

From the Office Window

By May Swenson

MY ATTENTION the frame for a complication of city roofs:
Various levels, shapes, perspectives, angles. Puffs

from chimneys, ruffled flags on a school tower. Ectomorphic
shadows, flats of late light. Distant pigeons diving, cloud surf

slow-unrolling. A red construction crane north-leaning,
then south. Scrawl of a jet half-circling, caning

the sky. A monster of many surfaces rises to the split-second net
of my eye. How to beach it? Strokes of a pen, fleet

washes of a brush would fetch it eventually almost exact.
The process would be tedious, the body stiff, unlit

at capture. A camera might harpoon, arrest
the big thing whole—but gray and small. A cinema projector

could gulp and then expel it life-sized, intact in all
details, the entire whale still swimming. But the soul

would be hooked, and have to repeat itself just like that:
Chimneys never ceasing their white

evacuations. Shadows never slipping.
Flicking flags forever flicking.

Pigeons always slanting at that distance. The brick whale
never darkening. *Its many scales*

are already lamplit, the spouts and towers dark.
Words? Let their mutations work

toward the escape of objects into the nearest next
shape, motion, assembly, temporal context;

let the progeny of interlapping shadows multiply . . .
Facades of light! Another cumbrous monster has risen to my eye.

The Salesman

By Gene Frumkin

ALWAYS the big ruby sun ascends
and the compass points to him.
The lake of his eyes is full of sitting
ducks.

Tomorrow is always white as laundry
on the line
and the past is dirty water.

So he takes the plane from failure to
failure,
buoyant as a ballerina,
with his parachute packed for the next
disaster.

He has learned the wisdom of futility:
that heaven
is the rumor of his good luck.

Elegy for Simon Corl, Botanist

By David Wagoner

WITH wildflowers bedded in his
mind,
My blind great-uncle wrote a book.
His lips and beard were berry-stained,
Wrist broken like a shepherd's crook.

His door leaned open to the flies,
And May, like tendrils, wandered in.
The earth rose gently to his knees;
The clouds moved closer than his skin.

Sun against ear, he heard the slight
Stamen and pistil touch for days,
Felt pollen cast aslant like light
Into the shadows of his eyes.

When autumn stalked the leaves, he
curled;
His fingers ripened like the sky;
His ink ran to a single word,
And the straight margin went awry.

When frost lay bristling on the weeds,
He smoothed it with a yellow thumb,
Followed his white cane to the woods
Between the saxifrage and thyme.

And heard the hornets crack like ice,
Felt worms arch backward in the
snow;
And while the mites died under moss,
The bright scar sang across his brow.



Captain Slocum in West Tisbury for W.M.T.

By Ruthven Todd

THE penultimate voyage accomplished and the world
Clenched in a knuckle-busted fist, the age-old plan
Of sailors had to be fulfilled. Hopeful, the old man
Thought of an orchard and of the leaves that curled
In springtime buds, leaves more delicately furled
Than ever sails. Feet on earth now, he could scan
The unmoving acreage of apples, let a breeze fan
Cheeks stung by spindrift which a tempest hurled.

His nagging wife, however, revived thoughts of the dead,
Of the girl-wife buried long ago, under an alien hill.
The laughter of children brought his anguish to a head,
Producing wounds that only open sea could heal.
So the deep-water sailor set out, as he had done before,
To suffer, as he always did, upon the shoals of shore.

Rehabilitation Center

By Maxine W. Kumin

IN THE good suburb, in the bursting season,
their canes awag in the yellow day,
the newly maimed mince back to danger.

Cave by cave they come to building their hearing
hard as fists against the jangling birds,
the slipslop of car wheels, walls' mimicries,

the rebuttal of planes. Curbs curse them.
Puddles damn their simplicity. At lot lines
forsythia is a swipe across the face.

Under a wide sky let them cry now
to be coddled, misread a tree, black shins
or crack their knees on countermands;

the downgrade is uncertain for us all.

In time they will grow competent,
love us, test and correct, feel words
on their quiet skin, begin to light our lamps.

Six weeks and they will swing around these corners,
grotesque and right, their appetites restored.
It is true the sun is only heat,

but distance, depth, doorsills
are ridged on their maps until
they know exactly where they are now.

I see their lockstep tight as lilac buds.



Do You Know Him?

By Edwin Honig

NOTHING that clicks in his closeted brain,
Nothing that falls from his feasible tongue,
Nothing that's stamped with his pertinent name
Can ever be wasted or shown to be wrong.
The positive man has made them belong.

The shapes in his shop are always glassed in
Like specimen fish that swim into view
With cards neatly stating their wild origin.
They impress without rousing the angler in you.
The positive man has caught them for you.

But if ever you feel, when his ship shape shop
Is locked, an ink that inundates the day,
A skip in the clock, a tear that won't drop,
Know that such things only seem this way
When the positive man's on his holiday.

Like Country Gardens and the Shepherds Hey

By Byron Vazakas

FLIES buzzed my hammock strung
from porch to pine
where I vacationed, west of Lancaster,
my thirteenth summer, weed-choked
with romance.

Where Uncle Dan's well-hoed tobacco
rows
defined the view, green-leafed against
pink clay,
my sticky hands paged yellow
paperbacks.

Well fed, soaked in Aunt Ida's
lemonade,
my exile was an opera bouffé
where Graustark summered from the
obvious.

A toot of peppermint an ice-cream
cone,
made up for brain storms stunned by
the three R's
like sunstroke cured with watered
vinegar.

Among the Amish, like a wunderkind,
I took time straight, no duty's
spectacles
to thread time's needle with the
livelong days.

Sand-castled by the Conestoga Creek,
I dreamed alone. July's leaf-heavy
heat
played ducks-and-drakes with crops;
but not with me.

But summer is remembrance of things
past,
as in my past, until, in looking back,
cigars clutched by a wooden Indian

Are tomb enough for Dan; and Ida's
grave
a Cook's Tour album of bright
postalcards
shelved on a whatnot in a shuttered
room.

