. It was nice to have enough of it to smear on whatever you wanted. Angela worried that the butter they got from the cow on their farm was too white. She worried, even though Daddy said it was the best butter. Angela's first chore of the day was to set the table for lunch. She used the metal tumblers they'd got from eight books of Green Stamps and she gave Daddy the gold one and herself the blue.

She couldn't give Daddy just any color; she'd never give him white or red or purple, and rarely brown or green. She couldn't tell you why, except that the white one had a permanent brown ring inside its joint from bad dishwashing. Except that something bad might happen, she couldn't tell you what. She wouldn't give herself those colors either; but sometimes, when she was feeling out of sorts, she'd give herself and another girl the same color, maybe the blue or orange. But no one else could ever have Daddy's color.

So when there wasn't enough tumblers to go around without using two gold ones, Angela had to ask Terry to wash one. Terry didn't like that one bit. She asked what was wrong with the other gold one, and Angela had to say it wasn't clean. Terry gave it a quick rinse, and Angela said it still

wasn't clean. Terry said Angela was crazy; Angela said she'd wash the blankety-blank glass herself. Terry said why not use a glass-glass instead; there were plenty of those. Angela said she didn't think Daddy'd like it. And that settled that.

Tuesday she chose a pattern for change, though lately she'd preferred the pure true strength of colors, no fads. But this ribbon was sweet, a sweet striped powder pink and powder blue. "Ain't she sweet," she imagined Daddy singing to her, as he sang to one or another of them now and then, but less and less lately, "See her walkin' down the street. Now I ask you very confidentially...." That afternoon came her weekly trip to town. She went with Bobbi and Dana, whom she didn't mind, except for the silly way Bobbi spelled her name and topped the I with a circle or even a heart, even sometimes with an arrow through it. How childish could you get? But Bobbi drove the truck and drove it well. And Daddy called her a sergeant, whereas Angela was only a PFC. Angela thought it was about time she got a license, if only Daddy could find the time to teach her how to drive. In town they bought groceries, ate ice cream sundaes, and spent their allowances - Bobbi on movie magazines and stationary, Dana on two paperback mysteries and Angela on candy bars and ribbons, thin little ribbons she thought she'd wear two, three, four at once.

She was tempted by a black velvet one, but she didn't think she was ready for black velvet. On the way back Bobbi asked them what they'd wish for if they could have one wish. Bobbi would wish for one of those Mercedes with the diesel engines. Dana wished for trip to Paris, a whole year in Paris. "I don't know," said Angela when her turn came. "There's so much." Her mind was still on her ribbons. "Give me a minute and I'll think of something." But quickly they began talking about something else. Angela thought it was a good thing she hadn't told her wish, because if she had it wouldn't come true. And she thought there was a chance, just a chance but one worth keeping, that Daddy could see what wishes were in their hearts and grant them. She admired the brilliant sunset they were driving into even though it meant they were late for dinner.

Wednesday's was orange, a very old orange, turning brown at the tips but the rest of it still fine. Angela had never washed it or any of the others because she was afraid they'd fade or grow limp, even limper than they were for all the wearing. She never lent her ribbons, but then no one asked her anymore. Late in the day, Peggy Sue did a dance out front by the road, wiggling her hips a lot and swinging her arms. She was dressed like a harem girl, tied in lots of scarves, she had almost as many scarves as Angela had ribbons, and wearing bright red jewels on both hands and around her neck. She said they were rubies, and it didn't matter that they were made from taillights by kids at a farm down the road, because they looked like rubies. They twinkled and danced, better than Peggy Sue, Angela thought. Peggy Sue spent most of her time playing little 7 inch

skinnydipping

*barbara stacy*

naked in the ocean of cold air  
I plunge into warmer water  
breaking the leafy shadows  
into rings that swim with me  
up and down this garden pool  
here is peace and such silence  
as if the world had knocked off  
for an afternoon and left me  
all the water on the planet  
for my wetness - brooks and lakes  
Nile and Pacific surging  
between my legs and I become  
an aquatic creature, finny  
joyous as a thousand fish  
shaking their tails  
dancing in the dark.

