There is a caldron rimmed with pearls of whose gifts I am not ignorant; I will speak little of it; its treasures are known to the Bards.

- Arthur Machen

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Table of Contents:

“Cold Darkness”
Amanda Beane..........................................................1

Present at a Baptism
Craig W. Burns.................................................................2

“I caught the falling loved one.”
Ian Matthins Underwood................................................3

“i’d have dropped my name for you”
Virginia Lautzenheiser.....................................................4

This White Room
Sharon Locher.........................................................................5

Sleeker
Melaina Maraldi........................................................................12

Pines
Lisa Brayman.................................................................13

#4 For George Herbert Walker Bush
Craig W. Burns.................................................................14

Mid-Life Crisis
Virginia Lautzenheiser.....................................................16

Seed of Us
Melaina Maraldi.................................................................17

“Many lifetimes ago”
Jeremy Kredlo.....................................................................18

“A poem is”
Thomas Venner....................................................................19

First Lesson
Craig W. Burns.................................................................20

Waterbaby
Amy Hicks............................................................................32

Day 9 - Solo on David Lake
Shawn Gavin......................................................................33

“the feeling of friendship”
Virginia Lautzenheiser.....................................................34
Cold darkness
like
being underwater.
And there are lights above--
I can’t reach them--
tiny bright eyes
looking at me and
I can’t read them.
You have the world
the wind tells me,
whispering gently.
And I find no comfort--
it’s more like a fishbowl
a little castle
and a pretty flower--
fake
plastic
the castle has only one room
and the flower has no scent.
I do not understand the Hand
that feeds me.

And so I sit, in darkness
contemplating.
Where am I
and how thick is this glass--

Amanda Beane
Present at a Baptism

The gypsy moth spins her web of discontent
And pulls you into her sickly embrace
As under a streetlamp's halo
Someone cries for your help
You look back down the hill
At the long line of black faces
Dressed in white
You are among them, a visitor
Pale and strange
They send you hurtling forward
Into oblivion, into the arms of a loved one
So as you wake from your dream
You remember the gypsy
With her legs spread wide in
The perfect romance

Craig W Burns
I caught the falling loved one as he fell.
Frustration mixed with sadness, not unlike
The beer stench mixed with bile, the boy’s sweet breath.
Corrupted....

We shared our inner feelings long
And longer into the night—we spoke
Of all the taboo subjects left
Untouched....

He stumbled as he walked;
He mumbled when he talked;
He told me that he loved
Me....

I wanted to.
I tried so hard.
I gave him what
Mattered....

He fell --
We shared --
I tried --
Ohfuckitall.

Ian Matthins Underwood
i’d have dropped my name for you
a thousand times i thought
i felt it fall from my head
like a new haircut
but that’s no longer my right
or your privilege
my ribs are my own
open me up and see for yourself
if you still believe
your name must be carved
into one of those bones
but just so you know
i want to be fair
i plan on returning what’s yours
medusa error and sin
marry them all
these snakes don’t become me
i’ve decided to try kneading
my mother’s old womb until i find
a name of my own

Virginia Lautzenheiser
This White Room

Who-whom do I blame-the greatly feared bully of the bus who feigned choking on his milk every day at lunch when I appeared-
The Jehovah’s witness who inquired about my religious beliefs at age five-
my best friend who taught me about prostitution by exploiting Barbie and Ken dolls?

To know-known anything towards my mind-thought-process of determination,
I suggest pounding one’s head against a wall or any other inanimate solid object.

a freak, crazy nutball, looney, psycho, lunatic are my own precious titles of my mind-mind’s state.

“Really”, they ask. such a sick fascination with the disturbed youth of today. It’s sex, drugs and rock ‘n roll the elders say. “Now back in our day, we played stickball and attended bible readings”.

JESUS SAVED-SAVES.

Religion is a great fancy of mine-fascinated with God and Jesus

I’ve seen them in the form of
Charles Manson—
didn’t he claim to be the messiah?

I always believed-believe he bore a striking
resemblance

The hair maybe?

Anyways,

this room is all my very own
bed, table, lamp
all white and imperfect
like my own self.

I often tell my two halves, “You and you cannot
truly gage the feeling of this lesser world, you and you
climb above this lifetime”.

Yes I and I, me and me do.

A shame no one recognizes this being floating upwards.

A doctor once told me, “An enigma-a puzzle
you make yourself to be, you refuse to allow anyone
to comprehend your thoughts and/or actions”.

