

We Need Supper

They tried force, one then another. I work, said one. Sex, joked a second. A certain movie, the third. The women at the other tables were like starlight, blue and keen, out of reach. The space among them, over the hot sauce and nap-kin pile, was the only true thing. Lonely, it said and, Why do we want? The men had no choice but to confront their silverware, the jabbing at and eating of small, masked admission. The evening wore on. Perhaps there was time. They needed some way out, through the jaws of their coffee cups or the last lowering of hands.

Lily

The snake tasted the air. Among the cold shale, high desert night, were spots of heat, a rat, a small bird. The snake smelled them, alone, not alone, the bandaged feet of birth.

Epistemology

He took her by the throat and squeezed. Mo- tels, he said, they make me murder. She pushed him away and stepped onto the lawn. Lightning bugs lifted and fell, trucks on the highway busting the night. Shall we marry? she said, twirling her skirts. It was impossible to understand, the humid cloud of words.

As Light Becomes St. Paul

In 23 directions of gray, the girl puts her hand to the sharp building's edge, gathering together some long-standing anger. He watches her, the spirograph pigeons, waiting for the flush of blood to her throat that'll somehow be the signal for morning.

Valentine

There seemed to be impossible things, crossing the sidewalk, adjusting the birds, the smoke from a concrete pipe. He had a valve that was wrong, perched whitely among the viscera. He tried small and smaller tries.

The Love of the Lazabout's Wife

He watched the glaze of August from the steps, the dirty basketball boys and garbage trucks. Well? she said. What have you done? He could point to the dandelions he'd seen or the lakes he'd imagined, the hot cold water of want, but she would laugh and turn away. Didn't think so, she said. Still, there was more summer in her mouth than he would have known in a wild of work.

The Gossipers

The red sweater of her sat with cups empty. Do you want him? said her friend. No, she answered. Just his voice. He, not so far away, spoke. In this way, they invented a machine, her gilt wheels, his explosions. It ran into the night, across several years. Friends regarded it with amusement and teeth. He sat with the red sweater of her. The sun beside you, he said. I know, she answered. Who would invent stories against them?

St. Sebastian's

His foot had ached for months, a slow stab, heartbroken pain. *There's nothing wrong with it*, said the doctor. The remorse of a red handkerchief stuck from his lab coat pocket. *Of course, that doesn't make it unreal*. He thanked the doctor and went to the park, the low bubble of children, the pale, beatific mothers.

Loss

She burned the shirt in the backyard, the green smoke an ugly whiplash, the buttons popping.

I still don't get it, he said.

What? That I have one less shirt? The fire was pale, shining on her arms.

The Idealist

The lake drained to mud, the oars and barrels and cracked dinnerware drunken among the new weeds. If there's quicksand, she said, would you pull me out? He shook his head. I'd go down too. And then which of us would bear our future children? She laughed, already up to her knees.