bon voyage

*rochelle hope mehr*

he yells now  
because the cancer has spread to his brain  
he yells at me for trying to spoon-feed him tuna fish  
says the pills make him ill  
he knows I mean well  
he'll get up tomorrow  
he's having bad dreams  
he has to sleep  
put out the light  
goodnight

and I think we are all in some way  
touched in the brain  
none of us really well  
all of us hovering on a plain  
shitting in our underwear  
fuming in not-so-quiet despair  
not so gentle  
nor so brave  
as we fumble our way  
past the Everyday

## My Environment

*temi rose*

Once upon a time a long long time ago  
there lived a princess with a heart of steel.

incomplete incense

failed for ever

notice nothing

stay in the place you started

wrap yourself in substance

enlarge your self

after effects of shock include

failed nervous system

weakness intervening in each interaction

fear mandates loss of control

too rigid

too stiff

too much pain

don't stop

don't think

don't wait

keep it up

don't let go

too hard

to know

to own

it all

ama

*mary laine yarber*

She rounds her coral lips and

whistles a robin's song

flushing blood and air from

lungs to make room for one last

breath and dives ivory-nude

but for fins wagging

into pale and somber water

a silent graceful arc sinking

past orange ball anemones

and purple tub sponge

her lungs compressing

under meters of green

she can't hover long in

the alluvial cave scooping

crusted mollusks into a

twined reed bag and must

soon flutter-kick back

toward a wet undulating sky

where she will discover

the one

in ten thousand

prize

a lustrous ivory ovule

chaste beneath

its filmy

nacre

veil

records on her portable record player and dancing around it. When she did it outdoors, boys would watch her, getting randy as squirrel, Daddy said, but he didn't mind. Daddy used to spend more nights with Peggy Sue than with anyone else. Angela knew because she counted. Lately Daddy'd been favoring Debby most, but he still spent a lot more time with Peggy Sue than with Angela.

Thursday's was red, but it didn't make her feel bloody. Or fiery either. To tell the truth, Angela had no imagination when it came to red, none at all. But that didn't mean she didn't like it as well as any of the others, better even. Thursday was her day to do the ironing, the job she hated most of all. She thought her turn had come too soon again, but Daddy didn't like complainers. The worst part of all was ironing things she knew belonged to Debby. If only she dared burn a hole in Debby's precious purple shirt. Of all the girls here, Debby was the one Angela hated worst. She hated the very name Debby, she would hate anyone else unfortunate enough to bear that name. Once Angela imagined, the way other people dream, that Daddy said to them, "Your names are all wrong, I'm going to rename you." And Lela became Gloria, Gloria became Peggy Sue, Peggy Sue became Lela, and Angela became Debby. She heard it like a stab in the heart. And she left for the kitchen, intending to stab herself.

Friday's was purple, but Angela hardly had time to choose. She rose just before four, when everyone was awakened by the screams of Gloria, whose baby was ready to be born. "He's coming out, he's coming out," she shrieked, but it was hours and hours til he finally did and she screamed all day. Daddy wasn't disturbed to hear her. "Sounds real healthy," he said, but he didn't come near her, not even into the room. He said it was woman's business. The only ones who stayed in the room were Jennifer, who was a nurse and finally delivered the baby in the afternoon, and Dana and Lela. Angela and the others fetched them food and things from time to time. Angela couldn't stand to look at Gloria who was white as a ghost and, Angela was sure, in danger of becoming one. Later, she wished she hadn't had to see the newborn still attached with its bloody rope to Gloria who just lay, still ghostly but quiet now, with her eyes shut. It made Angela want never to have a baby. Daddy always said he wanted her to have one, but he never could seem to find the time.

