

Silver Lullaby

For Joan and Laura

Time to sleep my little one.
Time to close your eyes.
Time to sail a silver ship
Over the silver skies.
Time to sail a silver ship
Over a silver sea.

*Time to dream,
Time to dream,
And then come home to me.*

Time to dream my little one.
Time to close your eyes.
Time to sing a silver song
Under the silver skies.
Time to sail a silver ship
Over a silver sea.

*Time to dream,
Time to dream,
And then come home to me.*

Time to dream my little one.
Time to close your eyes.
Time to sail a silver ship
To a land beyond the skies.
Time to sail a silver ship
Over a silver sea.

*Time to dream,
Time to dream,
And then come home to me.*

A Texas Bestiary

Armadillo

Softer than a bed
Of Texas clay,
On an armadillo pillow
I like to lay.

Cattle

Traditional

Chili, barbecue,
Chicken fried steak,
Brahma bull and
Brangus make.

Tex-Mex

Taco, fajita,
Enchilada,
Brahma bull
Makes a lotta.

Deer

He came on my lease.
He came near my blind.
I shot him dead.
Now he's mine.

Fire Ant

Sweet Jesus!
Damn the fire ant's bite
Burning digits
Through the night.

Roach

Big and bold and legendary,
The fast ones in the secondary.
The coach under the table paid.
The game called on account of Raid.

Gecko

Fluttery breast,
Shimmery green,
Feathery feet,
Front porch queen.

Cougar

"Cougar Bar and Disco"
On a Port-A-Let can
Spray painted by
An Aggie fan.

Toad

Croaking convention,
Serrated song,
Equinox orgy
All night long.

Dove

Little grey hens
Peck across the lawn
Bathed in summer sun.
Then they're gone.

Shrimp

Pink and juicy.
Tender to the tongue.
Get 'em on the roadside.
Better young.

Gull

The dip of gull
From sun to shade
More thunder than
My passing made.

Earth Prayer

Our Mother

Who Is the Earth
Holy Is Your Name
Your Realm Is Here
We Shall Not Fear

Give Us This Day

Bread of Your Grain
Flesh of Your Fruit
Wine of Your Grape
And Nourish Us
As We Nourish Each Other

Lead Us Into

The Turning of Days
Through Pleasure and Pain
Birth and Death
Rebirth

For You Are

The Wisdom of the Forest
The Power of the Mountain
The Glory of the Sea

Forever and Ever

Hear Me

Leaving, Letting Go

For Henrietta Goldman Saslow

Birds, Butterflies, Flowers
Icons of Unnecessary Beauty
Profligate Color
Transitory Energy
Arc Toward Light
Hindered by Vines
Blocked by Mountains
Deceived by Silent Maps.

They Leave
as do Children
and the Dying
And We Must Let Them Go.

In the Turning Days
We Leave Who We Were.
We Let Go with Grace
Color
and Energy
Perhaps
But Always With the Breaking
of
Pod
Seed
Bulb
Shell
Chrysalis.

Flying from Portland to Boston

Remembering August 26, 1990

We arc across a land light-flooded, water-flat.

Barns, sail-white,
tack green pools,
trim-tight.

Rivers, boat-filled,
carve a coast,
ice-willed.

Islands, rose-maddered,
sail offshore,
sea-shattered.

We swing out over the open ocean. We see forever.

Sea, gold moiré,
rusches across
a curving bay.

Ships, silver slivers,
stitch wakes,
embroider rivers.

Cape Cod, shadow-dark,
curves north,
tip, then arc.

We turn west toward land.

Harbor, hard-to-lea,
Quincy, Cambridge,
memory.

East Boston, granite, sand,
lighthouse, seagulls,
barnacled land.

Wing flaps rise, we descend.
triple-deckers,
Boston again!

Gloves

February 13, 1959,
Found May 15, 1992

I bought a pair of gloves
in the square last night. They
are black, with very thin fingers,
so that no one else in the family
can borrow them.

Vines

Vines intertwine
Encircle and bind
Spiraling bower
Deep root to flower

Timelines unwind
Winding through time
Trumpet and briar
Blooming in fire

The Day

Tightly woven,
tightly wound,
tightly bound,
the day comes over me,
a tidal wave,
a shroud.

I look up through
tight weave and
frothing bubbles
toward the light.

Fat List

Butter	brown, clarified, drizzled, garlic, melted, pat,
Breakfast	bacon, croissant, donut, egg, flapjack, granola, kolache, muffin,
Cheese	bleu, brie, camembert, Cheeze-wiz, feta, fontina, goat, gouda, grilled, gruyère, havarti, jack, macaroni and, mozzarella, parmesan, pizza, romano, roquefort, string, swiss, Velveeta, Velveeta Lite,
Chocolate	bar, candy, chip, hot, frosting, kiss, mousse, sauce, white
Cream	alfredo, béarnaise, brûlée, cheese, ice, sauce, sour, whipped,
Meat	barbecue, brisket, bologna, burger, capocola, chicken fried steak, chili, chimichanga, chit'lin's, cold cuts, fajita, goose, gravy, grease, ham, hot dog, jerky, lard, pâté, pepperoni, ribeye, roast, salami, sausage, shoulder, steak, T-bone, taco; wurst,
Nut	almond, coconut, filbert, macadamia, Nutella, peanut, pecan, walnut,
Oil	canola, coconut, cottonseed, corn, olive, peanut, safflower, salad, aioli, hollandaise, mayonnaise, pesto, fritter, french fry, nacho,
Pastry	baklava, cake, canolli, pie.

The Food Song

With Wayne on a road trip

You don't need no cake or ice cream,
Cookies, cheesecake, butter, cream,
You don't need no apple fritter,
It's real lovin' that you need.

