

## LOTTERY DAY, 1970

We're taking infield practice and shagging flies,  
Jersey heat dripping from the bills of our caps,  
"Black Magic Woman" on a distant transistor,  
kids splashing and shouting in the public pool.  
The ribbing and the girl talk are on low.  
Someone hits a ball into the tennis courts.  
A man in white shorts throws it back gently.  
Today the war is coming home.

In an hour my mother will meet me at the door,  
still in her nightgown, having watched TV all day  
as blue plastic capsules  
were drawn from two separate drums,  
one of which was full of birthdays.  
A Winston in her hand, her eyes will be red,  
but she'll be smiling.  
All she will say is, "316."

I backhand a grounder near second.  
The shortstop turns two.  
Crickets are out at noon.  
We're all friends—we're all nineteen—  
our moms at home,  
glued to flickering screens,  
while we're out playing the game we know.

*Poet Lore (2017)*

## SANCTUARY

My grandfather thought he was a German,  
dashing in his Pickelhaube, iron cross  
and bullet from Verdun, until they told him,  
“No, you are not one of us,”  
and a clothier named Stern in North Dakota,  
who didn’t know him, signed some papers,  
which sailed him elsewhere, so twenty years later  
he could watch *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*  
with me on a black and white box in the Bronx.  
Quasimodo was an ugly wreck. I remember  
the gap tooth, pig nose and seesaw eyes.  
The townsfolk teased and menaced him.  
My grandfather said, “He is one of us.”  
Esmeralda was Maureen O’Hara,  
who had curls, breasts and a tambourine  
that could make a boy forget he was six.  
Hounded as a gypsy, she was set to be hanged.  
My grandfather said, “She is one of us.”  
I asked, “But how do I know?”  
And he said the same way Stern knew  
two half-continents and an ocean away,  
without a spec of ash on the hood of his car.  
At which precise moment the hunchback  
swung down on a rope to scoop up the gypsy,  
fly her to the belfry and shout, over and over,  
a solitary word,  
in a splendid voice that belied his brokenness.  
It’s not often that you know exactly  
what a word means the first time you hear it.  
Or that every time you hear it after  
someone nothing like you  
is sailing for your shore.

## ON BEING SLAPPED BY A WOMAN I DON'T KNOW

Intermission at the Opera. Saturday night.  
All I know about her is the pageboy cut  
of raven red hair. She stands abruptly  
then uses the full arc of her body turn  
to imprint the left side of my face.  
One contact lens now lodged up under its eyelid,  
a bicuspid stuck to the inside of my mouth,  
my cheek like a pup tent smacked by lightning.  
I had never been slapped by a woman before,  
though there was something about it I missed.  
Bacall giving it to Bogie. Crawford to Gable.  
Deserved. Delivered. On to the next scene.  
Black and white. Mine seemed technicolor.  
Turns out, she had been twirling one tip  
of her reading glasses between her front teeth  
while the other tip was tickling her ear.  
Which she thought was me, from the row behind,  
flirting, or trying to filch one of her diamond studs.  
Probably some other guy had earned it.  
Or I had earned it elsewhere.  
Edging my hand under Faye Brown's iron bra,  
her dad glued to *Gunsmoke* downstairs.  
Teasing my ex-wife for airballing a foul shot  
in front of 20,000 fans during halftime  
at the Oakland Coliseum on taco night.  
Asking my mom, just before heading off to college,  
why she let her kids be whipped  
and what she got out of watching.  
I was a good boy once.  
May have been an okay man.  
Though the heart never believes this.  
Needs a sharp reset. A briskly wiped slate.  
That's what I missed. The clarity.  
And the wakeup doesn't hurt much,  
requires no response.  
Just blink a few times, wiggle the jaw.  
Welcome rough justice.  
The curtain is rising.  
Carmen is taking her mark.

*pampelmousse (2018)*

## LAND'S END

As the light comes up, first shorebirds come in  
one by one to tip the steeped granite  
where surf breaks black to blue to white,  
then their kin fill in quietly below  
as a stream's bustle spills the tide sideways and slips  
a bleached herring bone from its windowpane stone.  
Plumes of gold bottle grass never enlighten  
the igneous char and tilted slate,  
nor do cormorants believe in the squall,  
gravid kelp swales or sardines shivered down,  
just as lizard and rock have different knowledge  
of each other, yesterday, the gutted cliffs, the sun.  
You may find you aren't needed, which is not the same  
as unwelcome, and there is an order without design.