Saturday was white. Pure, colorless ribbon for a colorless day. The quietest day Angela could remember, everyone seemed busy elsewhere and chores were neglected or accomplished out of her sight. She wondered whether the others who were no doubt still attending on Gloria had moved her somewhere else. Gloria's room was the quietest place of all. Everyone but Gloria was at supper. But when Angela asked how Gloria was doing, girls just shrugged and shook their heads and said they didn't know, they hadn't seen her. Angela didn't like supper. Besides spaghetti, there were home

canned green beans, which she suspected of botulism. It particularly disturbed her that her portion was the only one taken from the new can. If just one girl had taken seconds from the new can, Angela might have been willing to run the risk but no one did. So she moved the beans around with her fork and pushed them to the sides of the plate. "Angela, you haven't touched your green beans," Daddy said. "I'm too full," Angela said, assuming she would merely be deprived of dessert. "It was too big a helping."

"But you didn't eat any, did you? No one's leaving this table til Angela eats her beans, every one of them." Angela sat silent for a whole ten minutes. Everyone else was silent too, not looking at her, she could tell, though her own eyes looked straight ahead, but exchanging with each other sneers meant for her. They seemed to her to be talking about her silently to each other saying how much they despised her. Even Daddy? Even Daddy. She thought she could stand it, but she couldn't. It was just too much. Finally she crammed all the green beans into her mouth and swallowed them at once. She could feel them go down into her esophagus in one large lump. "Good girl," Daddy said. "Want some pudding?" Angela shook her head and ran from the table, without asking leave, to the toilet, where she tried unsuccessfully to vomit. Hours later she did vomit, though suddenly, and over and over and over. She was sure she was dying for the few minutes that were all she later remembered of the time.

The next morning's was green. She hardly felt strong enough to put it in her own hair but Dana said that was just because she needed something to eat. Dana brought her breakfast in bed. She was wearing a coat and carrying a large battered suitcase. When Angela asked her where she was going, she said just away for a few days. Then Angela asked how many days had passed since she'd got sick. Dana said no days at all; it was just the next morning. "Sunday then?" asked Angela. Dana said yes, and left. Angela woke again at dusk, feeling much better, though still a little groggy, and got up. She put on the freshly laundered but unironed bathrobe that was lying at the foot of the bed. She knew she should really dress but they'd make allowances. How would they know she wasn't still sick? She wasn't sure herself yet. The house was very quiet. She didn't hear the dinner sounds; it should have been about the hour unless it was earlier or later and everyone was outside. But usually she could hear what was going on outside.

In the empty room she began to be afraid. It was empty not only of girls but of many small objects, Daddy's fur pillow and rug, figurines, needlework. The fruit bowl and the flower jug had been taken from the dining room table. Angela walked through the whole house, through every room, and found all clothes and personal belongings gone though most furniture remained. There was food in the kitchen though. Angela opened some store-bought beans and ate them cold. After that she picked up the telephone

I keep a piece of paper  
*margaret boles*  
I keep a piece of paper  
with her handwriting on it  
it's of no earthly use to me  
but something stays my hand  
were I to put it in the bin  
her hand was so consistent  
it's style, of her time  
it's etched in memories  
of long ago, before every  
individual would have  
had a phone, and so  
she would write to me  
I keep a piece of paper  
with her handwriting on it  
shopping list reminder note  
I cannot throw it out

the bone of the hawk  
*rochelle hope mehr*  
I do better approaching objects obliquely  
my directness warps me into tunnel vision  
and I miss the crux of the issue