And/Or- I am amused-amuse by people who
speak it out loud.

Enigma?
Puzzle?
What a shame they didn’t let me finish
only one arm and half my chest

a puzzle I was
with pieces carved into me-
a rusty blade I used

And here I am again—begin to the beginning,
Sent to dwell in this white room by my loving family and friends.

So sad and confused they seem-seemed,
Why?—I do not know.

I adore my room.

Today I painted the walls red—yesterday they glimmered in gold.

I also have a t.v., stereo, VCR and sink.
Today I brought them here, tomorrow they shall go.

Tomorrow I want green.
I pointed this extraordinary fact out to my mother.
Look at the red walls I painted!

“They are white”, she said.
I swear the woman’s eyesight is getting worse every time she comes.

Family.
I care little for such things now.
I need my own rules, tools, vageness in values intricate as each handsewn stitch in my Oriental rug

But now back to the basic of blame-blames,
there is really little to finger with

I run the tips along
the doubled glass windows
Throwing a foot repeatedly in their direction,
pound pounding

Demons dancing on the ceiling
a
little reminiscnet of the first
images I saw

They brought me here.

A priest once told me, “Turn to God in your time of need”.

I turned around
around
upside, outside down

“I can’t seem to find him anywhere”, I confessed.

I found the entire incident very amusing,
I’d rather watch my devils and burn in
Hell.

Seconds, minutes, hours, days, weeks, years
I glance above for a sign

My lunch tray has set here rotting
moldy
grey green in stench
cold and
congealed.
I ate a few years back, a feast of beans, lint, and outdated pickles; it made me dream of a small girl; her worn saddle shoes bruised on her arms.

She went fishing with her father—trying to ignore her bladder-full.

I think I knew her or knew of her, not too sure.

My haircut similar to hers—short, uneven

My bald spots I made myself when I tried to pull bad memories out of my brain.

Most have gone, I think I got them all.

Sometimes I cannot help but to laugh at the cameras

One in the corner
One in the wall
One in the bed
One in the sheets
One in the keyhole
One in the

A great article I plan to read

some one doing some thing some where some time
soon

some
points I cannot comprehend.

From side to side, page to page
rolling my neck
in hopes of a break
faster, pick up speed and
I throw it forward

no such luck.

Time to close-closed my eyes
the colors are meshing into
one big blob or blur

A tangle of mass- eyesore
and head a swim

It could be time to sleep;
so I thought-think a little

about
wool sweaters, rotting apples

and the
sharp sting of vinyl on the skin.

Abhorring and boring the idea of rest,
when they shall shock my limbs and
bleed my
brain.

A knock and there she is!
A familiar sight in white
with a cold metal tray
small paper cups
lined in army fashion - ready to battle
with my internals

blue, red-
I get all the very best
aand a shot to forget
it ever happened

One small stick
and..........
Sleeker

My hair is in a french twist and I look good.
I look sexier than a belly dancer
And I am waiting.
Wearing black and tottering heels,
I wait with class for a second chance
With someone I can’t stand to think of
But can taste his mouth when he passes by.
Everyone is telling me how good I look.
Max in her house dress and Sly in her jeans
Tell me, all about it.
I smile until I think my face will crack
And he hasn’t rung the doorbell yet
And I wonder.
All dressed up with someplace to go,
Sitting on a windowsill waiting.
And it feels like he is leaving me again
With no looks or words to explain.
And afternoon turns to night
And I sit quiet,
Sexier than the moon,
But still alone.

Melaina Maraldi
Pines

Hush - they
Whisper
Free to speak as
Wind gusts
They dance
In worship of the
Storm

Lisa Brayman
For George Herbert Walker Bush

freedom, patriotism and death
colors,
ilies and
half truths

mean nothing
when told to us by a population
where the business originated
from the colon of avarice
you play the victim
until you’ve served your purpose
and become a toy
a society
a tool for the pollsters
an excuse for polluters

So lie your head
on that deep goose-down pillow
and answer the questions
of the ugly population
that rises in revolt and
screams from the rooftops
at the fat old republican bureaucrat
who spins in precarious position
on the fiftieth-story ledge
stuffing his mouth with ballots and dollar-bills
until he chokes on a fifty and falls off the edge

now look into the sky
tell us what you see
written on the empty page
of the agate tablet
which we choose to call forever
because of the fear of forgetting
the politician as he stepped to
the podium, cleared his throat and
took microphone in hand
to make the promises he'll soon forget
Craig W Burns
So stick your head
on that deep phone-down pillow
and accept the position
of the ugly unpleasant
dull thing to revolt and
separate from the crowd
or the far off republic
because we want to stand in the center of the
dreamer who sleeps in garrison position
on the fifth-story ledge
stuffing his mouth with beans and dollar-bills
and he chokes on a fifty and falls off the edge
now look into the sky
see what you see
written on the empty page
described inside

