



Debi Kops

Claudia Dobkins



# FIRST POEMS

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# FIRST POEMS

**answer to deborah richardson**

behind every crêpe de chine cloud  
there is a gold lamé lining.

## **Beach Poem**

Night calls burst a whisper of boats through fog.  
driftwood scatters brushing my feet wondering  
where to go; the green cans are empty,  
umbrellas, once laughing lay squashed,  
their gigantic mouths still mumbling.

Blind eyes lurk on the ocean floor.  
sleepily they blink white and dry;  
where fish swim to drink silence on the shore,  
I hear seaweed battered on the wind.

## Still Life

This still life of cups  
mocking the table  
recurs as a glint of eye  
as an ice moon blown  
on October's window.

Your thumbs shredding plums;  
the skillet where you stand,  
back bent, sleek as a cat.  
The orange bowls gape  
where my laughter sticks,

the teeth edge of it slitting  
your voice beating out the inevitable,  
each syllable booms hollow,  
an echo of broken drums.

I turn, rotating on my axis of knives,  
the walls ache, the lights shut,  
as you tell me about her.

**gentlemen like that**

open all doors,  
light all cigarettes,  
pay the check,  
escort you home,  
kiss the tips of your thumbs,  
lean for your mouth with closed eyes,  
in the dark, you could be anyone.

**writing poetry**

each time  
the same wringing of hands  
and the thought of pills  
or music.

sometimes it's a man  
or the sharpening of pencils  
that detours us.

more often it is  
the migraine  
or anger that forces  
us to do it.

always saying this  
is the last time ever.

## THE HUNTER RETURNS ON FOOT

I only remember  
feet  
that shatter glass

the soft cunning of  
toes  
snapping weed

the thorny feet of the  
deerslayer  
tracking deer

I remember it all  
in  
withering photographs

young fawns that  
died  
with wooden eyes

frozen in a glimpse  
of  
shuffling bone

how the hunter stands  
watching  
his kill go gray

lean stags murmur  
confession  
shamed at ravage

when those feet do  
not  
return

they will sing your  
death  
with thanksgiving

**to fat**

shedding skin in handfuls,  
warm dough, pearly,  
i dream it out of windows.

silver in darkness,  
immaculate whiteness,  
my skin

washes off like colors  
or voices dying from  
the radio.

soft bed with little tufts of hair,  
what magnificent gardens burst within?

What woman hums beneath the folds  
impatient with waiting?

## **The Orange Tent**

It squats like a pumpkin,  
is harmless with its zippers and flaps  
but its fat mouth gloats.

what indolence!  
it sprawls like a nude with nothing to do  
but remember feet and various sized asses.

how smug it is  
anchored there with fat stakes.  
it stretches to the trees as if it recognized them.

The rubber sides puff with the breeze,  
glutted from some remembered dinner, no doubt.  
It sniffs as if anticipating erotica or money.

What does it want if not other arms  
and familiar creases?  
even the canvas sheds as if it itched  
for other people, different years.

**a sudden simple song (about love)**

that your skeleton fits mine is not enough.  
your bones rub me to a chiseled powder.  
your touch is electrifying  
even when you are not here.

my hair is an aura of questions;  
who do you dream behind your eyes?  
as if the curve of my pelvis is not enough.

when heat measures its beats across my thighs  
it is no more than an aching to be dressed  
in skin,

to flow in a milky substance  
of honey,  
of dandelion wine.

that your skin fits mine is not enough.  
your fingers capture my lips  
and I am burning for the woman you dream,

that the sound of her voice would leave  
me wordless

or alone with a mysterious melody.

**The editor says:**

These first poems don't make a difference.  
They are interesting but they don't make me  
cry, yet here's a line:

*O' tub of blood dumped from the sun  
how redness wraps the earth*

Now *that* approaches the cosmic!  
But this:

*A poppy within me blooms  
as rhythmic and exotic as Pennsylvania.*

Now, *that* is women's crap.  
Still, you show promise and I'd like to see more  
of your work.

When you are about thirty-five, *then* you'll be  
able to write, that is, of course, another decade  
away. Give yourself some time to fuck whores,  
brawl in bars and drink a lot. Then we'll see lines  
like:

*The hallways leak piss and soured rags  
but her eyes are innocent as easter baskets.*

## THE MATCHMAKER'S MISTAKE

If fate had arranged it  
the two of you would be together  
on that street we haven't walked;

she with her letters,  
you with the car,  
and rain.