*'Cause food don't give you no affection,
Food don't hug away your fears,
Food don't make things any better,
Food don't kiss away your tears.*

You don't need no grits and sausage,
Honey,
You don't need no refried beans,
You don't need no nacho cheese dip,
No, no,
It's real loving that you need.

*'Cause food don't give you no affection,
Food don't hug away your fears,
Food don't make things any better,
Food don't kiss away your tears.*

So throw that big Mac out the window,
Secret sauce and double cheese,
You don't need no french fries, baby,
It's real loving that you need.

*'Cause food don't give you no affection,
Food don't hug away your fears,
Food don't make things any better,
Food don't kiss away your tears.*

Common Physics

River, path, time, vine,
Find my pen, my brush entwine.

Knot, ruche, ribbon, lace,
Sinuous, serpentine, turbulent grace.

Curve of body, arm, and hand,
In a gesture of embrace.

The Middle of the Night, Paris

I came to Texas young, thirty, and now I am old.

Twenty years!

I have only one life

and that is what I did with it.

I wish I remembered it.

I see my young self get into the back seat of a car

Bending over

Conscious of my short skirt,

long hair, innocent eyes.

I met not one artist.

I was a duck out of water.

My webs thickened.

I learned to walk awkwardly

on the dry land.

I remember plunging through cold water once,

Beak first, supple spine,

Arabesques trailing light,

for food, for play, for combat.

I miss the game, the shine, the salt.

Each day passed slowly full of daily things.

Life sped.

I awake now,

from a sleep.

Moon and mountain call to me.

I hear alarms and smell the sea.

Alphabet

Alone Anger
Bind Blood Breast
Cut
Earth Encircle
Fire Flower
Grass Hand Intertwine
Joan Kiss Laura
Map Mountain Moon
Memory
Night No
Pain Path
River Root
Sea Sky Silver
Sister Song
Scar Shadow Silence
Time Twin Touch
Unwind Vine Volcano
Wing Water
Wind Wind
W X
Yes

The Goddesses Speak

Advice About Bastards

Persephone, the **D**aughter, says: **D**isobey the **B**astards

Aphrodite, the **L**over, says: **D**on't **S**leep with the **B**astards

Hera, the **W**ife, says: **D**ivorce the **B**astards

Demeter, the **M**other, says: **D**on't let the **B**astards get you **D**own

Hestia, the **K**eeper of the **H**earth, says: **I**gnore the **B**astards

Athena, the **T**hinker, says: **O**utwit the **B**astards

Artemis, the **H**unter, says: **O**utrun the **B**astards

Hecate, the **W**ise **O**ld **W**oman, says: **O**utlive the **B**astards

A Remembered Sea

For my mother, and for me

I.

Spheres of tears
cast long shadows
of western bearing
on an infinite plane
in one point perspective.

Twenty-foot cylinders
evenly spaced
march across
the gridded plane
along a Z axis.

A wall of cubes,
arched, foreshortened,
converges toward
a distant, diagonal
vanishing point.

A massive pyramid,
inscribed in a cube,
shaded and shadowed,
rises above
the cone of vision.

Elliptical lips,
Ovoids of voids,
and prisms of schisms,
descend and recede
in atmospheric perspective.

People, for scale,
hang by their eyes
from a five-foot line,
the horizon line,
that lassos the world.

The mirrored plane
reflects all objects
perfectly vertically,
upside down,
in perspective.

II.

There is an observer
forty-five degrees
from the D.V.P.'s,
with a cone of vision
of sixty-degrees.

She's caught
in Cartesian space,
on a line of sight
that pierces
the center of vision.

She stands alone
on the station point,
still, immobile,
visible
only in plan.

She stands behind
a vertical plane,
the picture plane,
transparent and infinite,
without edge.

She draws one line
across that plane
at eye level.
She finds the D.V. P.s
and the C. of V.

She inks three axes
with T square and triangle,
and draws all objects
caught in the net
of a scalable volume.

All are rendered in
black and white,
ink on mylar,
with vertical hatching
and varied line weight.

III.

She begins to paint
what she likes,
prismatic hues,
chromatic grays,
iridescent highlights.

She paints in oils
with arcing gestures,
accidents,
pentimenti,
scumbles and drips.

The observer is lost
in color and space.
She puts down her brush.
She walks forward,
shattering the plane.

She dances across
the flat grid,
slaloms the cylinders,
scales the wall,
climbs the pyramid.

Her smile melts
geometry.
Her shadow falls
on colored quilt
and on remembered sea.

She plucks down
spheres, ovoids, prisms,
touches them,
tastes them,
sings their songs.

She kisses the lips.
She leaps free!
She soars aloft
over the silent sea,
beyond the symmetry.

Person

- Boy** a male with *love*, without *power*
- Girl** a female with *love*, without *power*
[SEE NYMPH.]
- Bastard** a male who chooses *power* over *love*
- Bitch** a female perceived to have *power*,
so *love* is denied
- Jerk** a male without *power* or *love*
- Victim** a female without *power* or *love*
- Man** a male with both *power* and *love*
- Woman** a female with both *power* and *love*
[RARE IN POPULAR CULTURE; EXISTS IN REAL LIFE.]
- Person** a male or female with both *power* and *love*
[FOUND IN A CULTURE OF EQUALITY.]

Driving to Houston

Remembering Saturday, December 3, 1994

There was nothing special this winter morning,
no bluebonnet parades,
no high summer symphonies,
no waving amber grass.

Yet it was beautiful nonetheless,
the air washed by yesterday's rain,
the clouds gold and silver, unportentous,
a changing pageant as I drove.

Every blade of winter rye on the margins of the road,
every contour of cattle lying backlit under oaks,
every leaf of the willows marking creeks,
all are precious, etched in light.

I pass a pond shining on the right,
and my favorite building on the left,
a many-angled, many-textured,
many-shadowed barn,
still standing!

I whiz around a curve
in the land of milk and honey,
with a melancholy country song
playing on the radio,
And find a horse
blazing in the light,
unaware of its incandescence.