Tony Saracino
mid-life crisis

her father could scare us to death with his mr. hyde laughter on halloween nights. and he used to tell jokes and pretend he always ate cheese balls like apples. but one night beneath a full moon he drove all through town looking for trains - and not finding any he returned home a new man.

she said the other day she’d followed him all the way to that woman’s wide open arms. and what’s worse he’d been watching pornos in the afternoon - probably so she’d think he was creative in bed. this was a hard thing for a daughter to watch, i thought, looking at the darkness under her eyes.

she said now her mother was falling in pieces all over the house, but that was nothing and she bent her head down for me to see how thin her sixteen years of red hair had become.

Virginia Lautzenheiser
Seed of Us

I take this strong flesh and use it to fold
A baby into my gut
A blood-red whiplash that rips me
While tiny hands spill over my insides.
My outsides.
My grieving wicked man-guy,
Whose narrow, bony body
Encloses mine.
So slim, I will slip through him.
My child inside plays with matches,
Burning my skinned belly until I am scaled.
Biting, kicking with sharp everything.
I look away
Until I can no longer feel
Anyway.

Melaina Maraldi
Many lifetimes ago
I flew as a bird
Free on the wind and air

Many lifetimes ago
I swam as a fish
Graceful in the currents

Many lifetimes ago
I ran as a wolf
The world a whirl of smell

In this lifetime
I live as a man
And all of these creatures
Are killed by my hand

Jeremy Kredlo
a poem is

a newspaper plucked from the trash

by a bum in december.

he doesn't study the damned thing!

just curls up and goes to sleep

a little bit

warmer.

Thomas Venner
The tires of the Varig 737 screamed in protest as they touched the Brazilian asphalt. He could hear them from his seat: coach, window seat, above the wing, just as he had requested. It was late July and the plane was nearly full. The weather in Rio, the passengers were informed in five languages, was a beautiful eighty-five degrees with a mild breeze coming off the ocean. He tried to register all of this, as well as the stewardess, a blonde American who didn't speak a word of Portuguese, reminding them not to forget to fill out their customs cards. It was very important to fill out the customs card.

*Customs*, he thought. *What a joke.* He didn't have a thing on him, but for the clothes in the small bag over his head and the guitar by his side. He didn't bring much, because he didn't know exactly where he was going when he got off the plane. There wouldn't be anyone waiting for him; he hadn't called anyone, had wanted it to be more of a "surprise." He felt the plane jerk to a stop and watched as people began to get to their feet. The couple in front of him was American and five Americans in business suits passed him before he got to his feet. All of them wore red power ties.

He moved slowly; there was no hurry. It had taken him seven years to get back. Seven years of struggling back in the States, working through school, getting his degree, flying across Europe on assignment. It had taken him nearly a decade to get
back to South America; seven years to get back to Brazil. But he was back, and that's all that mattered.

The sounds of Rio hit him with an invisible force as he stepped through the door, dusty leather knapsack slung over his left shoulder, guitar over his right. He wore a battered leather hat and equally battered black leather boots. The O-ring on the side of the left boot was faded and the right was chipped, tiny flakes of rust showing in spots. His faded jeans matched the denim of the jacket and a light-weight cotton shirt completed the ensemble. He took a pair of sunglasses from the breast pocket of the old blue shirt and put them on before entering the airport proper. He was trembling with anticipation and barely heard the stewardess telling him to have a nice trip. He took a bandana, red, like the ties, from his jacket pocket and wiped a thin veil of sweat from his forehead. Sighing and doing his best to compose himself, he stepped from the noisy tunnel into the airport.

Whatever had passed through his imagination hadn't prepared him. He stood still for a moment, unaware of the people brushing past him, muttering curses in at least half a dozen languages, all in a great hurry to get wherever they were going. Taking off his sunglasses; he stood there, looking back and forth, taking in everything he saw: colors, sounds, smells. After someone hit him in the small of the back, sending him forward two steps, nearly making him lose his balance, he worked his way out of the human traffic and sat down on a plastic orange chair. He was still too much in shock to know what he was
going to do next. He cursed himself for not having called someone he knew, not having planned anything out. But, he reminded himself, that's not why I'm here.

