Valentine for Ernest Mann

NAOMI SHIHAB NYE

You can’t order a poem like you order a taco.  
Walk up to the counter, say, “I’ll take two”  
and expect it to be handed back to you  
on a shiny plate.

Still, I like your spirit.  
Anyone who says, “Here’s my address, 
write me a poem,” deserves something in reply.  
So I’ll tell you a secret instead:  
poems hide. In the bottoms of our shoes,  
they are sleeping. They are the shadows  
drifting across our ceilings the moment  
before we wake up. What we have to do  
is live in a way that lets us find them.

Once I knew a man who gave his wife  
two skunks for a valentine.  
He couldn’t understand why she was crying.  
“I thought they had such beautiful eyes.”

And he was serious. He was a serious man  
who lived in a serious way. Nothing was ugly  
just because the world said so. He really  
liked those skunks. So, he re-invented them  
as valentines and they became beautiful.  
At least, to him. And the poems that had been  
hiding  
in the eyes of skunks for centuries  
crawled out and curled up at his feet.

Maybe if we re-invent whatever our lives give us,  
we find poems. Check your garage, the odd sock  
in your drawer, the person you almost like, but  
not quite.

And let me know.
AUNT ROBERTA
What do people think about
When they sit and dream
All wrapped up in quiet
and old sweaters
And don't even hear me 'til I
Slam the door?

Eloise Greenfield

BY MYSELF
When I'm by myself
And I close my eyes
I'm a twin
I'm a dimple in a chin
I'm a room full of toys
I'm a squeaky noise
I'm a gospel song
I'm a gong
I'm a leaf turning red
I'm a loaf of brown bread
I'm a whatever I want to be
Anything I care to be
And when I open my eyes
What I care to be
Is me

Eloise Greenfield

THINGS
Went to the corner
Walked in the store
Bought me some candy
Ain't got it no more
Ain't got it no more
Went to the beach
Played on the shore
Built me a sandhouse
Ain't got it no more
Ain't got it no more
Went to the kitchen
Lay down on the floor
Made me a poem
Still got it
Still got it

Eloise Greenfield

I like to:
collect rocks on Venus
dance on Mars
eat on Pluto
buy rings on Saturn
ride a bike to Mercury
swim in the desert
write in fire

Jeffrey Trevino
The words just jumped into the quiet.

The words blasted into the dark.

Seth Hansford

The Red Wheelbarrow
by William Carlos Williams

so much depends upon

a red wheel barrow

glazed with rain water

beside the white chickens.
Dragonfly

It skims the pond's surface,
searching for gnats, mosquitoes, and flies.
Outspread wings blur with speed.
It touches down
and stops to sun itself on the dock.
Wings flicker and still:
stained-glass windows
with sun shining through.

Georgia Heard

Sparklers

Twirling our frantic loops and circles,
we cried out look! to the grownups
watching from their lawn chairs,
afraid they'd somehow miss the
giddy slash of every turn and leap
until the last glow died and we went back,
warned each time about burnt hands
and bare feet flying in slippery grass.
Again! we shouted, and ran as far
beyond the porch light as we dared,
for this was Independence Day
and we were too busy to listen,
writing our names in thin air.

Mark Vinz
Mom's Dream

Noise
  a whole lot of noise
a caterwauling screaming squalling
  thunderation of noise
Like timpanis fighting
  with out-of-tune cellos
or donkeys bawling out
  boisterous geese
How can a dream be so loud, she puzzles
  rapping once twice on the breakfast table
Just like that
  the hubbub stops
the kitchen becomes a concert hall
  and her children—
  Mary, Michael, Timothy
  Catherine, Sara, Amy—
standing in a circle on the softly lit stage
  sing
"Marmalade. Please pass the marmalade"
  in perfect harmony
while she waves her baton and marvels
  at the baby singing bass

Marilyn Singer

CLOCKFACE

Hours pass
  slowly as a snail
creeping between the grassblades
  of the minutes.

Judith Thorman
maple syrup buckets

At the edge of Mr. Wells's woods
I count eighteen rusty buckets
hanging from maple trees.

In these parts it's a known fact
that Mr. Wells has never smiled
in fact hardly speaks at all

though he once explained to me
why it takes forty gallons of sap
to make a single gallon of syrup

which made me wonder if maybe
he requires forty hours of silence
to make a single hour of talk.

