

John Grey

## A MAN IN WINTER

Bundled up in threadbare coat,  
he goes from stranger to stranger  
on inner city streets,  
begging for spare change.

Sometimes he cocks his ear  
to the words coming out of his mouth,  
is not sure exactly who's saying them.

He can't identify the man  
who needs change for a bus ride home  
or to buy a cup of coffee.  
What kind of fool  
would ask for something so meager.

Then he checks back  
into his foggy mind,  
his crumpled-up body,  
closes his hand for the day,  
huddles near the steam pipes  
by the brick cathedral wall.

He finds a place to put his head,  
other than on his own shoulders.

## THE PRICE OF BEAUTY

That's Charles out in the yard,  
her most faithful of husbands,  
on a cold, dry November day,  
dressed for September  
in a light blue sweater,  
armed with nothing but rake  
against a sky full of falling leaves.

It's the price of beauty,  
the pastel shades of cooling death,  
crumpled up in prayer,  
letting go their boughs,  
falling to earth  
and into the clutches  
of human neatness.

By the end of the day,  
all is in order.  
The trees are bare.  
Leaf bags stand grimly on the sidewalk,  
await pickup.  
All is taken away.  
Only order remains.  
It's like a present for her,  
only in reverse.  
Her face, no longer young,  
accepts it in that same spirit.

## GUNSLINGER DREAMS

My father was a serious cowboy wannabe.  
Except he lived in the city. And never owned a weapon.  
But I'd see him, now and then,  
practicing his draw in the full-length mirror.

He had no time for cattle. Didn't like the smell.  
Gunfighter was the role he saw for himself.  
Feared and admired by all.  
I think it was the immediacy that appealed to him.

Shoot first, then bask in the admiration.  
Be too slow and there's no self-recriminations after.  
You're on Boot Hill, enjoying the rest.  
His own life lacked immediate impact.

For any good to happen, it could take years.  
And, even then, it would only ever be  
a matter of his or someone else's opinion.  
He never got to blow the smoke away

from the end of the barrel, spin his  
Colt 45, slip it back into the holster.  
He worked a job, held a family together,  
just like so many others of his generation.

But he was a laborer, not Wild Bill Hickock.  
Just a hard worker and no Buffalo Bill.  
He was never the best, never the fastest.  
For which I have him to thank.