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CHARITY

The important thing is to show
Our concern. Poor – or, rather,
Disadvantaged – children need our
Help and it would be inhumane to
Withhold it. So we have set up
Rows of loaned tables under
A kindly donated, on loan, tent,
And some of us have benefited ourselves
With aprons and are cooking
Soup. With one giant kettle,
It looks like a witches' brew –
And pretending that this is some
Evil convention is so much fun for all
Of us. We never imagined. We grin
And giggle as we siphon the line
Of children forward, giving them
First, on loan, a bowl and then,
On loan, a spoon. They hold them
In separate hands and perhaps
Like weapons. We make
A game to keep them focused:
Who will get the rat's whiskers,
Who will get the rat's tail?

EFFORT

There is a man in a garage
Beating on heavy things with his hammer.
The garage door is up and open
To the world. Children skate
Down the sidewalk and look over
As they pass. They always see
The back of him. Every so often
He saws, places something in a vice.
He does not seem very precise,
But every day he is there, open
For the neighbors to peer past
His empty driveway and into his
Garage with its nondescript tools
And his hammering, and the sight
Of his back, bent, lowering his head
Into the details of his work. He
Is fashioning the fate of the world.
Everyone wonders where he parks his car.

EXPECTATIONS

We ride like the expectation of distance.
Trees and fences and buildings pass;
We lean forward to bear the smack
Of the wind. We luxuriate
In the sound of our horses' steel breathing.
There are places to go,
Places to come back from,
Things to pass. How long
At this speed can our horses race?
Whisper it to me, so they
Will not know. Getting the most
Out of everything is all there is for us to do.
I pump down on the stirrups,
Pass too many things to see them all,
Focus on my horse's mane,
Gasp at my grasp of the reins.
We ride as if our journey were not random.

NATURE

When was the last time
You bit into a good lightning bolt?
The ones that come down these days
Roll a bit tinny, leave an after taste.
I remember when the texture of each
Was all crackle, and the digestion of a good one
Seemed like shielded wire between reinforced circuits.
Now the wire is not gold, is not
Even copper, and the lack
Of polarization cauterizes your stomach.
When it was God who sent the bolts down
You knew that every one you might capture
Would be a treat that would keep you aglow
All the night and into the next day.
This jolt the weather makers sputter out
You can hardly stand to stuff in:
You have to struggle to keep the uneven juice
From spewing back as stray ionization.
There is in them more burn than glow,
More static than sizzle, more smoke than stun.
Chum down a few less ripe looking ones
And, from the first of morning, your day is you hanging
Your chafed backside over the capacitors,
Unable to stop the wattage flow:
With you thinking surely
Each ampere out must be the last,
And swearing next time you would rather
Plug directly into someone's wall: prime yourself
For the safe, if tamed, stuff; trade
This painful jiggery for a slow burn consistency.
But soon, with a garnish of thunder,
Yet again your school-boy hope is growing,
And you begin half-wittedly to surmise that
By now they must be stitching this discharge finally right.

PUBLIC ACCESS

I am sorry to say
everyone is out.
Everyone takes the same lunch hour.
Everyone also takes the same time off
for their dentist appointments.
At the exit of the parking garage
it is a mad collapse, the black and white
restraining arm moving in each lane
as though it were marking out
loaves of bread from long coils of dough.
There is simply no one here to take your call.
You can leave a message, if the memory disk
has not yet filled completely up. E-mail
is an option: select an address
that seems closest to your interest.
Postal mail all arrives to the same room,
is sorted by interns who earned their jobs
by relationship, which is to say, indirectly,
by sex. Your concern is important to us
if you have the right number. You might
call back between luckier hours
or hold. Someone will be back
soon to accidentally disconnect you.
Let me be honest: we both know
the cost of missing your call
is far less than the cost of servicing it.
You knew this before you called
but you called anyway
and an automated voice
sounding like a love-denied
teenager in pink tennis shoes
has to tell you that no one
is here to find out why,
with mass marketing and social
media, we should care about the call
of one customer who, if he or she
had anything better to do

would be doing it. Think
of how many phone-service minutes
this is costing you. But, oh, you
are going to press that series of seven
buttons one at a time to end up back
at the main menu, where the question is
how can we help you?