Could there be anything more beautiful
than a white horse in a green field,
backlit by sunlight
inscribing the arc
of its perfect neck?

After Reading The Blindfold

After reading a novel by Sire Hustvedt

A sorcerer's gifts:

one glove,
a cotton ball,
a mirror.

But not a sorcerer, and not gifts:

no three wishes,
no revelations,
no innocence rewarded,
no fairy tale,
no parable,
no poetry.

Just the sweat and heat of ordinary disorder:

a dirty glove that once concealed another's hand,
used cotton, cosmetic-stained,
cold glass, blind to memory.

Only the random juxtaposition of intentionless experience:

outside the magic circle of archetype,
beyond symbol,
beyond psyche,
unblessed by sacrament.

No heart, no gut, no love, no fear:

simply continuous in time and
space, simply
here.

Room

Studying seven centuries of Western painting, I am surprised
to find many images of women indoors with submissive posture.

A woman dips her head and curves her spine
when she sets the table, says grace, pours milk
(men pour wine);
sews, irons, puts up linen,
bathes children, serves older women;
reclines naked, serpentine,
an odalisque of hairless line;
mourns, marries, or is Mary,
chosen to be the mother of God;
picks nits, gleans sod.

Only the young are straight,
a dancer, a pianist, a princess.

I collage Giotto, Lippi, Fra Angelico,
van Eyck, Velasquez, Vermeer,
de Hooch, Chardin, Ingres,
Corot, Cassatt, Matisse.
The women surround an iconic room,
Leonardo da Vinci's baby in a womb.

The bent backs and curving spines
lend a pleasing repetition to my design,
a theme and variation, an underlying order,
a unity of purpose, a charming trefoil border.

The Sun Rides With Me

Remembering May 31, 1994

I fly low into New York.

The sun picks out cars.

Hoods flare
between serrated houses
packed close.

A backyard pool flies by
briefly aflame.

Rivers blaze.

Canals ignite.

I descend to a sunless city,

grey,

flat,

shadowed.

Flying to Paris

Remembering May 31, 1994

I fly over Shelter Island tethered by ferries,
caught between Orient Point and Montauk.

I fly over Cynthia's house.
Rhode Island is all water.

The last I see is Cape Cod.
I draw the curve from Boston down past Plymouth
all the way around to Provincetown.

I erase the silver slice of canal near Amy's house.
I never knew how many lakes are on the Cape.
I draw them in.

My view is black and gold, peopled with memory,
Linda, Nancy, Mary Lou, Sue,
mist and sand, glittering streets.
Before everything we are land and sea.

Over my shoulder the Cape leaves me.
A shimmering hook on a curving sea.
A curving hook on a shimmering sea.

Lust on United

Remembering March 15, 1987

She waits in the aisle,
her fanny at eye level.
She's wearing high-heeled boots
and tight jeans.
The jeans cup her ass.

Thinning Hair,
Head Phones,
and Mustache
watch her take
the window seat.

Thinning Hair
gently strokes the
tight jean seam,
the perfect curves,
and smiling lips.

Head Phones
smothers in her hair
and fucks her slowly;
Mustache takes her swiftly
against the bulkhead.

T.H., H.P., and M.
see her man sit next to her.
He's young.
He has worn jeans
and all his hair.

Headphones blasts music
through his skull,
Thinning Hair reads his Clancy,
Mustache takes her again
floating together
in a plastic drink.

Judith Dances at Arthur's Wedding

Remembering May 9, 1992

Judith is tipsy and dances with everyone.
"That's the old Judy," boasts Carl
over the pulse of the band.
"She's downright irresponsible!"

She flirts outrageously with all comers.
When asked to dance, her brows comma,
her eyes umbrella, arms fling.
She leaps delighted! to her feet.

My sister was a cheerleader long before Law Review,
arching in her lettered sweater,
innocently teasing cops,
in kiltie skirt and bobbie socks.

Judith dances with abandon in the middle of the floor.
Turning tail, she sidles close,
a sultry cat in heat,
then twirls her hips and whirls away.

A whirlpool among eddies, she and her partner spin.
They beam as they advance.
She swings free on her high heels;
"God," toasts Carl, "that girl can dance!"

I Should Have Had a Brother

Remembering May 22, 1992

“I’ve been living with guys the past ten days,”
says Joan, just back from school.

“They are so useful! They can fix things,
carry heavy things, and they are good at packing.

“You just load them up and send them down to the car,
and then they come back, and you give them more.

Curt carries me places. I’m his little sister.
He picks me up and carries me downstairs.

“One guy, Dave, comes into the house,
gets a beer, and watches sports on TV.
It doesn’t matter what kind -- snorkeling, boat racing --
the dullest sports that take hours.

“The commentators stretch: they profile contestants;
discuss weather conditions; reminisce about past meets,
anecdotes, their mothers. The whole time you know what’s on TV?
A boat. And you know what the boat is doing? Nothing.”

Backyard

Remembering November, 9, 1991

I

Morning winter sunlight illuminates the yard
igniting lime and amber leaves,
backlit, burning, burnished green.

The broken shade of pine floats across the pond.
Branches offer needle sprays --
votive candles lit at dawn.

Wild grasses reach bamboo palisades
where children once sang Girl Scout songs in
clearings left by Baldauf boys.

II

Songbirds glissando. Black birds caw.
The summer songs of toads are gone but
doves duet across the lawn.

A cat with narrowed eyes stalks the gentle doves.
He's arrow straight, with twitching tail --
but they'll escape!

III

A squirrel dines in our pecan with dainty claws,
scattering shell. Last summer he
ate every apple

On my apple tree, biting always sweet
blush, leaving me the green!
He shovels nuts inside both cheeks.

IV

Wayne mowed last Sunday. I attacked mesquite,
cracking limbs, unwinding vines,
hauling branches to the street.

