

## MARROW & TUFT MANNEQUIN FACTORY, MIDNIGHT

A crotch-itchy night watchman is listening to  
Mozart  
in the bowels of the mannequin factory.

Wolfgang, his blind guard dog,  
gnaws away on a woman's leg made of plastic.

It's nighttime survival for men:  
radio, coffee, beef jerky, crossword in a skin  
magazine.

Thumb-lick, flip and leaf through the pages.  
Find a four-letter word for *woman*....

Take comfort in the centrefold.  
It's ghastly boring stuff, waiting for noises.

Furnace turned low, you see your breath in the air.  
Wolfie's breath too; he pants out vespers.

The old dog moans and it sounds like your wife.  
Find a six-letter word for *wife*....

Go on, pet the beast.  
He needs the contact and so do you,

trapped inside this cage of concrete  
with those lifeless bodies on the assembly block,

wooden groans in the floorboards, a creaking  
ceiling,  
howling windows, a strain of industry lights.

The factory stinks like rancid cabbage,  
like language from bad breath, like burnt toast.

Your mind construes your senses—things smell  
better in these dreams.  
A magic flute is turning into perfume,

perfume is turning into a tragic cello-shaped sister.  
Gloria always smelled burnt toast before a seizure.

There's a frightening rhythm to an epileptic fit.  
Find a five-letter word for *sister*....

Wolfgang's splayed like a corpse,  
as loyal to the ground as the Dead.

The body's promise to the earth is lost in here.  
They all keep coming back plastic.

Suddenly, a yearning to make love in a field  
against grass and beneath a tree,

pressed upon hips and a blanket of soil.  
Find an eight-letter word for *lover*....

You've given all the statues names that end in "A."  
Go on and call out to them for comfort:

*Donna, Flora, Martha, Maria, Lucia, Cecilia,  
Theresa, Sabrina, Christina, Cassandra, Sara, Anabella,*

*Isadora, Isabella, Nora, Anna, Magdalena, Amanda,  
Amelia,  
Cordelia, Ophelia, Miranda, Tristessa, Gianna,  
Constanza.*

Mannequin girls don't give a damn about Mozart,  
though the radio blares out and echoes like a  
labyrinth.

Distorted in the purple half-light of the warehouse:  
see them contorted, unpainted, bent at the waist,  
fixed.

Unclothed giant dolls  
you'd find in a child's playground fantasy.

Only five more hours until the factory reopens  
and the foreman relieves you from your post.

Until then, follow these hallucinations, passing  
through walls,  
penetrating stone and looking for warm bodies.

And as the tyranny of night music keeps calling you  
back,  
find an eight-letter word for *Naming the Mannequins*.

**RIFF'S ALLEY BOXING CLUB, 12:30 A.M.**

Awake to find two chirping birds flying circles  
around your head,  
smelling salts under your nose,  
gloves swatting at your trainer.  
It was all over in the fifth.  
In the clearing, the other man grows horns  
and puffs smoke out of blue nostrils.  
A small crowd of rodents in raincoats  
is crawling out of the boxing club,  
not far from the mannequin factory.  
To hell with your ranking,  
the place is a drain and you're slowly sinking down,  
circling counter then clockwise.  
There's blood on your scapula  
and blood on the medal of our Lady of Guadeloupe  
hanging around your neck.

On ice in the locker room,  
the numb parts burn.  
You've never made a deal with the Valentino boys  
before.  
First loss since going clean,  
and you're stretching yourself  
and racking your already soft brains for answers.  
Your trainer is an eggplant in sweats,  
pockmarked and purple.  
The loss is making his psoriasis worse;  
he's wild with scratching.  
Naked and ashamed in front of the old man.  
If only booze could take the blame.

**12:35 A.M.**

The eggplant leaves.  
 Stare hard at the slaughtered bison in the mirror.  
 Losing sober isn't like losing drunk.  
 Find the rubbing alcohol in a first-aid kit,  
 struggle with the cap  
 you have between your teeth,  
 biting down; frantic to get it off,  
 all saliva for even just a drop of the poison.  
 The bottle cracks;  
 bursting out, a swarm of bees  
 stings the mouth and the back of the throat.  
 Bubbling, every wound fizzes.

Where have the words gone?  
 You search for the words  
 and begin again:

*Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee,  
 blessed art thou among women  
 and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus.  
 Thy womb. Jesus. Thy womb Jesus.  
 Womb. Jesus.  
 Jesus.*

Alone, just like before the fight,  
 you draw a blank on the prayer.  
 More than a blank—fact is, the words  
 have left you completely, taken from you  
 just as swiftly as they'd been given to you—  
 lost, on the burning tip of your tongue.

**12:45 A.M.**

Strip down to your bare ass,  
outface the assault from the shower.  
No matter how hard you try, you can't leave your  
body.

Beat on and bruised.  
Hope is a bitter thing to lost causes,  
used goods and comeback kids alike.  
Better to embrace sorrow;  
hold up more conceivable ideals,  
like fifth-round knockdowns and despair.

Donna, the ring girl, calls out to you.  
She's standing half-naked  
in the doorway of the locker room.  
She's traded in her cards for a silk blue robe  
with the words *Riff's Alley Boxing Club*  
embroidered in gold on the back.  
Aside from strutting around the ring between  
rounds,  
she's also a kind of consolation prize for the loser.  
A way to keep the flunkies coming back, win, lose  
or draw.

Glare at her, so hard it hurts.  
Then pounce.  
The two of you go at each other like drowning dogs,  
sprawled out over uneven cracked tiles.  
Lost in the steam from the shower stall.

It's not blood, baby, only sweat and tears.  
Biting, hair-pulling, scratching, eye-gouging,  
name-calling are all allowed,  
so stick and move, stick and move!  
Coughing like trees in a storm  
and gasping for new breath,  
exploding, in turn, until it's over.