I misled you, but not intentionally  
I was in the wrong path and bid you follow me  
I was able to swerve when the storm clouds gathered  
you were already past  
and I could not draw you in

you told me to go away  
as the veil of death compassed you

I saw the shroud  
the headstone  
the bone of the hawk

they lie together

*eleanor koldofsky*

they lie together side by side naked  
warm moving freely for necessities  
that the passage of time demands - a  
tissue for sniffles reaching over each  
other to adjust lights papers pencils  
drinks leaving abruptly the opened  
divan for tea or coffee or peeing or  
champagne (the favorite) returning  
running back speeding tippy-toe into  
their room diving into the crumpled  
disarray of bedclothing sheets  
blankets comforter to find that warm  
length of body to stretch against the  
extended elegant arm the long well  
padded thigh the bodies coming  
together the always pleasure of the  
contact glancing off each other and  
returning in movements intimate and  
possessive proving oneness a unit  
talking of everything minds in free  
flight soaring agreeing teasing as little  
destruction as possible recalling early  
years without the other wondering of  
all wonders that they had met all the  
previous years preparing them for this  
however long it would last came up  
frequently for review eyes melting into  
each other's minds was sufficient  
reply turning to one another and lips  
brushing against cheek ear throat  
mouth while hands seek stiffening  
nipples dimpled buttocks muscled  
backs strong arms thighs moving  
smoothly freely form the swell of  
honeycomb juices welling up to prime  
the body for the gift the slackening of  
the thirst for love in which they  
indulged themselves the luxury of  
time adding an element of desire that  
they exercised in all ways that bodies  
may meet and caress languorously  
creating a fusion and exstasy that  
they had never known the silence  
small kisses sweet moans smiles of  
ownership. one

receiver. The phone worked all right, but she didn't know who to call. The truck was gone, and all the bicycles but one with a flat tire. But it was too late to go anywhere anyhow. So Angela went back to her room, and it was there on her dresser where she should have seen it as soon as she got up, a note from Daddy. "Dearest sweetheart, baby Angela," it began, and said they had to leave suddenly for reasons that he would explain when he saw her. The rent and telephone were paid; if she wanted to order groceries from the store, they would be paid for too, an account had been opened for her. Someone had to stay, Daddy said. He couldn't force her to, but he asked her to. Daddy asked her to stay. She could but obey.

The ribbons would stay in their drawer til his return. He said he'd return but time passed. How much Angela didn't know, she did not keep track. She passed her time watching television, and walking around the grounds. She kept expecting a passerby to notice her but no one did. She did have some company. They'd left her the cow and some rabbits and chickens. It was lucky she liked eggs. She thought about tying a ribbon around the cow's bell, after Daddy came back.

anonymous

*rochelle hope mehr*

one day

I'll write something

I'll put it away

take it out later

and throw it away

I won't hound editors

with words of distress

I'll rip up the paper

I'll sweep up the mess

I'll pack my bags

find a new address

and escape into

namelessness

## differentiation

*rochette hope mehr*

why does it bother me?

I shall have to read what the psychoanalysts say

if I resemble her physically, does that make me her clone?

my father, as he lay dying, called me by her name and I tried to feed him

does that make me a nurturing mom?

He died, after all, and I don't think he knew what hit him

could have been a wayward tree

could have been a bomb

why does it matter, this business of differentiation?

this matter of falling far from the tree

I'd like to be the apple that falls so far

and sounds nothing but dead air

## layers underneath

*margaret boles*

when we were four and five

she brought us

to live in the country

now I know

she was running away in a sense

running from herself

and her own inadequacy

in the country it would be easier

to cover her tracks

to rewrite history

pretend to a past

that wasn't hers

adopt

a sophistication

she wasn't born with

but wore as a glove

so convincingly that

she convinced herself

that she'd lived

a different life

## the apricot tree

*mary laine yarber*

I cannot eat an apricot

without giggling just a wink

## finality

*rochette hope mehr*

it's strange how the eye is drawn immediately across the room

as if nothing is gone

is it that the space has shrunk?

collapsed into itself?

before it held a bed

the bed held a man writhing in despair

the man's breath got stuck in his throat

his eyes fixated

what did he last view in that huge blue stare?

