

Barbara Duffey

We Can Definitively Report that We Have Not Released Man-Eating Badgers in the Vicinity

Mavericks per the law of fur and claw, they sing their call sign, “Only When Provoked.” And boy, are you One to Provoke, you who went to the vet in the flash-flood warning, knowing you'd be stranded, just to buy prescription cat food. You'd stroke a badger's coat, coax it down from my bureau, rub its face beside its croc-strong jaw. What do you expect? You heard the man—no one else is responsible. Your need to feed will get me hurt.

Other and Unspecified Misadventures During Medical Care

—medical billing code E876.3

It could be worse: Fall on Stairs in Water
Transport, Accident Involving Spacecraft,
Injury Due to War Operations

but Occurring after Cessation of
Hostilities. If only it weren't so
hard, the Other, Multiple, Ill-Defined

Dislocations, easy, the Foreign Body
Left In. After the Unspecified Fall,
susceptible to the Toxic Effect

of Substances, we Conflagrate in
Private Dwellings, Shock Without Mention of
Trauma. The whisper quickens down the line:

She's a goner, and we don't know why. When
the sun finally shone enough we could
see the bottom of the river through rushed

snowmelt, we packed our bags and left by the
back door, two Single Liveborn on the lam.

Sonnet of the Spontaneous Combustor

On fire, I live as if a specimen,
performing my spectacle above
a critic-crowd who name me in Latin.
Research appears in the journals of
whispers: *a self-oven short order cook,*
he could be, this mancus uni doli;
jet fuel; an ADD-sufferer's book
light; hot dog, marshmallow rotisserie;
no person but kindling, tinder, power
source employed in engines, pushing pistons.
But when I'm unlit, the cautious cower,
the throng parts for me, everyone listens.
If I were predictable, I'd draw jobs,
know myself—instead, my chance heat throbs.

The Circus of Forgetting

We went on an oddball, B-lister
bender for a while, but now
we plan a *montagne russe* down Main Street,

elephants on inverse pyramids, and
a radar for the overburdened.

When we find them, we'll invite them in

the three rings, spin them three times, super-
annuate their memories by pulling
on their auricles as we strum a

lyre whose strings are made of werewolf gut.
If they have boisterous thoughts, we'll throw them
in the mash tun, ferment them to beer,

or repair their puzzle-hearts with glue
of cafe latte and rice flour.

It will be a mixed blessing. They will

rest easy as bots, fail at math,
lose children, flail their hands when they
learn we don't offer future-proofing.

They can't choose whose bear hugs to accept
or which ragamuffin kiddo to
kiss at night. They overlive in fright.

Theories of Sculpture

Snoozing in rock, minding your own business
you free. He knows where you are.

is how Michelangelo finds you and chisels

Barbara Hepworth will round your edges,
buff you down,
sphere you,
turn you
in a lathe so each limb
liquefies
at moment's notice,
you, a frozen movement.

Rodin will make a you
with bronze, mold
from absence, fill you in
waiting to be remembered.

Degas will build you up,
flake by flake, from metal
and dress you in a tutu.

You will always stop a wave-beat past a kneecap,
always extend past the lines recognized as human-shape.

The Brancusi you
a wily,
gilded,
pregnant fish. You are
parentheses married at the tips,
the gleam off bulges,
a side-stretch before a run.

Giacometti will thin you tall
as marathoners,
keep your head but move it
on continuous legs.

*The legs only
the mind's antennae to earth.*

If you ran your legs thin, would your broadcast change?
I ask because I fear my mind's too weak a signal to reach
earth on its own: I want to look like someone who knows what she's doing.