He keeps bees, too: succulent honey.
Strange that such a sour man should
produce all that sweetness.

Ralph Fletcher

NEW NOTEBOOK

Lines
in a new notebook
run, even and fine,
like telephone wires
across a snowy landscape.

With wet, black strokes
the alphabet settles between them,
comfortable as a flock of crows.

Judith Thurman

Lemon Tree

If you climb a lemon tree
feel the bark
under your knees and feet.
smell the white flowers,
rub the leaves
in your hands.
Remember,
the tree is older than you are
and you might find stories
in its branches.

JENNIFER CLEMENT
Translated by Consuelo de Aerenlund
ARK

Packed
back to back
on rack after rack,
stacked nose to nose,
there they all are,
in series and rows,
all praying for drought.

And there's no going out:
All of them, all—

bug catchers
fly snatchers
chick hatcher
bone gnawers
flesh clawers
hole diggers
sap swiggers
chest puffers
down fluffers
wing strummers

foot drummers
tail thumpers
fence jumpers
earth heavers
web weavers
seed pluckers
blood suckers
vine braiders
stream waders
cud chewers
night mewers
day cooers
moon bayers
egg layers
hive dwellers
tree fellers
mud grubbers—
all of them,
ALL
forgot to bring rubbers.

Sylvia Cassidy
CAMPFIRE

We're sleeping in the woods.
We're strangers here.
The Milky Way
is thick as white breath
on the dark, cold air.

We eat and sing
and feed twigs to the fire:
bones it begs for,
leaping to lick our fingers.

Judith Thurman

We Could Be Friends

MYRA COHN LIVINGSTON

We could be friends
Like friends are supposed to be.
You, picking up the telephone
Calling me

to come over and play
or take a walk,
finding a place
to sit and talk,

Or just goof around
Like friends do,
Me, picking up the telephone
Calling you.
74th Street

MYRA COHN LIVINGSTON

Hey, this little kid gets roller skates.
She puts them on.
She stands up and almost 
flops over backwards.
She sticks out a foot like
she's going somewhere and 
falls down and
smacks her hand. She 
grabs hold of a step to get up and 
sticks out the other foot and 
slides about six inches and 
falls and 
skins her knee.

And then, you know what?

She brushes off the dirt and the 
blood and puts some 
spit on it and then 
sticks out the other foot

again.

April Rain Song

Let the rain kiss you.
Let the rain beat upon your head with silver liquid drops.
Let the rain sing you a lullaby.

The rain makes still pools on the sidewalk.
The rain makes running pools in the gutter.
The rain plays a little sleep-song on our roof at night—

And I love the rain.

Langston Hughes
Poem

I loved my friend.
He went away from me.
There's nothing more to say.
The poem ends,
Soft as it began—
I loved my friend.

Langston Hughes

UNDER THE BED
by Jon Scieszka
illustrated by Lane Smith

There are all these things under my bed.
I know. I'm supposed to clean them out today.
But what do you do with three checkers, one sock, a marble, and a dragon?
Where do you put a green necklace, pirate treasure, magic rings?
Then there's my submarine, spaceship, jet, and time machine.
My cave, my castle, my treehouse, my fort. Wild horses, genies, monsters, magicians. Two-headed serpents, black knights, vikings, and cowboys.
And what's a guy to do with his jungle, his ocean, the top of Mount Everest? Five dust balls, half a cookie, and one unexplored galaxy?
Where do all of these things go?
I don't know.
But there are all these things under my bed.
I know.

I Remember

I remember
walking down the street beside
Uncle Eddie's legs
taking a nap in Mama's lap
talking to the pigeons in the park
I remember
my fuzzy hat, my yellow cat
my potty pot
I remember a lot
but I wish I remembered
what I forgot

Eloise Greenfield
The Sidewalk Racer
OR
On the Skateboard
LILLIAN MORRISON

Skimming
an asphalt sea
I swerve, I curve, I
sway; I speed to whirring
sound an inch above the
ground; I'm the sailor
and the sail, I'm the
driver and the wheel
I'm the one and only
single engine
human automobile.

FOG

The fog comes
on little cat feet.

It sits looking
over harbor and city
on silent haunches
and then moves on.

—Carl Sandburg

The Rider
NAOMI SHIHAB NYE

A boy told me
if he rollerskated fast enough
his loneliness couldn't catch up to him.

the best reason I ever heard
for trying to be a champion.

