

Character Poems

Description

Siren

By Amy Gerstler

I have a fish's tail, so I'm not qualified to love you.
But I do. Pale as an August sky, pale as flour milled
a thousand times, pale as icebergs I have never seen,
rocks I lie on, that from far away it looks like I'm a baby
riding a dinosaur. The turn of the centuries or the turn
of a page means the same to me, little or nothing.
I have teeth in places you'd never suspect. Come. Kiss me
and die soon. I slap my tail in the shallows—which is to say
I appreciate nature. You see my sisters and me perched
on rocks and tiny islands here and there for miles:
untangling our hair with our fingers, eating seaweed.

Extra Extra

By Sarah Gorman

She's dressed to kill,
scarlet off-the-shoulder
minidress, matching sheers
and bangs moussed
like a spray of river
backed up behind a rock.
Her bag's hooked on a pinky
and she swings it,
tight little orbit,
parachuting
maple key. You flash back
to a fall morning
by sheer luck catching
the sudden sexual rain –
a thousand seeds
from one overripe tree.
It had to be
overkill, all that action

for a single coupling
into succulent, condition-red
soil. But now that you
think of it, there's
something extra here too,
an endearing messiness
as she flips her bag
once too often
and it flies smack
into her best
friend's abdomen.
She's blown her cool
but there's wisdom
in losing it too.
Call it instinct?
--this woman knows
in the beginning
life exploded:
a universe, a home
from all that swirling
powder and shadow
and gloss.

Relationships

Ode to the Drum

By Yusef Komunyakaa

Listen

Gazelle, I killed you
for your skin's exquisite
touch, for how easy it is
to be nailed to a board
weathered raw as white
butcher paper. Last night
I heard my daughter praying
for the meat here at my feet.
You know it wasn't anger
that made me stop my heart
till the hammer fell. Weeks

ago, I broke you as a woman
once shattered me into a song
beneath her weight, before
you slouched into that
grassy hush. But now
I'm tightening lashes,
shaping hide as if around
a ribcage, stretched
like five bowstrings.
Ghosts cannot slip back
inside the body's drum.
You've been seasoned
by wind, dusk & sunlight.
Pressure can make everything
whole again, brass nails
tacked into the ebony wood
your face has been carved
five times. I have to drive
trouble from the valley.
Trouble in the hills.
Trouble on the river
too. There's no kola nut,
palm wine, fish, salt,
or calabash. Kadoom.
Kadoom. Kadoom. Ka-
dooooom. Kadoom. Now
I have beaten a song back into you,
rise & walk away like a panther.

In the Mirror
By Tricia Stuckey

Come here,
he said
reaching an arm out
across the rusty-colored
red vinyl of the long bench seat.
Come here,
sit next to me.
Sliding over,
she watched him

watch the road.
Come closer,
he said
and the crazy grin spread
across his tanned face.
The teeth of his smile
shone in the sunlight
and his hair
sprung from his head
like a mane
Closer,
he said,
and slung an arm
around her shoulder
pulling her to his side.
The dust flew up
from the road
and the big red truck
bounced and flung itself
down the old dirt road.
Look here,
he said
glancing toward the glare
of the side-view mirror.
She sang along, off key,
not knowing the words,
and leaned in closer still.
There,
he said,
in the mirror.
She tilted her head
and caught a glimpse
of her face next to his,
slightly sunburned,
eyes bright, teeth shining
from a crazy grin,
hair twisted into ropes
by the wind.
Look closely,
he said.
This is the way
I will always think of you.

Norwegian Wood (This Bird Has Flown)

By John Lennon and Paul McCartney

I once had a girl, or should I say, she once had me
She showed me her room, isn't it good, Norwegian wood?

She asked me to stay and she told me to sit anywhere
So I looked around and I noticed there wasn't a chair

I sat on the rug, biding my time, drinking her wine
We talked until two and then she said, "It's time for bed"

She told me she worked in the morning and started to laugh
I told her I didn't and crawled off to sleep in the bath

And when I awoke I was alone, this bird had flown
So I lit a fire, isn't it good, Norwegian wood?

Point of View

Daisies

By Louise Gluck

Go ahead: say what you're thinking. The garden
is not the real world. Machines
are the real world. Say frankly what any fool
could read in your face: it makes sense
to avoid us, to resist
nostalgia. It is
not modern enough, the sound the wind makes
stirring a meadow of daisies: the mind
cannot shine following it. And the mind
wants to shine, plainly, as
machines shine, and not
grow deep, as, for example, roots. It is very touching,
all the same, to see you cautiously
approaching the meadow's border in early morning,
when no one could possibly
be watching you. The longer you stand at the edge,

the more nervous you seem. No one wants to hear
impressions of the natural world: you will be
laughed at again; scorn will be piled on you.
As for what you're actually
Hearing this morning: think twice
Before you tell anyone what was said in this field
and by whom.

Kitten

By Felda Brown Jackson

She is thirteen. Her cat, Sneakers,
has just had another litter of kittens
to be chloroformed by her father
in the large cooking pot. "Keep whichever
you want," he says, "mother or kitten,
just one." She is sitting on her bed
petting the male kitten with thick
tan fur. She sits close to her Silvertone
radio, moves her mouth to the music.
A rifle cracks in the back yard,
then a scuffle like a rat
under the house. Sneakers has gotten
away, not quite dead, is crouched
in a far corner wailing a low
steady wail. She watches the square
knob on her dresser, lit with sun,
the back hairs of her kitten ablaze
in the sunlight like little spines
Under her is the live crawlspace.
She hold the little paws of her kitten,
pushes her thumbs gently into the center
of the pads with almost divine
tenderness, watches the claws extend
involuntarily, translucent little hooks.
She has a vision of pushing until they fly
outward like darts, or rays of sun,
leaving the kitten with buff-
colored buttons of feet. She names it
Buffy, imagines buffing the DeSoto
with the kitten, rubbing him flat
as her grandmother's fox stole,

popping in little marbles for eyes
that would catch the light,
hard. Her father is calling kitty, here
kitty, his flashlight in the cat's
eyes. It is Jungle-Cat, leaping out
of a 3-D screen among arrows, flying
at the audience. She stretches out on
the bed and brushes her face across
her smooth animal. A dark creature passes
through the back chambers of her thought
like a shadow, enters a kingdom
of shadows, stirring and stirring.