the man is gone

the bed is gone

the space is gone too

as if it were never there

sea longing

*margaret boles*

I'm going to sit and satisfy my sea longing  
and gaze out over the waves  
they're gentle today but more than lip-lapping  
I'll count for the seventh, the largest wave  
and smell the surf and spray  
a lone gull here and a trio there  
as they fly low over the sea  
the evening sun catches the white feathers sparkle  
and glint like rare jewels against the sky  
I will tell the sea rare secrets  
of things I barely know  
of spirits who loved and loved her  
long, long ago

ice

*mary laine yarber*

I was only out for cough drips and dinner, a desperate  
errand through lashing snow. But ragged and achy. I have  
sloughed home to the wrong house, two stories of mustard  
clapboard and a mailbox with one name newly scratched  
away. Your kitchen spills saffron across twilight and  
snapping wind, nearly reaching the shadowed curb where I  
watch. I can't see the table of thick knotted oak but still  
know the cobalt stoneware you have laid at its far end, the  
last dish not crunched underfoot. I paw muck from my nose  
as you light candles of evergreen on a side board, swirl  
cinnamon into steaming cider, and gaze out a window at  
spiteful flakes that whorl wisps of asthma into my choked  
lungs. Chill pierces my coat as steam wafts from the pot  
where you stir chicken into chowder. My eyes, swollen and  
glazed, weakly follow licks of firelight on your sable hair and  
when your head lalts and shoulders sway I know the long  
climbing stretch of Chopin is about to make you weepy,  
though all I hear is the soft clank of a street light swinging  
against the tap of flakes. I long to thumb the tears that sear  
your cheeks no longer mottled and bruised, but you don't  
believe promises sworn on the unsure light of stars.

league of hearts

*temi rose*

league of hearts  
starts now  
at the end of enchantment  
at the loss of derangement  
at the time of the honeysuckle  
rain

the league of hearts  
was initiated in dark times  
came to be in the time when women spoke beyond  
their ability to comprehend  
they held back from logic  
worried that cold ratiocination would harm babies  
they were right  
logic does harm babies  
the thing is  
we grow up  
and live longer  
so age is now something to be reckoned with  
just as infancy was once

the league of friends whose hearts I hold  
in mine  
will never vanish  
not death or mutilation  
not pain, humiliation or momentary grandeur  
will release us from the tender mercy of love  
shared  
known and unknown friends  
abide here

and our children

*margaret boles*

and our children  
you cannot live their life for them  
you cannot dream their dreams  
for they live in the land of tomorrow  
they dream tomorrow's dreams



love me today  
*eleanor koldofsky*  
love me today, not tonight  
love me as I'm standing here  
not when I lie  
although, I am more vulnerable that way  
i'm here now  
the car is smashed  
love me now

love me in the daylight  
when all is hell  
not the moonlight night  
everything s'well

when the dinner is late  
when your boss is having a crisis  
nice is  
love me today  
don't love me for my sexy bits  
have your eggs and soggy chips  
with ketchup if you must  
but love me in the daytime  
and at night - carry on with lust



love

*eleanor koldofsky*

once upon a time there was a beautiful canvas. large, white, shimmering, aglow with light; the brightest lightening white the canvas was suspended in time, floating and waiting. one day a painter searching the world for just such a canvas came upon it and with delicate and wonderful touching and devising; with magnificent colors of every hue; working devotedly, tenderly covered the canvas in a majestic design after resting and viewing and revelling in the splendor the canvas now portrayed, the artist once again in a marvelous display of ingenuity drew magical colors over the original pattern, causing the canvas to undulate with exstasy and self pride, being the recipient of such caressing strokes one more time the artist retired to contemplate this marriage of color and canvas. desire to complete and satisfy the loving canvas, now trembling with the knowledge of its worth and beauty, charmed the artist to cover slavishly and with even further perception the entire canvas with all of the brilliance of nature's colors - leaving at the top right hand corner an untouched circle. and from a circle of light left untouched, over which no color could ever be, the now magnificent canvas looked down upon itself with pride and pleasure at how beautiful it had become; never to return to the paleness of its previous self. the artist waved goodbye and blew a kiss which floated up to the circle and caused it to sparkle

the end