First things first. He knew what he wanted. Picking up the pack and guitar, he rose from the chair and made his way to a concession stands. "Um guaraná," he said. "E frio," he amended. He watched intently as the young woman turned and bent deep into the cooler, her dress riding up to mid-thigh, her hips outlined against the tight floral fabric, to get a bottle from the depths of the cooler. He smiled at her when she turned back to him, looking her up and down quickly. She noticed his glance and smiled back, handing him a glass and opening the clear green bottle with the bottle opener she took from the cash drawer.

"Sete mil cruzeiros, por favor," she said as he dug through his hip pack for the few cruzeiros he had with him. He handed her the notes, then asked in Portuguese:

"Where can I sell some dollars?"

"You can sell them in the bank," she answered, pointing towards the bowels of the airport. He stepped to one side as a customer came up behind him. He poured a glass of the golden liquid and took a sip. He held it in his mouth for a moment, savoring the taste. He hadn't tasted guaraná in seven years. He must have been smiling without realizing it, because as soon as the customer left, the woman turned to him.

"You like it?" she asked, a grin on her pretty face.
"Very much," he replied. "I haven't had a taste of guaraná for over seven years. Now," he continued, "where did you say I could exchange some dollars?"

She smiled as she answered. "I see you know a little of the jeito here. Your Portuguese is good for a gringo. I thought you were Minheiro at first. Where did you learn to speak Portuguese?"

"I lived in Brazil for a while," he mumbled, finishing the bottle of cold liquid. She placed another in front of him. Pouring another glass, he continued. "I stayed in Muriaé, with a Brazilian family. I've been meaning to come back ever since, but this is the first opportunity I've had."

"Well," she said, "let me give you some advice, but I think you already know." He nodded and she went on. "Don't sell your dollars at the bank. They'll screw you over."

"Where can I sell them, then?" he asked. "I need some cruzeiros to get to Muriaé. I also need to know how to get to the bus station."

"If you're not in a hurry, I can show you when I get off work. My father is going to pick me up, so you can get a ride to the bus station if you want. And I'm pretty sure Dad knows someone who will buy dollars. Why don't you come back around seven-thirty this evening?"

"Sure," he said. "By the way, my name's Chris."

"I'm Helena," she said and turned to help a customer. Shrugging, Chris took out a ten-thousand-cruzeiro note and placed it on the counter. He emptied the glass and, the second bottle finished, slung his pack over his shoulder, picked up the guitar.
and made his way back into the crowd. The number of people had diminished as they made their ways out of the airport and into waiting cars, taxis and buses, most bound for the city, many for hotels, businesses or the homes of friends and family.

Seven-thirty? That wasn't for another four hours. What was he going to do? Sighing, he picked out a landmark so he could find his way back and made his way into the commercial section of the airport. First of all, he was hungry. Pushing his way into a large restaurant, he sat down at a table and waited for a garçon to help him. He ordered a burger and fries, grunting unhappily that everything on the menu was anglicized, and another guaraná. He ate silently, his mind running over his first hour in Brazil. He watched people pass outside the restaurant, smiling amiably whenever he caught a pretty woman's eye. Even in the hustle and bustle of the airport, they almost invariably smiled back. When he had finished his meal and the table had been cleared and the check paid, he sat back in his chair, put his pack on the table and seriously thought for the first time about what he was going to do next. What had brought him here, with nothing more than a change of clothes in his pack, a few pencils and notebooks, a camera, lenses and film, and a couple thousand dollars in a money bag discreetly hidden in his shorts? He considered the last years in the U.S. He frowned as he reflected, remembering the failed relationships, the empty feeling as he walked to the stage and reached for the diploma, the sensation that something was missing, the saudade of he knew not what.
After working for over a year after graduation, bored with his job, he had quit. He spent the ensuing time wandering the country with the same battered boots on his feet and leather knapsack on his back as he had now. He had worked his way from town to town, playing one-night stands in filthy bars. Finally, sick of the cliché he realized that existence to be, he had returned home to Michigan, hoping to find himself in familiar territory. From the start that had been the wrong place. As he stepped across the Illinois border and into Michigan, he felt no different than he had when stepping across any other border. Still, he persisted.