What I wonder tonight
pedaling hard down King William Street
is if it translates to bicycles.

A victory! To leave your loneliness
panting behind you on some street corner
while you float free into a cloud of sudden azaleas,
luminous pink petals that have never felt loneliness,
no matter how slowly they fell.
Tears

When I cry
there is a festival in my heart.
There are lots of drums
and the gods are beating them hard—
it echoes inside me
and the tears roll out.

*Matsumoto Kanako, fourth grade*

Weeds

Weeds have buds
weeds have leaves
weeds have flowers
and still weeds
are always left out,
though they're the same as flowers.
A long time ago
no one said "weeds"
and everyone was happy.

*Aruga Shunsuke, third grade*

The Basketball

*Alexander W. Marcus, Grade 4*

An orange sphere,
Hard in your hands,
With tiny bumps all over,
As if it has the chicken pox,
It soars like an eagle in the sky,
Curving up and diving down into its nest.

At the flower stand
Mama's Valentine rose waits
while I count my coins.

*Nikki Grimes*

A silent toad—

the face of one

bursting with much to say.

*Issa*
MULTIPLICATION

My report card,
math, unsatisfactory.
I hate numbers;
they have to be just right.
People need to read;
They don't need math.

Mother sees Miss Adams, my teacher,
after school.
"You don't know
your multiplication tables;
We go to work after supper."

Mother has flash cards.
Questions on one side,
answers on the other.
Nine times three,
four times seven,
eight times eight.

I practice alone,
scratch Rags' head,
and leisurely turn the cards.
I miss my book.

Mother orders me
to the kitchen;
It's serious when we work
in the kitchen;
We sit on straight-back oak chairs.

She flashes the cards,
I have to speak fast.
Some I don't get.
Some I never get—
eight times seven,
nine times seven,
nine times three.

George looks over
my shoulder;
even my little brother
knows the right answers
before I do.
Rags looks sad
and leaves the room.

Donald Graves

(NOTE: Rags is his dog.)
NOT FROM ANYWHERE

“Everyone who has ancestors from Italy raise your hands.”
Michael Minetto and six Italians raise theirs.
Miss Fortin is teaching us about immigrants who come to America.
I wonder what I’ll do.

“Let’s see, Sweden.”
Davey Nichols, Elisabeth Lindberg, Jean Ames, Terry Dahlquist lift their hands.
Bobby Nelson puts up a fist.

“Ireland, how about Ireland?”
Jane Mullen, Roy Corr and Agnes Scully and a bunch of other kids.
“Yeah, Ireland,” yells Pete Casey.
Only three kids and me sit with our hands on our desks.
I don’t know where I’m from.
Grandpa, Grandma, Great Grandpa, they’re all from here,
this country, America.

Miss Fortin addresses the rest of us.
“Tell me where you are from and then raise your hands.”
“France,” says Mike Fortier.
“Me too,” Ellen Boudreau raises her hand with a smile and looks around the room.
“Should have thought of that one,” says Miss Fortin.
“My grandparents are from Germany I think,” says Rebecca Schmidt.
“And Donald?”
All eyes turn my way.
I can’t think.
I simply don’t know.
“Hah, he’s not from anywhere,” snickers Bobby Nelson.

Donald Graves
Sea
The night has dappled you
with white and black.

Carlos Sánchez Venticilla
Ecuador

bird singing
in the dark: I try
to get out of my dream

Virginia Brady Young
USA

at the sea's edge
grandpa slips a few stones
before they go.

Allan Currie
Canada

On the branch of a tree
a bird
weighs itself.

Pablo Mora
Mexico

EYE
Pond flat as a plate,
grasses sewn shut
by ice needles;
no sign of life
except
in the upside-down
bottom of the pond,
a frog's eye opens
and closes.

Chilé
sometimes
a bite is all it takes
for a supernova
to explode

El chilé
a veces basta
una mordida
para que explote
una supernova
Deer Mouse

got got got got got
got
out of the nest
got
into the cold
got got got got
got
food
lots of food
got
seeds
berries
nuts
bugs
bark
got enough to last
got enough to store
got more
got got got got
got going
move
hustle
don't rustle
don't squeak
beware
danger in the air
got busy
got done
got got got got
got out of here
run