Laura picked up pine cones and planted basil seeds.
She'll torture plants all winter long
and win first prize in botany!

V

A lizard's caught outside our door, inside the screen.
His feet are feathered leaves. His
breast flutters when he breathes --

A wary silhouette shimmering silver-green.
Later we will pound the glass
and frighten our chameleon free.

Blue Kitchen

For my mother, Ruth Alice Bowman Ciani,
and my grandmother, Maria Adelina Russo Ciani

The blue geometry of my kitchen,
square blue tiles,
round cobalt plates,
catches light from the pasta pot.

The blue and white rectangle
of Laura's painting
on the board and batten wall
is like Mom's quilts:
sails in the bay,
Christine's house,
Anne's on the shore,

are bits of cloth cut from old dresses,
with ironed seams,
dovetailed joints,
blue and white as the pie and ice cream
served for dessert on the fish house porch.

I'm filling the pasta pot as did my German mother,
forgetting potatoes and sauerkraut,
as do my sisters
on Flea Island,
in Cambridge, Bolinas,
Inverness,

as Nana did.
She pampered my plain tastes
serving my spaghetti white.
A spoonful of water from the pot,
fragrant with butter,
pooled at the bottom of my bowl,
a gift
with the blue Chinese bridge
waiting for me fifty years ago.

Marcia Ball on Texas Avenue

Texas Avenue sucks.
Too many high-assed cars nosing smug vans.
Not enough trucks.

With any luck
I'll get to Bryan before dark.
I pass a four car pileup,
a state trooper in shades.
Maybe I should chuck
it all and move to Snook.

It still goes both ways
in Aggieland, U.S.A.,
but now it's just an L.A. street,
More crowded than a mosh
pit, Pico with no carwash.

Finally I catch a rhythm,
Marcia Ball is singing
 "you'll find another fool,"
her Mama's cookin' with a
 sweet dark roux.

We caught her at the Cantina,
bringing us good, good news,
red nails flying on the piano keys;
 and legs
as long as Texas Avenue.

Necklace

For my father, Dr. Angelo Walter Ciani

In his pocket my father carried a fruit knife.
Now he has a shoe horn and a little rubber hammer.

In my purse I keep a necklace
with beads strung seventy-seven years ago
by an Italian boy in the North End.

He gives me checks or hugs,
never things.
“I made it when I was ten years old
for the person I was going to love.”
I have never seen these pretty beads before,
so unlike Mom’s diamonds, our gold.
I put them round my neck
and wear them on the plane.

I will see Dad again,
nine times. The last time I
slip hammer and horn inside
his dark suit pocket.
No need for knives now.
In my pocket I will want a necklace.

Flying West

Remembering October 5, 1992

Clouds ablaze
burn a purple sky alizarin,
vermilion, orange, cadmium, scarlet,
all the way West.

Blind passengers
ignore the pyrotechnics fading over
exfoliating eczemas of habitation,
a photo of Tokyo.

We find Texas
empty, the prairie black, lapping
clustered incandescent grids as
poignant as lost islands.

One light moves
south, a crazy skipper sailing
solo remembering purple skies,
longing for a dawn.

Hula Hula Washer

Remembering August 9, 1993

I am lulled by the cha-cha of the hula-hula washer,
the dryer's continuo.
I hear giants jig, crazed, unbalanced.
I shift wet sheets.

Tocsin timers call to me.
I rescue warm, wrinkling shirts, and panties
right-side-out with labels looking up at me,
and clothes, wet, bound, bleeding splotch,
remorseful reminder the housewife procrastinates,
dreams with the cat, reads, writes, paints,
a general fuck-up.

A Night of Shooting Stars

Remembering August 11, 1993

She lay on a lawn
lush with the odor of clay,
watching stars fall.

She lay alone
clothed in the song of cicadas,
wrapped in stars, warm.

She lay lost
spinning in wind-spinning stars,
falling through light.

Berkeley TV

Remembering 1968-1969

When I was living in Berkeley,
my mother sent me a TV.
My hair was long then,
a Sassoon cut grown out.
I wore ten dollar dresses
covered with flowers
(so short one made a pillow)
past the succulents at my front door,
on the bus to the city
suspended between bay and fog,
to lie on the floor at the Art Institute,
lace at my throat, shells on my forehead
above innocent eyes;
to hear Janis at Winterland.
I wore jeans to lay sod at People's Park,
and the night we were gassed by a phalanx of Martians,
and on marches down Telegraph
when hippie girls slid flowers into rifles
of National Guard boys,
both nineteen, fraternizers.

I smile when I remember the Indian vest I wore over bare breasts.
The little mirrors caught the light of Crazy Joseph's candles.
I never turned on the TV.

Sixteen Oaks

Remembering telephone conversations with Aunt Loretta

May 27, 1992

Aunt Loretta has call waiting.
How are you, Dear.
Let me get rid of the person.

I treat your father like gold.
All day long he contradicts me.
Two months ago he was going to disown Ann,
Now he loves her.
Don't ever say I said it.

I have to write the poem for Uncle Willie's party.
It has to be an inspiration.
I'm having my hair tinted on Friday.
I'm trying to lose weight.

I just want to ask a question.
Would you use Drano while you're cooking?
Thirty times a day he contradicts me.
He makes me feel like a zero.
Once he almost killed me.
Don't say a word.

Dad's turn:
I'm still living under great stress.
You know how it is.
I defend myself.
I haven't been right since the boy ran into me with his bicycle.
My hand is like a balloon.
Who the hell is going to pay me for my suffering?

Loretta breaks in:
Why are you always treating me like dirt?
He called me a boss.
I'm always nice.
I never answer back.
Naturally its hard.
My house is upside down.
Laura is such a serious girl.
I was always extra serious.
When you love school and love learning, you are like that.
Will she be an artist like you, or does she know yet?