Her raven words echo inside the shower  
where the boxer lies in jigsaw pieces on the floor.  
Parts of him going down the drain,  
while the woman is towelling off,  
broken bits left in the ring in the fifth,  
some flickering in a flame  
in a candle down at St. Cecilia's Cathedral,  
where he went to Mass before the match.  
Find the name for your pain. Find God in coach's  
spit bucket.

**1:00 A.M.**

She's still talking to you.  
But you won't face her now,  
won't let her see you this way.  
Get up and peer around the corner.  
Meet her hollowed-out ass.  
There are parts of you in that hollow too.  
She's still nude, bent at the waist,  
painting the toenails of her left foot,  
asking if you want to join her for a drink.  
On instinct to escape,  
you make for a small window above the toilet.  
She's the noise outside,  
the constant talking  
that sounds like:

*CHEAP MOTHERFUCKER CHUMP.*

So, motherfucker,  
balance yourself on the rim  
of the toilet and pry open the window;  
hoist yourself up, and slither;  
wiggle through the opening above  
and land outside with belly, face and genitals in the  
torn mud.

Mucking through that heap,  
in a downpour of red rain,  
a desperate nightcrawler,  
thrashing your body along the ground:

creature from the blackest of lagoons.  
Soon, you'll hit pavement,  
grow legs and walk upright;  
but this evolution  
is still a ways away.  
Writhing on the leathery surface of the Earth,  
the life force of the ages  
is bearing down on your back.  
Just another mile, baby.  
Just a little more.  
Dig a little deeper, boy; almost home.

Rising up out of that bog,  
your boxer's body  
is covered from head to toe with sludge.

Run, prizefighter, run,  
as you have done on countless mornings  
for countless miles.  
Run like a frayed bird trying to fly,  
on bird feet with wings flapping.  
You can see it in the distance,  
your body is being cleansed.  
Cleansed of the right hooks and left jabs,  
of being beat on and bruised.  
Cleansed of alcoholism and glory missions,  
and muscle spasms and Donna's chasm.  
Your body is being cleansed.

Stop running as the prayer comes to you.  
Plant your feet. Raise your arms, your face, your  
eyes

and repeat the words of that prayer:

*Holy Mary, Mother of God,  
pray for us sinners  
now and at the hour of our death.*

And from your wounds,  
a small pool of blood  
forms at your feet. Amen.

## DUMPSTER, 1:10 A.M.

A bearded acrobat in rags  
    hooks his ankles over the metal lip  
and grips the big green bin.  
    Max is fishing in the alley again,  
frantic to reach the buried bottle.  
    The balancing act is slippery in lime:  
juice or puke or both. Index finger into Sleeman's  
    open mouth,  
    *'Gonna gag it and grab it and cash the bastard in.'*  
Hurling his crumpled body up and over the rim,  
    he sticks the landing.  
The wheels of his shopping cart squeal  
    as he peels away giddy and richer than rats,  
dancing to the sound of jangling empties  
    and pocketfuls of change.

## **LIQUID ECLIPSE NIGHTCLUB, 1:15 A.M.**

Jerry and his beloved, Stella, are telling each other  
all about love, shoving their way around a crowded  
bumper dance floor. More bodies floating here  
than in a Babylon river: quivering

thighs, hips, tits, lips; dips, lifts, twists, the do-si-do.  
Disco lights pulsate with the heart's murmur.  
Squirming to get at one another:  
shuddering like gritty camera lenses.

Men's room is down the hall.  
Follow your master libido.  
Go. Float by the boys playing billiards.  
Fill your shot glass one last time with rum.

Sometimes the drives get the better of us.  
Lust's a lion that will not yield.  
Feel the blood in your veins  
strain those parts that lie soft, like lambs.

**1:30 A.M.**

Crammed inside a bathroom stall,  
walled in, standing up.  
Hiccupping pelvic thrusts.  
Fearless fantasy #35 from the urbanites' *Kama Sutra*.

Putrid smells of urine and wine-vomit.  
Shiny beads of sweat on your lover's brow.  
Now the world makes sense of the senses.  
Intense collage of the human comedy reduced.

Fused together here with glue and *eau de toilet*.  
Quiet! Subdue your grunts and groans.  
Loads blow, echo, jerk, resound and die off  
against lime green tiles.

**I:33 A.M.**

Two bouncers enter, mean-spirited and savage,  
dragging Santino Furioso in chains.  
Rage, blades and payback time.  
Crimes he's committed against Don Alfonse's daughter.

*Slaughter the greaseball if you have to.*  
*He knew the cost of each sloppy kiss....*  
Listen: hear them smack a belt across his face.  
Disgraced fathers don't dream of Eros.

Lost virginity must be found again.  
Pound his ribs until they bruise, until they break.  
Pack his mouth with bathroom tissue.  
Mute him, bend him, piss in his wounds.

The two goons bring him to the rim  
of the urinal and flush.  
Such is the rush and cascading fall  
of waterlogged retribution.

**I:45 A.M.**

See them with closed eyes and open mouths,  
shrouded and waiting for Santino's beating to stop.  
Shocked: find them huddled together,  
like stone statues on a toilet seat.

Meat gasps beyond the door, ignoring  
his listless tries to break free.  
Maybe they won't find them hiding like reptiles  
inside the exclusivity that private chambers provide.

Divided: Stella wants to scream wildly.  
Jerry forces her face deeper into his chest.  
Shush, hush, and be still.  
Will your nerves to walk the razor's edge.

Pledge a thousand silences  
if it means you won't be called  
to bear witness at the trial.  
Denial is the voyeur's one saving grace.