

## Sharper Than

Da ich ein Knabe war,  
Rettet' ein Gott mich oft...

*When I was a boy  
a god often rescued me...*

— Friedrich Hölderlin

When I was eight my father came out of the closet;  
his first lover, a kind and generous soul;  
subsequent others, less so.

Trusts—set up for my twin and me,  
by our dead mother's family—  
made quitting his job easy.

So, he left my sister with friends  
and sent this “motherless bore” to his brother,  
before he and a new partner went “antiquing” through Spain and Morocco.

Uncle taught English at Montana State, where the sky was a gun-  
metal lake; trees: coal streaks, wind-quaked,  
un-perching raptors.

Here, I was given light chores:  
snow to my waist; numb hands plucking hay  
off of jeans; the radiators' ping;

and the bright laughter,  
come spring, of others (I'm told)  
when I mistook nettles for mint.

Honed a kind of malingering, for most of that stint—  
part-response to my farm-crazed aunt's  
unsparing miserableness.

So, there were tantrums and tricks,  
except with those two “chunky chicks,”  
who taught “R's” in the sticks,

one room with a barn in the back for the kids  
who arrived on a mount. Can remember how I clutched a bean-  
bag, one evening, watching John Dean's account.

Gollum's word "precious" from a brief reading of Tolkien;  
or uncle, tired, flushing the bennies his students had left  
on his desk, one side of a *Playboy Magazine*.

Hell, even then, I knew that lukewarm hugs  
brought little relief to that matrix  
of grief called a marriage.

Yet, I was happy, one night, walking back from 4-H with a twelve-year-old cutie—  
hay-spackled dungarees in the cold, dancing beauty  
of a flashlight's beam in wind-swirled snow.

More often, though, I sat frozen and tearful, watching ice  
dissolve in a puddle by a field. Wondered, then, if the labile breeze were as hollow  
as a widower's howl; or if a place called Marrakesh were as foreign as the word "father."

Towards the end, I went "blind," remaining in bed, to listen  
to my aunt's monologue, all day—paper-thin  
walls punctuated by curse,

as she sewed and un-sewed her own down sleeping bag  
(some kind of hippie inverse of Penelope or Everest),  
before hush-enraged voices,

upon uncle's return. The sound of his briefcase  
thudding to the floor. His reluctant shuffle,  
as he trudged to my door, to suddenly—

almost evangelically—spook-lay  
on hands, like waving good-bye;  
so that, rapturously, I

could "see"  
and was

"cured."