*The Place that Inhabits Us* (Sixteen Rivers Press, 2010)

## BOTTOMS UP

times drink.  
we some -  
through which  
times opens,  
part that some-  
near the lofty

And the bottleneck has always been at the top,  
says, his two-year-old hates naps, end of list.  
aren't born, they're come-by. As the comedian  
forgone past their sell-by dates. But our bents  
thing or chest thing, whose fruits should be  
better. Get over it, you say. Just another groin  
when it suits me but the old cat when it suits me  
What's Your Problem face, to be the white man  
blood raw, I get to shoot a would-be helper the  
can't even manage the first twist. And, fingers  
at home. That time is coming. My time. When I  
lap; I have to board looking like I left my diaper  
in the honest effort that a cup-full splashes my  
have lost my grip; I squeeze the middle so hard  
She did say OK, but I'm as aged as I look to her,  
That she would rather die of thirst. And what if:  
I do not inquire, simply imagine her reply.  
even for well-meaning fossils. Therefore  
the damn thing. But no free passes anymore,  
I've been watching, itching to help her just pop  
of her halter top, then flips me a stare. Yes,  
Phoenix. She tries again with the ribbed hem  
of Fiji water in the waiting area for our flight to  
stud is laboring to unscrew sixteen ounces  
A young woman with Cal cap and ruby nose

P L U O T  
(In Memorium)

since everything  
by what we call accident,  
will someday come  
plum and apricot would have

by what we call accident, tied the knot without our consent. But our genetic impatience just had to enlist a lab coat and a pipette, so après the scare last year an iridescent label was publicly affixed charging GMO. OMG how the Safewayers fled in shock and dread to the aisle of Pop-Tarts and Eggos. You may remember where this led—banishment of a favorite nourishment to the rack of fruitoids, like the once-planetary anagram redefined as sidelined, now among the X-Men of edibles, as though bitten by a radioactive spider, its superpower no longer in vogue of gaining sweetness in the cold. Oh, scion of miscegenation, can't we all just get along? I confess to missing the Flavor Heart—cordate, dark perse skin, xanthous flesh. Though I've been told my mood swings and the mole bulging my earlobe may be a product of having overindulged. Inevitably, on another someday in a grove where the wind, the root soil and the habits of honeybees have been just right for centuries, a schoolgirl, bred the old way in the underground, will on her drift back home pluck from a long branch in her ingenuous genes a creation equally unusual yet no less natural than the fish which first bellied onto gleaming sand, and she will taste with her unpropitious lizard tongue the wild type coincidence of *p* and *a*, thinking what she would never dare to say,  
*How deviantly delicious.*

*DMQ Review (2016)*

## BIRTHDAY POEM

T  
h i s  
year's has  
fallen on the day  
heaped snow is slipping  
wholesale from pines by dint of  
earth's mood and spin, as when some-  
thing that is meant to  
happen sometime, happens  
now. White pads tip off in sheets,  
chunks quit their cradles, then a pause, after  
which more concert of mists, tails and stag  
cascades, old trunk knots and bark  
knobs fleeced, branches freed by the same  
law that bowed them. How still life must stand to  
animate the cold, hold for a while the sky come down,  
then let it fall again to suckle the root, turning frost  
back to forest,  
as if these were  
still last year's woods.

*The Marin Poetry Center Anthology (2013)*

## THE EMBRACE

A Stone Age

man and woman

were just unearthed a few kilometers from where the Capulet girl predicted  
all the world would be in love with night. As the copper subsoil was

brushed side-  
ways, their bones

rose dove-tailed in bas-relief, suggesting a purposeful caress. He had the  
wounds of heroism, she the wounds of sacrifice, though scientists could

not decipher

whether she was

his wife or some local virgin, whether it was her pleasure or her fate to comfort  
a warrior's soul in the afterlife. They share the grave but not the

truth, so I'm  
sending you this

valentine out of season. I lied about Paris, had been there before, but wanted  
to share it with you as if it was new. I hid those turquoise

earrings in

my sock drawer,

hoping that if you found something, anything, on one of your witch hunts, it  
might put us back on track. I know you wanted time and I gave you a

Rolex, 6-inch  
Jimmy Choos,

but The Man was keeping me late so I bought what I could with a heart dressed  
as credit. I would have weathered, bucked the dark patches, had enough

Left over

to help with your

son. And the Warfield, where we first went as friends, third row center, McCoy  
on keyboards, drum brush smoothing the sand, bass run

braiding the  
line, sax blowing

arrows just above our ears. You took my arm. When they bury us face up  
in separate boxes miles apart, I will still be in love with that night.