He tracked down some old acquaintances and managed to land a job in a friend's studio, taking portraits of little kids and little old ladies with their dogs. He managed to last five months in that job, subsisting in a one-room apartment with an old color t.v. and VCR and his books. He bounced from relationship to relationship, nothing ever quite clicking. It was the middle of May, at the beginning of the annual wedding boom, that Chris quit. He remained adamant through Kim's pleas to stay just until the season was over and she could take the time to train someone else to do the job. He just had to stay! But he persisted, and when the lease on the apartment ran out on May fifteenth, he packed a single change of clothes in his battered leather knapsack, picked up his guitar and headed downtown to the bank. He closed both his accounts and walked to the airport. Once there, he boarded the first flight to Chicago, certain somehow that the answer lay south.
At O'Hare, he immediately boarded the first flight in that direction, which happened to take him into Orlando, Florida. Reluctant to go any further, he stuck around the peninsula for a couple weeks, playing gigs here and there, the money he received allowing him to just scrape by. It was at one of these gigs that he found out where he needed to go.

He had been playing at a dive known as The Warthog, a small Country & Western bar where a lot of "good-ol' Southern boys" came to hang out. He played in an iron cage, with a parking-lot full of pick-ups outside, and dodged beer and pretzels half the night. On this, his last night there, he decided to play his last set completely impromptu. Before he knew it, chords he had memorized his second year in college came back to him, as did the lyrics for the songs. He beat out the melody, crooning the Portuguese lyrics into the shoddy microphone. The crowd boomed and hissed, screaming for blood, and the manager sent two of his bouncers in to drag Chris out of the bar and see him to a taxi with a crystal-clear instruction never to show his face within a mile of the joint. He learned later that it was to protect him from the crowd, which blindly hated anything remotely "ferign." As he sat in his hotel room, a lukewarm beer between his legs, the television blaring reruns of some old sitcom he had grown up with, he knew where he had to go, and he knew what he had to finish. . .

"Can I get you anything else?" the waiter interrupted Chris's thoughts. He stood by the table, looking down on the American, a slight sneer on his
face.

"N-no," Chris answered haltingly. "I guess not." He picked up his pack and guitar and walked out of the restaurant, seeing the waiter glare after him, frowning at the pony-tail that hung down the middle of his back. He turned left, walked past the bank Helena had warned him about, past several stores with records and CDs displayed prominently for the sake of international travelers.

Noting that the sun had moved, Chris looked at his watch. It was approaching five o'clock. Only another two hours or so to kill. He made his way around the circle of stores in the middle of the wing and went back the way he had come. When he was again outside the International Arrival area, he found a plastic orange chair that looked remotely comfortable and took a seat. People of all nationalities flew by him as planes came in from Miami, Bonn, London, Tokyo, and he caught flashes of strange conversations. He watched the people, trying to pick out the Brazilians, watching them go by, catching every movement, every nuance. Another two hours.

Two Brazilians, a mother and her child, sat next to him. They whispered among themselves about the "funny-looking American," as the child described him. Then the girl, maybe five or six, walked up to him and stood by his knee.

"What's that?" she asked, pointing at the guitar case, covered with colorful stickers from every major city they had been through together.

"It's a violão," he told her, giving her his best smile.
"Can you play?" she asked innocently. Her mother gasped at the breach of etiquette and reached for her. Chris gave her his best smile and reassured her that he wasn't offended. The woman put her daughter back down and the little girl returned to Chris's left knee. "Can you play?" she repeated.

"Of course!" he exclaimed, feigning astonishment. She giggled and hid her face with her tiny brown hands. "Would you like to hear it?" he asked.

"Sim," she said bashfully. Still smiling at her, he laid the case on the white tiles and opened it. The little girl gasped and her eyes opened wide as he took the instrument, colored dark cherry, out of its case. She reached her hand out to touch it, but her mother was too quick and had hold of her before she could lay her fingers on the fine polished wood.

"It's alright," Chris told her. "She won't hurt it." The woman released the child and she returned immediately to Chris's side, her hand slowly extending to touch the smooth wood. Her thumb brushed one of the strings and it made a small sound. Gasping with fright, she jumped back, an astonished look on her face, eyes wide, tiny mouth forming an unasked question. "Don't worry," he said, "it won't bite."

