

Nura Yingling

### Night Ride

The white hot days of my fifteenth summer  
were slaves to the tyranny of air on fire.  
Father's garden flowers burned black in my eyes,  
mother's plates of fruit to carbon in my mouth.  
I was in love –the yearned-for serpent spiraled round  
my drumming body, tight as my legs hugged the rope  
I flung from my window all those diamond nights.  
*He* would be there, on the lawn, incandescent,  
blue-jeaned prince on his ten speed bike.  
I'd ride his handlebars through tunnels of wind,  
blacktop and stars, until some soft form of light  
from some far place we couldn't see  
would warm our faces, bring back Time,  
make us slow down and stop and leave  
the road for the high secret grass  
to sink and drown in the rush of our kisses.

That boy was so good, I think so now,  
his reverent hands, his hard sweet mouth.  
But when I hold love up to the eye  
of nearly three times fifteen years,  
it's the ride I remember, the dark speed,  
the wheels spinning under us singing like water,  
the liquid night that belonged to me,  
mercifully inflammable, wild and free.

## Two a.m. You are still awake

The full moon pours stark milk into your room  
and sharpens the trees behind the window glass  
to black paper cutouts, gallows. Two a.m. You are  
still awake, jangling like a payphone on the side of a road  
in your chronic dream of driving alone on the darkest night  
and a phone booth appears- a box made of this same  
haunted light- out somewhere in the middle of nowhere.

The dying world has become the topic of party conversation.  
Even your dharma teacher recites the grim statistics. If not  
for the children, you might move to Bhutan or sail to Finland  
until the end. What keeps you from sleeping is always the children,  
fear and prayer clashing in their tiresome duel. The glass flashes red  
as an ambulance shrieks. You hear the soothing voice of a friend  
who has suffered, think of a phrase Thomas Merton might have written.  
And the word "God" suddenly bears no weight. A vast explosion  
in the center of your heart. Then space for nothing but everything:

The woman at the *Stop n Go*, standing at the cooler in her Christmas sweatpants,  
staring in at the lit bargain wine. How she let you hold her like a trusting child,  
though you barely know her. Seeds sleeping deep in the breathing earth.  
And the moon floating, weightless and silent within your rib cage.  
All forms of light for a moment, One. Knowing for a moment you're awake.

## Half Life

In this single snapshot I have framed  
of myself alone, and placed among those  
of my husband and children all through the house,  
I am twenty three, half my life ago.  
It is black and white, partly in shadow, partly  
in sunlight, beneath a striped carnival awning.  
I am polishing a mirror and I wear a broken heart,  
you can see it there in the center of the frame:  
two ragged halves handpainted on my chest.  
Dressed as a mime in thick white face and a black bodysuit,  
a clownish tear in cerulean poised on one cheek,  
mouth marked by a thin violet line,  
I painted faces at summer fairs out west.  
Little girls asked shyly for unicorns and rainbows;  
their brothers for lightning and comic book gods.  
With a fine brush I granted each wish,  
held up the hand mirror when I was through  
and lifted my gloved palm for coins that dropped  
from the indifferent hands of distracted mothers.  
I can hardly believe how much money I made,  
never, once, saying a word.  
And the lover for whom I suffered so  
seems a boy to me now, the silence  
a blessing, the colors anointing my brush as pure  
and singular as the notes of a chant  
sung by a nun who has chosen her life.