

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