

FOUR POEMS

The Three Ages of Hair

As a girl, her hair was a traffic-light
on red. Boys screeched to a halt.
When dishes were washed, it looked amber:
“Perhaps go. But perhaps not.”

As a young woman, her hair was a terrorist’s
bomb. It exploded in all directions.
It could not be disarmed. Glass
lay around, among several broken hearts.

As a grand-mother, her gray hair
smeeked out like smoke from a log;
drifted by like a farm in a fog.
Yet, in wind, it rose like a pillar
of ash, and went before her day
and night, leading where she had to go.

Swimming with a Hammer-head Shark

Snorkeling off the Galapagos, over a reef that combs
its multi-coloured beards in the current:
suddenly, a hammer-head shark is hugely
beside me, big as a Greyhound bus,
but all lights off, no engine audible.
By fiat, the sea is made not just for,
but of him: fathoms turned to dark
hide and swinging muscle, muscle
to dark, finned and mottled tide.
His giant hammer sways from side
to side. It drives ocean before it
in long, sunlit twisting nails.
Spread-eagled among clanging anvils of gun-metal
grey waves, foam flying
like sparks, I wait to be hammered, forged,
re-struck into an unwelcome new coinage.
But all he does is swim in parallel,
nodding slightly, tapping weeds
gently into place along the surf-lines
like a conscientious boiler-maker: riveting

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shoals of creole fish into their ripples.
This is no knuckle-duster of the deep.
He rolls slightly, to get a better look at me.
His right eye is less of an eye
than a query. He rolls more, to make
me entirely a query, then arches away,
downward. This hammer watches us shyly.
It will not strike. But at night, the ocean
becomes one great whale
under a feeding-frenzy of stars. It is rising
from the global warming of its depths, to take
our brightly-lit coastlines and cities,
returning faeces dutifully to us in the streets.
—In the end, the hammer, ourselves, crushing us.

Five Signs that You're not the Reincarnation of Someone Famous

In heavy rainstorms, when dust turns
into clumps of silvery clay, you feel a need
to mix them with straw, make bricks,
and build something very large and triangular.

When you dream of seven fat girls,
followed by seven skinny girls,
and try, unsuccessfully, to make love to all of them,
no psychiatrist is interested in interpreting your story.

Winos in the street walk determinedly
toward you, holding out mugs of water.
They pass you by, and head for a man carrying
a bag of loaves, a box of fishes.

While working under the sink, to unblock the drain,
with garbage-bags softly caressing your face,
you have an irresistible urge to hand brushes
to anyone who's painting a chapel ceiling.

As you sip warm beer on the stoop,
wondering, with an enraptured variety of gestures,
whether to be or not to be,
a dog runs up and pees on your foot,

simply and undeniably. You realize *this*
is an answer. Like the damp log that burns,
as it must, on a roaring fire. Like the window

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that, even though dirty, lets in both dark and light.

In Search of Continuity

Between this heart-beat and the next,
in the candle-flame's quiet, is no
other pulse to bridge the flickering gap,
and ignite another set of hungers at the hearth.
"All is vanity." "But a kingdom is at hand."
Is all vanity? Is my hand at hand?

Between blackbirds on the roof at dawn
and white birds that take their places after,
between rage and the speckled mushroom
of smoke that pokes its head from a hole
that was hope exploded in the middle of the road,
a woman slips off her cotton dress
and lies on the bed in a petite soul
of fine, white, continuous lace.

Between bulldozers that knock down walls
and the politicians who build streets and subdivisions
from prefabricated words that glitter in mid-air,
between the bill-board of God's beautiful
face, touched among clouds by the pilot
in his war-plane, so alone, and his wife's
photo, zipped in his burning pocket,
between the remembered and the half-forgotten,
the quarter-promised and the deliberate lie,
a snail uninterruptedly climbs the trellis,
leaving a silver trail behind.

Between this line of a poem and the next,
in gods or time should we trust?
Or in the evening humming-bird's neither
fall nor ascent, motion nor rest,
at its invisible pin-point of nectar?

Roger Nash