I went to the cemetery to see John's stone.
 Even my father, poor man, who's been dead for twenty years....
 There's nobody like John.
 We got along like two drops of water.
 You don't have to believe me.

Sarah despises me.
 When I visit them, Harry says
 "Mom, don't forget I'm married."
 For me he never lifted one finger.
 Now he slaves morning, noon, and night.
 The sad thing is that people who love beautiful things
 aren't usually petty.
 Don't say a thing.

They used to call me the Bird Lady.
 I picked my own meat and had them grind it.
 I'd have them put the fat in the corner --
 then I knew they cut it off.

Thank God nothing broke when your father got hit by the bike.
 I'll let you talk to him.
 Don't say a word.

October 2, 1992

Vandy had two stunning men.
 She never forgot Dr. Mastriani,
 Chief of Surgery at Milford Hospital.
 She never went on a date with him.
 Mama opposed it.

There was a Dr. Matarese.
 Carrie said she never saw a man go so crazy as he did
 when she told him Vandy was engaged to Alphonse.
 I never knew my father asked Walter to find Vandy a husband.
 She had so many handsome men!

Vandy told me with tears in her eyes,
 two weeks before she died,
 that she dreamt of Dr. Matarese every night of her life.
 He lived in a twenty-seven-room house.
 He dropped dead in the hospital at the age of sixty.

Walter should have helped Carrie find a husband
 because of her eyeglasses.

I still have thank you notes to write from John's funeral.
 I made this homemade fish chowder.
 He didn't eat it until nine p.m.
 He should have gone to the Cape.
 August was an awful month,
 worse than Texas!

I'm tired of people telling me what to do.
I was very nice with Walter down the Cape.
The sink was stopped up.
He wanted to put Drano in it.
I asked him not to while I was cooking.
He got so angry I thought he was going to have a heart attack.
He lifted up the can and threw it into the sink.

"You're killing me off"
he said to me if I ever slightly disagreed with him.
He made me eat spaghetti with fish when we went out to eat.
French fries are too fattening.
"I'm your older brother.
What do you know?"

I found the letter Donna Carolina wrote him from Mirabella.
It said "Caro Angelino, my oldest grandson,
I hear from your father you are sometimes arrogant.
You must always curb your temper."

When Walter returned from the service
he moved in with us for sixteen months.
He was broke.
Carrie bought you a velvet coat.
She bought you everything.
Your father wrote a letter to keep Manfred out of the service.
He never found out why they wouldn't take him.

He always says he's the oldest.
Papa bought him a car,
but Manfred had to go to dental school
on the subway with his bad heart.
He had to change three times.

Another thing.
Don't say a word.
July, 1991.
Walter made spaghetti.
He gave everyone only one meatball.
One year he brought my father a loaf of bread for Christmas.
He used to be very generous.

He got through medical school in 1931.
I was nine years old in the third grade.
He left then.

My father didn't know a thing about the stock market.
Uncle Willy told him "No one pays cash for a house."
He paid \$8,000 on \$14,500.
He could have paid cash.
The mortgage was \$75 a month.
Carrie helped from her teacher's salary.
After the crash it was too late.

Times were very hard.
Mama wouldn't join clubs.
 The ladies wore fancy clothes.
Papa went up and down tenement steps all his life.
 That's what doctors did then.
He had forty Italian lodges in the North End.
 They paid him a retainer.
He was kind.

Papa gave John his diamond pin
after he lived with us for five-and-a-half years.
Walter said it was his.
He was the oldest.

Could you make me a sign for the Cape house?
With "Sixteen Oaks" written on it?
There used to be sixteen oaks.
Some died, but who's going to count?

Anemone

Remembering July 23, 1995

I am sea grass,
swaying in tides.
My fingers are tendrils,
bending.

I reach through transparency.
Blue light blesses me.

Then I am orphaned,
caught in grief,
bowed in stillness.

Slowly I see
my parents have blessed me.
I dream no more
the tide that between them
ripped;
I dream no more
the current taut between their
poles.

I become a lily of the sea,
the body and blood
of a sea anemone.
The tides of the universe
spiral through me.

I sing the song of myself,
without goal, without grief,
gloriously spinning,
catching fire from the sea.

In Memoriam

Remembering fifty years

For the Dead

My Brother, **Louis**

brown back; sun-shot hair; divine child

My Mother, **Ruth** Alice

quilting, braiding, sewing, growing, in spring mint and pink

Mom's Sister, Aunt **Lorraine**

who could draw the back of a house after seeing only the front

Mom's Mother, Grandmother **Ida**

canner of peaches; killer of chickens

My Father, **Angelo** Walter Benjamin Theobald Frances,

eldest Italian son; graduate of Harvard at nineteen;

golfer, fisher, father, healer; explosive, decisive; stroker of brows

Dad's Father, Papa **Luigi**

sitting me on his knees, singing "Parlami d'Amore Mariu";

astounding me with dragon smoke

Dad's Mother, Mama Maria **Adelina**

maker of pasta and ragú, and soup from dandelions I picked;

showing me how to draw a six-petaled flower; posing haughty for photos

Dad's Brother, Uncle **Manfred**

worm-eater, player of bridge and tre sette, man-about-town

Dad's Sister, Aunt **Caroline**

painter, lover of art, clothes, dolls, and her daughter

Dad's Sister, Aunt **Wanda**

cooked pizza rustica every Thanksgiving;

