

Charles Borkhuis

TRAINING WHEELS

when is a photograph
like a tombstone

and why is happiness wrapped
in a riddle of inverse proportions

we all looked so cheerful in the photo
with our party hats and noise makers

perfectly balanced on the frozen rope
of a smile extended into a future
that never quite arrives

while the living stumble past
on shaky stilts

no doubt it's necessary to compartmentalize
so we can see through the thighbone
without having a nervous breakdown

or fly the plane safely through the storm

to the child awake in bed
waiting for her story

ETERNAL RETURN VOUCHERS

that tiny voice again warbling

“help me . . . help me”

if only I knew who was speaking

behind this choking sensation

sometimes I get my heads mixed up

“down on your knees in the mud”

open your eyes and it all starts again

the many hiding inside the few

identity as the creation of others

why is that fly wearing my face

the missing connection lies

just out of reach or buried within

children in the trees are waving

everything is waiting for us to begin

POWDER BURNS

no one was there
when I arrived

blindfolded and stumbling
into the furniture

“where’s the party
where’s the tail where’s the donkey”

teeth marks don’t necessarily mean
she still loves you

I’m turning my insides out
over the same old tune

unable to keep within the frame
my shutter-speed slips the knot

masked creatures enter
and exit as death-in-life

illuminates
while drawing us closer

to the crack in the chinese vase
where the desultory self leaks out

PARTY FAVORS ANYONE

bring on the cake with its sparkling candles
and the fire trucks with their intrepid
intestinal hoses

sit yourself down upon this shaky throne
and let the games begin

you make a sweeping gesture
with your sword and decapitate
the smiling head of childhood

at times you dress like a bat
and are bent upon exposing the decomposing
half-truths that draw flies
the lies that conceal under a cardboard crown
the real nature of desire
which no one knows

which no one knows . . .
but you
in your poet's cape and mask
peering down from the roofs of tall buildings

you have been seen
nosing an egg across a ballroom
of dancing bears
you have been seen
entering the narrows where words can't follow

blow the party horn's deep rasp
let the games begin

DRAWING FLIES

*how many vacant rooms
in the eye of a fly
or is it a full house tonight*

it was code for something in a dream
which was code for something else
in a movie maybe isn't that
a blinking motel sign up ahead

no need to register what's in a name
the wings of a bed spread
there's something of a stuffed bird
in all of us don't you think

she's in the shower reading your thoughts
the thoughts of a fly on the wall
the thoughts of the one upstairs in bed
and the other one buried in the cemetery
*the car is in the swamp
what more does she want*

here comes the detective's spiky shoes
his hooks and clamps
climbing the silent rock face
up a staircase or naked breast
following the splitting hairs of a clue
that lead inevitably to you
and the rather large insect in the fruit cellar

they say a boy's best friend is his dead mother
but you're not so sure anymore
out on a shaky limb the mind may stumble
upon the thorny precipice of a word
and lose its balance to the dizzying buzz
of a harmless housefly