

## KNIFE EDGE

*P.S. Adrias*

The light fell heavy  
On the naked knife where blood  
Had rippled then stopped.

We looked at ourselves  
And tried to locate the wounds  
But did not succeed.

And in the distance  
We saw something left behind  
And knew it was us.

Where have we come from?  
Did we lose our way somehow  
Among our creased lives?

Did we come from pain  
And forget to look for joy  
In the unfolding?

Isn't joy the point,  
The knife edge we travel on,  
Exquisite as pain?

We should remember,  
Not lose the purpose in this.  
One needs the other.

Between joy and pain  
The balance is everything  
As I move onward.

Looking back I see  
That this is where we lost it,  
On the edge of you.

Are you so hopeless  
That you have given up joy  
And can only bleed?

I know I can help.  
There will be answers later.  
Now I need the knife.

## THE THREE RUBIES

*Nisa Geller*

My father's sinewy hand wore a gold ring with three rubies. This belonged to three generations, and now my father, who received it at thirteenth.

A ruby was promised to each of us three daughters. I fantasized about owning it. Surely he would choose to give it to me, who listened to his stories.

In Nantucket, he returned from the sea missing a ruby. We looked in vain. He stopped swimming with it. He decided the older two would receive the rubies and the youngest, me, would get the ring. I was pleased.

Soon he noticed another ruby missing, a fruitless search followed. A jeweler secured the last rare Polish ruby. To replace the others was prohibitive, so he wore a ring with holes and one ruby, which would be mine.

But the third ruby was lost. A movie theater scoured. He wore a ring with three holes. He didn't discuss the future of the ring anymore. We were grown and preoccupied. His fingers stretched across his laptop keyboard. The ring hung off him as he wrote his stories. I looked at his long fingers and wished the ring would never be mine.

## I GOT YOU

*P.S. Adrias*

"I'm old enough to be your fucking mother", she said and he looked at her and said, "I know", so she said, "and that doesn't bother you? This could be dangerous, you know." And he just kept looking at her, as if to say, well? So?

She was the first to look away.

I don't know what I'm doing, she said to herself.

But then he touched her arm and asked her, "what are you thinking?"

And she found herself answering in a free hand sort of way, and then one thing led to another, so instead of losing herself, getting stuck in the trap of what-will-people-think, she listened to what he had to say, and nodded over and over...

Until finally she said "It doesn't matter, does it. We're both on a journey, and if we get lost we can always look over and see each other, traveling companions. There's comfort in that, yes?"

And he held up his right hand, high-five, and she took her right hand and slapped his so hard her palm stung, but boy did she grin.

And he nodded and grinned back "it's okay" he said, "I got you!" And he did.

THE EFFECTS OF  
UNEMPLOYMENT  
ON SELF-ESTEEM

Tom Fugalli

She keeps a Victorian police  
truncheon in the back of her panty  
drawer. Otherwise, things are fine  
here. I've got lots of small projects  
nearing completion. And that growth  
on my back has taken care of itself.  
By which I mean, I don't know  
where it's gone. I guess you can lose  
anything.

## RANCH HOUSE

*Jim Schwartz*

A garden-variety ranch house on a street full of garden-variety ranch houses. He seeks refuge from dirty dishes, unmade beds, soiled laundry. Seated at his desk, door closed, curtains shut tight against the night, he studies photosynthesis, marvels at light's transformation into sustenance. Muffled voices grow louder, rise above a sitcom's canned laughter. Footsteps echo down the hall.

"You don't get me," she says, walking by the boy's bedroom.

"I'll go back to counseling," his father says.

Laughter.

Doors slam. An engine roars. Her Plymouth speeds into darkness. He tastes metal, smells winter's first snow. Returns to his books, to the ingenuity of plants, to the magic of light.

*Jennifer Belew*

He treated me like I could do no wrong. However, though I didn't know why, I felt sorry for him. And I thought if I worked really hard, I could make him happy. The problem was that no matter what I did, no matter what anyone did, my father was on a downward spiral; depression, alcoholism, sexual confusion.

Because he and my mom were divorced, I felt he had no one except my brother and me. If I could keep him smiling, if I could hear his laugh, I was doing my job. I'd get anxious about seeing him, hoping this time would be different, that the disappointment wouldn't come. Back home I would cry – for the father I so desperately wanted, but who always let me down.

When I turned 30, I let go. That's when I lost him: the moment I realized I never had the power to make him happy, the moment I understood what he was all about. Now I hear his laugh and feel sad. Because I lost the father I had created for myself. The father I wanted. The father I needed. The father who never was.