cleaned her woolens once a year

Wanda's **Alphonse**

builder; gardener; bewildered tyrant

Aunt Loretta's **John**

gentle Wasp; quiet chemist; lover of opera, cats, and Loretta

Wanda's Daughter, Cousin **Amy**

Amy-my-Cousin; night giggler; flame of energy

Amy's **Guy**

clam digger; banjo-playing heart-throb idolized by aunts

Wayne's Mother, **Henrietta**

absolutely sure of her life and place; life-long lover of Abe

Wayne's Bubbies, Two **Roses**

one little and aged; the other strong, big-bosomed, teaching me to crochet

Victor, Mike, William, Frank, Lee, Mae, Lars, and Irma

For the Living

Wayne, Joan, Laura,

Judith, Suzanne, Cynthia, Ruth,

Marion, Joe, Eric, Richard,

Aunt Loretta, Aunt Betty, Uncle Irving, Aunt Alice, Uncle Willie,

Cousin Bruno, Esther, Mario, Carladorra, Isa, Edi, Armando,

Conrad, Arthur, Carl, Carrie Lou, Johnny, Torino, Liz, Mark,

Janie, Ruthie, Alexander, Daniel, Lars,

Zayde, Betti, Mitchell, Judith, Richard, Judith,

Aunt Rae, Aunt Sybil, Uncle Harris, Aunt Claire, Uncle Chuck, Aunt Frieda,

Uncle Sam, Aunt Sooky, Aunt Micki, Uncle Irv,

Alene, Nancy, Richard, Larry, Phyllis, Sharon, Robin,

Barbara, Marty, Vicki, Jerry, Patti, David, Kay, Joel

Wives, Husbands, Kids, Cousins

* * *

Papa is blessing the whole table on Palm Sunday,
the aunts and uncles and cousins.

The bird sings in his cage by the grape arbor.

*Aunt Caroline's painting of the Italian girl
looks down from the dark paneling.*

I feel the splash of holy water.

Fred, Dad, Victor, and Papa are playing cards in the nook.

*A coconut face hangs in the window.
I am allowed to sit on a high stool and watch
if I don't move or say a word.
Dad plays a card carefully.
All hell breaks loose.*

Wanda, Carrie, and Loretta gossip in the kitchen with Mama.

*They are washing and drying the good dishes.
The room is warm.
Light streams in the windows.
Kids chase in and out.
Someone knocks at the back door.*

Alphonse is singing after dinner standing in the curve of the piano.

The children are shushed.

Amy is singing in the kitchen down the Cape.

*She is fifteen.
Soon it will be high tide.*

*She walks to her car in the snow.
She is laughing.*

She sits across from me in Carl's restaurant.

Justin is on her lap.

Guy is at her side.

Yesterday they went quahogging in the boat.

I see them, caught in the sun, kissing.

Dad and Arthur play cribbage on Amy's deck

overlooking Barlow's Landing.

They wear light blue shirts.

Scout snoozes at their feet.

There is the smell of pine and salt air.

A wind comes up from the sea.

It is the day of Louie's christening.

I have never seen so many people in our living room.

Louie is finally asleep.

*I have one foot on the floor,
and am slowly lowering the other,
without making a sound.*

"What are you hiding in your jacket?"

*Louis is at the top of the basement stairs,
one hand on the door knob.*

*He pulls out a kitten he found in Cambridge,
frozen with cold, hiding under a car, hounded by dogs.*

Celia will outlive her rescuer by a decade.

“Would you like a little something to eat?”
asks Bub Garber,
spreading a feast on the dark, carved table.
I smell stuffed cabbage. I taste noodle kugel.

“They didn’t pick my husband, so I won’t pick their wives,”
says Hennie of her three sons.
She sits on the sofa between Joan and Laura.
Her white blouse is crisp, her navy slacks trim.
She holds two small hands in hers.

Mom is sewing a doll’s toga in big, clumsy stitches:
Judy’s Latin project.
She’s making lasagna, cracking an egg into the ricotta.
She pours herself a second cup of coffee from the percolator.
She waters her pink and white impatiens.
They spill from their pots.

The light is low in the front hall.
Dad helps Mom with her fur coat.
She slips her arms into satin-lined sleeves.
I smell her perfume, his cologne.

Dad is in the kitchen talking on the phone.
“Good. When? Thank you.”
He had operated on the crushed leg of a boy run over by a gravel truck.
The hospital is calling to tell him the boy can wiggle his toes.

“Who set this table?” asks Dad.
He passes out paper-thin slices of watermelon.
Later he will feed Puppy and Celia,
and do the New York Times crossword puzzle.
I sit next to him.
He absently strokes my brow.

Dad is asleep on the sofa.
The Quincy Patriot Ledger is open on his lap.
His face is relaxed.
I draw him.

I Laugh in Yellow

I laugh in yellow,
In green I dream,
In blue I brood,
In red I scream.

**I Laugh in Yellow II or...
I am Hysterical in Yellow**

I laugh in yellow

Daffodils on satin sheets
Sunset waves unfurl tow-haired tumbling summer boys
and dimpled daisy dancing girls

In green I dream

Baleen-filtered deeps I dream
Absinthe currents spill spinning spiral vortices
nebulae of emerald krill

In blue I brood

Purgatory's indigo
Weeping violins cast a melancholy glow
hiding hell's alizarin

In red I scream

Temples pulsing tango beats
Charley Parker blows scarlet-scarring scimitars
wedding stain hid in the rose