Giggling again, she stepped forward and, hand extending more slowly this time, touched to dark wood. A smile lit her face as she laid her palm against the smooth surface and Chris struck the sixth string, sending vibrations through the instrument. She giggled and turned to her mother, who had a strange, worried look on her face.
"What do you want to hear?" he asked, putting the strap over his shoulder and pulling a pick out of his pocket. He sat down and motioned for the girl and her mother to sit across from him. Both obeyed, the mother now nearly as interested as her child. They both looked on, waiting for Chris to make the first move. Taking a deep breath, he struck the first chord. It rang true and he continued through one of the songs he knew best, the lyrics coming forth smoothly, voice and guitar molding together and becoming one. Neither of the women, mother or little girl, understood the words, but both sat there looking at him when he had finished. People who had stopped in their important rush stood still for a minute, looking at one another, uncomfortable. No one said anything for over a minute. Eventually, when it became evident that the show was over, the people wandered away again, looking at their watches to make sure too much time wasn't lost. The three sat staring at each other until the little girl slid off her chair and came running to Chris's knee.

"Pretty," she said in her attractive juvenile Portuguese. She reached up and touched the strings, less leery this time, her fingers brushing them cautiously, making a small sound. With sudden inspiration Chris took her hand in his and placed the pick in her small palm. She gasped and looked up at him with huge black eyes, wet and foal-like, slightly afraid. He slid to one knee and took the guitar from around his neck, placing it over her tiny shoulders. Her mother watched nervously, still not sure if Chris had poor intentions. The little girl gave her mother
the universal "Don't-worry-so-much" look and returned her gaze to Chris's face, waiting. Holding the guitar off the floor with his left knee, he placed the pick between the little girl's thumb and forefinger. He took her left hand and placed it over the neck. He pushed down on her fingers, keeping them in place on the strings and then, gathering her tiny, dark right hand in his thick pale one, brought both hands down over the strings, striking a chord. The little girl's face broke out in a smile and she glowed like the bright Carioca sun. He moved her fingers and struck another chord, her hand in his. In this manner, they proceeded through the song he had played for her and her mother, Chris whispering the words along with the slow melody. When they were finished, he took the guitar from her and returned it to the case, removing the strap and sticking it in his pack. He turned to the girl, who was still standing next to him, and again took her hand in his. Smiling broadly, he placed the blue pick in her right hand, closing her tiny fingers over it. He looked at his watch, and seeing that it was nearly seven, slung the worn leather pack over his shoulder and picked up the guitar, standing.

The little girl, her eyes confused for a moment, ran to him and grabbed onto his leg, pleading for him to play her another song. He set the guitar case on the tiles and, pulling the girl from his leg, kneeled, facing her. "If I tell you something, will you listen?" he asked. The little girl didn't say a thing, only looked at him with brimming eyes, nodding slowly. Grinning, Chris continued.

"If you want to hear another song," he said,
"listen. Here." He tapped her temple gently with his calloused left forefinger. "The music is up here," he continued, "just like I will be up here. Dream," he said, his eyes beginning to lose their focus. "Dream ... and remember." Then, something clicking inside of him, he gave the girl a peck on the cheek and placed her in her mother's arms. She sat there, not making a sound, her small fist gripping the pick with force. "Can I ask your name before I leave?" he said, kneeling before the two women.

"Carolina," the little girl muttered.

"Carolina," he repeated. "A beautiful name. One I think I could write a song about. In Portuguese, of course," he added after a brief pause and as a clouded look flashed briefly over her face. "It is certainly a name I'll never forget." With that, he stood, guitar in hand, and walked away from the mother and child to meet Helena, who he hoped could find him a place to sleep and someone to buy his dollars.
Waterbaby

When I touched you
I felt that you were the ocean
With the saltiness of
Your lips readily
Descending upon mine
Your body trickled
And splashed over mine
As you swam upon
My presence with
The sun tangling
In your hair
And I'm nothing
Compared to you.

Amy Hicks
Day 9 - Solo on David Lake

Night came, I sunk deeper into the grass, and the mosquitoes were my only friends. Over their singing I listened to the forest walk.

And stared long at myself, always coming home.

Shawn Gavin
the feeling of friendship

two girls, maybe they're sisters, sit
on the steps of a fountain
waiting for the clouds to lift
they share cigarettes while they talk
trying to create the illusion of sun
night comes without stars
so one girl, looking up, says -
why don't we sing and dance naked awhile
this makes the other one blush
but she smiles and slips off her brown shoes
and they dance with arms swaying high and
fingers feeling through invisible clouds
catching the moon and some stars in their nails
and then the girl who blushed earlier
sighs and says - this openness warms me
more than a clear day in june

Virginia Lautzenheiser