

Charles Borkhuis

THE OUTSIDE LOOKING IN

raise your noir a scar and have a sip
here's to the afternoon's drool at twilight
the mercurial day has given way
to the mosquito and the gnat

a passing cloud sets the stage
for the dark epiphany of an earlier time
little changes in light through the blinds
morph into slanted creatures on a wall
whispers of the outside looking in
nothing is ever what it seems

someone dies and the world goes on
with its noisy routines
laughter shouts and screams
what you thought was so important
isn't to others who have their own
convoluted traumas to think about

in your twenties you'd probably prefer
a tattoo to speak for you
in midlife it's more like a disturbing crack
in the ceiling that gets longer each time you look
where a voice might speak to you
when no one else is listening

you don't have to say it I can read it off your face
everyone is no one special
the leaves in the trees would applaud your discernment
if they only had a brain

A LITTLE MORE NOTHING PLEASE

nothing is ever quite over
there's always a nagging something
you could die for
that can't be said

let's say your point of view has changed
ever so slightly now you can relax
and close your eyes
your dingy is floating across a mauve sky

now the sun hides
behind your lover's face
and the dead rise as smoke

the criminal always leaves his ghost
at the scene of the crime
and the poem ends and begins again

in other words
time takes us for a ride
a horse-drawn spin around the park and back

approximations decide our fate
nothing is ever complete enough to end
there are always loose streamers hanging
over the abyss

numbers that don't add up
are destined to go on indefinitely
tell me what was it exactly
that you wanted to say

RAISING THE DEAD

ropes and pulleys are working overtime
on my caged falsetto
if I were a weeper I'd weep
for all those thespians who died on stage

but I'm only a singer of songs
that's the way it is in show biz
the dancing bear and the smiling assistant
being sawed in half

then we break for lunch
soon to start all over again
putting on a face to face the public
unless you want to masquerade as yourself

a dangerous game
any way you cut it
one is always buying time
with little to show for it

the lights come up I say my lines
and die on stage the curtain goes down
and the audience shouts
encore encore

but when it comes up again the audience
doesn't want to see actors taking a bow
it wants to see its dearly departed
rising from the dead for the late show

ALIEN GRACE

light releases its losses
its crumble-clock sandman
face falling apart in his hands

the flatfoot chases his double
down a rabbit hole where
dreams collide

the sculptor chips away
at the cement firmament
one star at a time

one million sunbathing heads
watch the crashing waves
that just want to be human

no sign but a frozen wakefulness
the sensation of breathing
mist upon a mirror

alive in the reservoir of darkness
where comets come and go
peopled by faces little flames

if I could just
piece together another you
a map a mask or head on wheels

rolling down the bumpy alphabet
to slide off a slip of the tongue
as if to speak

as if we were an accident
signaling at the periphery of all that is
one wiggles a toe at a distant planet

one coaxes a skull to sing
an aria to an asteroid
far away but fast upon us

one urges roads to bloom
rivers in a puddle
and pronouns to switch heads

she hiding in the other me
makes beautiful noise
in the microwave background

enter anywhere the sentence finds you
sunning in the rain
or shipwrecked on a rock

you are not alone your shadow
dials light from a distant supernova
the whole particle mind in hurricane makeup

squeezed to an infinitesimal pinprick
where words from nowhere
dart in and out through holes in the coral

a howling stone thrown skyward
shines moonlight
through your open mouth