Ordering Birds

Albatross, Anhinga, Ant Pipit, Arctic Loon, Auk,
Babbling Thrush, Bald Eagle, Baltimore Oriole, Barn Owl, Bee Eater,
Bird of Paradise, Bittern, Blackbird, Black-Capped Vireo, Blue Jay, Bobolink, Bobwhite,
Boobie, Bowerbird, Brown Noddy, Budgerigar, Bulbul, Bunting,
Canary, Canvasback, Cardinal, Cassowary, Chickadee, Chicken,
Chuck-Will's-Widow, Coot, Cormorant, Cowbird, Crab Plover, Crane,
Creeper, Crested Swift, Crossbill, Crow, Cuckoo, Curassow, Curlew,
Darter, Dipper, Dodo, Dove, Dovekie, Duck, Eagle, Egret, Eider, Emu,
Falcon, Finch, Flamingo, Flicker, Flowerpecker, Flycatcher, Frigatebird,
Gallinule, Gannet, Gnatcatcher, Goatsucker, Godwit, Goldfinch,
Goose, Grassquit, Grackle, Grebe, Great Blue Heron, Great Horned Owl, Grosbeak,
Grouse, Guillemot, Gull,
Harrier, Hawk, Heron, Hummingbird, Honey Creeper,
Ibis, Inca Dove, Indigo Bunting, Jacamar, Jacana, Jay, Junco,
Kestrel, Killdeer, Kingfisher, Kite, Kiwi,
Lark, Limpkin, Long-Billed Dowitcher, Loon, Lyrebird,
Macaw, Magpie, Mallard, Marsh Hawk, Meadowlark, Merganser, Mockingbird,
Mourning Dove, Murre, Nutcracker, Nuthatch,
Ostrich, Oriole, Osprey, Ovenbird, Owl, Oyster Catcher,
Painted Snipe, Palm Chat, Parakeet, Partridge, Parrot, Passenger Pigeon, Peacock,
Pelican, Penguin, Peregrine Falcon, Petrel, Pewee, Pheasant, Pintail, Pipit, Plain
Wanderer, Plant Cutter, Plover, Prairie Chicken, Ptarmigan, Puffin, Purple Martin,
Quail, Raven, Razorbill, Red Knot, Ring-Necked Pheasant,
Red-Headed Woodpecker, Red-Winged Blackbird, Roadrunner,
Robin, Rubby-Throated Hummingbird, Ruff, Ruffed Grouse,
Sandpiper, Scarlet Ibis, Seed Snipe, Shearwater, Sheldrake, Shoney Guide, Shoveler,
Shrike Vireo, Silky Flycatcher, Skimmer, Snipe, Snow Bunting, Snow Goose, Sotty Tern,
Sparrow, Spoonbill, Starling, Stilt, Stork, Sun Bittern, Swallow, Swan, Swift,
Tanager, Teal, Tern, Thrasher, Thrush, Trumpeter, Toucan, Towhee,
Tufted Titmouse, Turkey, Turnstone, Tyrant Flycatcher,
Veery, Vesper Sparrow, Vireo, Vulture,
Warbler, Wagtail, Wattled Crow, Waxwing, Weaverbird, Whistling Swan,
White-Eyed Vireo, White-Winged Dove, Whip-Poor-Will, Whooping Crane, Wigeon,
Willet, Woodcock, Woodpecker, Wren,
Yellow-Bellied Sapsucker.

Ladders

Jacob dreamt

We climb ladders to change bulbs, clean gutters, rescue cats,

of a ladder

get a good view, exit a hole.

as he lay

Ladders leaned on the Cross

on the stones

when we pulled down Christ.

of Beth-el.

White Food: Manufactured Sugar Products Marketed to Children

4 grams of sugar = 1 teaspoon sugar

Words hollowed out so they do not mean what we think they mean:

“Cereal,” “Drink,” “Lunch,” “Snack,” “Fruit”

SUGAR IN THE MORNING

Kellogg Apple Jacks (Sugars 16 g per 33 g serving) **48% sugar, 4 teaspoons sugar**
 General Mills Cocoa Puffs (Sugars 14 g per 30 g serving) **47% sugar, 3 1/2 teaspoons sugar**
 General Mills Count Dracula (Sugars 14 g per 30 g serving) **47% sugar, 3 1/2 teaspoons sugar**
 Kellogg Froot Loops (Sugars 15 g per 32 g serving) **47% sugar, 3 3/4 teaspoons sugar**
 Kellogg Golden Crisp (Sugars 14 g per 27 g serving) **52% sugar, 3 1/2 teaspoons sugar**
 Kellogg/Disney Mickey's Magic (Sugars 15 g per 29 g serving) **52% sugar, 3 3/4 teaspoons sugar**
 Kellogg Smacks (Sugars 15 g per 27 g serving) **56% sugar, 3 3/4 teaspoons sugar**

SUGAR FLUID

Kraft CapriSun (Sugars 30 g per 200 ml pouch) **7 1/2 teaspoons sugar**
 Cott Chubby Cotton Candy Cream Soda (Sugars 30 g per 8.45 fl oz bottle) **7 1/2 teaspoons sugar**
 The Coca-Cola Co., Coca-Cola Classic (Sugars 37 g per 16.9 fl oz bottle) **9 1/4 teaspoons of sugar**
 Dannon Danimals Rockin' Raspberry drinkable lowfat yogurt (Sugars 15 g per 3/1 fl oz) **3 3/4 t sugar**
 Pepsi Fruit Works, Strawberry Melon (Sugars 62 g per 20 fl oz bottle) **15 1/2 teaspoons sugar**
 The Coca-Cola Co., Fruitopia Cherry Vanilla GROOVE (Sugars 43 g per 12 fl oz) **10 3/4 teaspoons sugar**
 Gatorade All Stars Thirst Quencher "No fruit juice" (Sugars 22 g per 12 fl oz) **5 1/2 teaspoons sugar**
 Nestle Nesquick Reduced Fat Banana Milk (Sugars 58 g per 16 fl oz bottle) **14 1/2 teaspoons sugar**
 Hershey's MilkShake, Cookies 'n' Cream (Sugars 88!!! g per 14 fl oz bottle) **22 teaspoons sugar!!!**