Tonight an otherwise dry sky  
stains through the years;

on this road,  
blots of another sort  
and all our aches are different.

**david**

nothing sleeps right  
the nights he walks

the air hugs a street lamp  
or strokes a dead animal's fur

where his feet go  
a faint sizzle leaps off the sidewalk

as if his frost  
were a fine cut glass melting

he is the moon in reverse  
a calling card

in hieroglyphics  
or untranslatable verse

the white bird haunting  
behind his forehead

flutters its wings like breath

forming unutterable words.

## **Tulips**

stick in the air with nothing to do.  
They are receptacles for stares;  
one man is in awe of their beauty,  
another wants to grab their necks and yank.

Still they remain passive, unafraid.  
Even if the wind musters a subversive whisper  
they are compliant, they do the right thing.

As for the grass, no one seems to notice.  
How it gushes in abundance!  
Even now invisible blades of it grunt  
against roots moaning with terrible secrets.

## BRIEF EXPLANATION

What love did. The beast sleeps,  
the apples sit on the window dried and waiting.  
When poems yawn the air eats itself  
a good void. The shaft of my brain waits

for what you say. I am more like hunger  
satiated on tubes. The beast is the curve of  
a letter rerouted, it breathes in strange winds,  
blinks with button eyes.

Love, say then, that I have written stronger  
poems; I outweigh dust, in the crumble of earth  
I am a blade hating; or, let me die,  
    the pump of blood,  
the bullet of heart blasts too deep.

If what I say rides on helium, know it can  
be pricked, that the line is empty, what I  
pour in the glass bell leaks, my teeth tear  
blanks.

What love did. The beast sleeps.  
I work to hear the sound of nothing;  
the agony has gone deaf, as if each day  
were the last poem I'd ever write.

## **Gardener**

*(for George Behrman)*

Cupped in your hands  
I want to stay  
as melons scented with  
October.

I am over-ripe, blown  
full as moons, splitting  
to mouth for your

lips. Lift me, my  
rootbed swells to meet  
your vine.

Here in tender grasses,  
I burst, letting my  
seedlings grow wild.

## **For A Friend Who Left Without A Message**

Without you I am burying animals,  
with you I am digging them up.  
There is a hole outside,  
today it was empty.

Now the rain soaks through the mound,  
below an echo of drops beating a brown bag.  
Had you been there to feast on flowers

I would have returned to pack the earth.  
When you left no shoe or footprint  
I examined the grass  
looking for a thumbnail or a split.

**walking**

two kettles drumming,  
a boom of legs in skeletal rhythm  
grinding from hip to hip.

between our thighs, skin and silk swishing,  
the sound of apples eating from the inside out.  
our juice is red, blasts of blood bang bones  
beating in feet.

we march on rattling sticks.

when we lock fingers, I think splinters  
shooting the sun down.

**listen**

baby

do you always keep a woman waiting?

i

will not

stand for this

sitting

wondering

what it is

you've decided.

i've got

four pieces of paper

with you scrawled

all over them.

my hands

are smeared with

every color

of your name.

it took me

such a long time

to pick the right one.

come on

poem!

**not her house**

this  
is her mother's house  
nothing has anything to  
do with her

though  
she swipes the sponge  
across the counter  
as if

she  
was planted there.  
she has something  
stuck around her middle

the blouse  
fills her out  
no  
it couldn't be fat  
yet

she's only married five  
years and  
angry at her ovaries

that  
won't produce.  
at three o'clock  
she wakes him

straddles his middle  
and rides until  
she's wet  
then the doctor will

check  
to see if she got it  
in right  
if it can work

with less pills  
and apprehension.

it is dark  
in her mother's  
house  
I can't see the  
china she is showing me

nor the patterned silver  
or her reflection  
already  
tarnished  
from use.

## Winter Song

the trees shedding leaves.  
the earth is a rug covered  
with hands.

the naked limbs  
like bones  
clatter in a rough wind.

what I see before snow.  
before you and I grow silent  
is a thousand tiny windows  
smelling of death  
each one more quiet than the last.