SUGAR LUNCH & SNACKS

Oscar Mayer Lunchables, Deep Dish Pizza (Sugars 61!!! g per package) **15 1/4 teaspoons sugar**
 General Mills' Betty Crocker Hawaiian Punch Fruit Gushers Fruit Snacks "Excellent source of vitamin C"
 "Earn Cash for Your School" (Sugars 12 g per 25 g pouch) **3 teaspoons sugar**
 Nestle Butterfinger BB's (Sugars 96!!! g per 12.5 oz bag) **24 teaspoons sugar!!!**
 "Enjoy one of AMERICA'S coolest snacks ANYTIME, ANYWHERE, ANYPLACE:
 Watching TV, Playing a VIDEO GAME, Surfing the NET, Popping in the CAR, During HOME-WORK"
 Jello Chocolate Flavor Pudding Snacks "Perfect to Pack in Lunches" (Sugars 21 g) **5 1/4 teaspoons sugar**
 Cap Candies Harry Potter Bertie Bott's Every Flavor Beans (Sugars 35 g per pouch) **8 3/4 t sugar**
 Kraft Jet-Puffed Marshmallows "A Fat Free Food" (Sugars 4 1/4 g per piece) **1 1/16 t sugar per piece**
 Hershey's Kisses, (3 g per 1 piece) **3/4 teaspoon sugar per piece**
 Nabisco Oreo Chocolate Sandwich Cookies "America's Favorite Cookie" (Sugars 4.3 g per cookie) **1 1/3 t sugar**
 Dolly Madison Bakery Powdered Donut Gems "Back to School" (Sugars 3 3/4 g per donut) almost **1 t sugar**
 Mars Skittles (Sugars 45 g per 61.5 g package) **73% sugar, 11 1/4 teaspoons sugar**
 Mars M&M's (Sugars 31 g per 47.9 g package) **65% sugar, 7 3/4 teaspoons sugar**
 Hostess Twinkies (Sugars 14 g per 43 g cake) **33% sugar (less than sugar cereals!), 3 1/2 teaspoons sugar**
 Hershey's York Peppermint Pattie "Get the sensation!" (Sugars 25 g per 39 g pattie) **6 1/4 t sugar**
 General Mills' Betty Crocker Whipped Fluffy White Frosting (Sugars 7 g per tablespoon) **58% sugar, 1 3/4 t sugar**
 "Earn Ca\$h! for your school. 1. Collect Box Tops. 2. Send Them In 3. Your School Gets a Check!
 General Mills Box Top\$ for Education, boxtops4education.com"

Sugar Boy

Howdy,

I've finally got around to making the sculpture of Sugar Boy.

His head is the sugar bag Karen gave me. His tongue sticking out is a chocolate candy bar. He has red spoon ears and little dark sorta cheerio things for eyes. His hair is silver pipe cleaners spraying straight up because he is always hyper.

His body is transparent bags of bags. Esophagus is Oreos. Stomach is a round sugar drink powder canister. Lower intestine is a long wiggly plastic bag tube of brown cereal pellets. There is a chocolate bar poop in the back.

The arms are newspaper bags with intense round things inside. The fingers are more of these cheeries on silver pipe cleaners.

The legs are plastic bags of cereal just as they come from the box, 2 for each leg. Feet are plastic bags stuffed with plastic bags -- supermarket logos are tattoos. Toes are big marshmallows.

Right now he's wearing a little blue sleeveless jacket.

He's going to be playing in a sandbox of sugar, candy stuff, drinks, wrapper trash. I think I'll put a sugar-filled plastic coke-shaped bottle in one hand. Not sure about the other yet.

Mary

No Fat Cat

No fat cat,
 Ass pat,
ace in the hole, cat in the hat,
hail mary pass, broken field run,
bowl bid --
Number One!

No top dog,
 Top gun,
ally-ooop!, home run,
jackpot, gusher, killing!, coup,
clout, rout --
Ballyhoo!

No hot shot,
 Hot hand,
goin' to the promised land!
inside tip, fix in,
kickback, stock split --
Big Win!

No favorite son,
 Son of a gun,
golden boy, place in the sun,
good-ol' boy, one of the guys,
Emmy! Oscar! --
Nobel prize!

No friends in high places,
 Old school ties,
hard ball, soft money, little white lies,
first round draft, lucky call,
shoot out, shut out --
Game Ball!

Hot Summer

We wet the clay soil by the kitchen door
so the door won't stick.

The bamboo is dying, grey sticks in the distance.
Brown spots pucker the leaves of the oaks.
Water plants suck down the pond.

One pine tree died last summer in the heat.
It's gone. Hard on the squirrels.
Only one shaky path remains.

Where that tree stood for forty years
the sky is empty, blue.
The sun reaches down into the yard,
searing the pond sultry, the grass brown,
the deck boards hot.

The shade is always down now in Laura's room,
so we can't see the lilies.

We water at night, slow trickles from the hoses,
privet, red oak, pear tree, roses, photinia, sage,
trumpet vine, butterfly bush,
evergreens and thorny volunteers,
and always the last two pines
dropping down needles,
dead brown needles.

For the Artists

We are the Id that makes the Ego possible,
Yin to the Yang of Commerce,
Black Shadow of Doubt and Mercy and Joy
Cast by Apollo's Sunlit Rock.

We are Fat, Muscle, Spleen, Heart,
Bone, Gristle, Hanks of Hair,
Indigestible in the Acid of Contempt.
Still Juicy among the Desiccating,
We Ascend, Traverse, Descend.
No Fluid Squeezes from Us
In the Bowels of Mediocrity.

We are Still Alive,
Still Kicking, Screaming, Laughing, Singing,
Warriors, Wizards, Lovers, Kings,
Gods of our Page, of our Stage,
Of our Caves, our Wombs, our Dreams,
Shamans, Seers, Mystics, Priests,
Keepers of the Myths,
Tellers of the old, old Tales,
Hunters of the Moon.

Dumb with Tumbling

Caves to see tonight,
Hermit places bound by tunnel, maze, matrix.

Lost to mother, lost to child,
We fall through torrents, narrows, chutes,
Dumb with tumbling,
Fattened, attacked, sifted, sorted,
Single file to sacred places bringing gifts.

Only slow the rivers now,
Circling back to blood chambers,
Blue with spent commandos, lazy pilgrims out of tricks.