THREE POEMS

Charles Casey Martin

DEER BLIND

For my father

And the Lord God formed man
of the dust of the earth . . .

—*Genesis* 11:7

I

I've kept a gunstock I carved
One spring for mornings
When I can smell
Its pine-bleeding sap, the wood
Remembering to draw its rings
Tight for winter
The way a spayed bitch
Sometimes fills with milk and blood.

So it must be for you, hearing
Shotguns chase deer, repeat
Songs an Okinawan sniper hummed
In 1941: his bullet pinned
Your hand to a tree—
Another missed your brain,
Drilling into mud, through years
Of rotted jungle humus. Lodging,
Perhaps, in the bone of an ice-age deer.

You told me about mumbletypeg:
Your brothers in a circle,
Pocketknives balanced nose down
On knees, elbows, fingertips.
Beginning with bare toes, you'd flick
Your knives ten times, and each blade
That failed to stick upright
Drove a six-inch peg deeper

Into hard-packed clay. The last
Throw was made from the tip
Of the nose, staring
Cross-eyed. The loser squatted,
Hands behind his back, and found
The buried peg with his teeth.

II

Oaks leave acorns on snow
Oakleaves over acorns
Shade over leaves. As your stainless
Blade guts an eight-point buck,
A snapshot grays his blood, pins
Your hand to a fencepost, leaves
Oaks behind you out
Of focus. Every gray-handed
Shadow points away from the sun, east

Through timber to a mud road: a black
Handbill on a fencepost and one
Silver doe breathing
White into a crosswind. Suppose time

Thawed this pasture, waded
Its ditches, slipping through
Barbed wire: the doe's breath
Would darken and freeze in her throat.
Pink eyes and nostrils
Ice-glazed, hooves deep in sleet. Dead
And patient for winter to die
Behind farmhouses, on the cold
North sides of Oaks where snow thaws last
When spring unlocks the ground—

Its worms and clover.

DOLLARS

pass unnoticed
home to home;
interchangeable as faces
of presidents
(from a crossword)

for sheila reynard

i

an Angel told me
we're given two lives

and in two's she said
we spend them two

in difference in marriage two
Black Angel black shadow

I'm in a city
that's known so many poets

I use their elegies
as streetmaps their poems

lead me to a graveyard lamp
and a Black Angel they've taken

from you Angel
these schoolboy poets

only to whisper behind your
back just one friend

would send me to visit he said
each of us is visited

by some inevitable sadness he was
dressed all in black he named you

mother midnight
Angel of Death and told me

not to be afraid
to speak foolishly or to cry

because words
like tears are part of a darker

misunderstanding so tell me
Black Angel

death angel
how do I begin an elegy?

ii

in august an east windowseat's best
on the northbound three p.m. get by
a pretty girl and hope a jap
won't sit close the driver's

left his uniform
jacket to hide the steeringwheel
from sun cotton t-shirt
left arm shades darker than the other
he rolls a smoke in the coach's
afternoon shadow

the centennial's queen of cotton
is leaving the capital
boarding the kerrville bus
with a two dollar cash prize
and sterling texas charmnecklace on it
her hometown is a pink

rhinestone *she's blind*
but don't worry this is 1945
the cottonfields are full the war
is almost over and a farmer
up the aisle will offer watermelon
and ride with her as far as
the next city

iii

waco hours later
an hour late warbond
posters taped inside depot windows
newstand monthlies headlining
peace the cotton queen

breaks her two dollar bill
for a glossy atlas and joins a g.i.
who pays for a book of crosswords
and a ticket north *his change*
is two dollars
even the g.i. reads from the atlas

whose poor description
is like west texas scenery they unfold
the map and using its legend
and the length of a fingerjoint
measure in inches
the miles they've come through the sleeve

of her summer cotton dress
the g.i. glimpses the girl's breast
blonde as the khaki uniforms
she folds all day
in a freedom factory *a sniper learns*

to aim for a jap's third uniform button
but misses if he remembers
that death's not impersonal
like a boy's desire to touch
the breast of a homesick girl

a two dollar bill
a silver necklace
a boy's hand on a breast

the bill is a symbol for silver
for the girl's sadness
that will return when the soldier
leaves her

iv

the driver's shirt
is the color of diesel and mustard
the bus now rests for repairs
at a roadside farmers' mkt
the girl buys apples and promises
a real supper in dallas
less than a dollar left she thinks
testing the edges
of her coins with a thumbnail
the g.i. lends her
two *a lazy silver*

bomber flies innocent
circles over the airfield
at ft worth and from a dallas

bar the g.i. dials long distance
with a finger in his ear it's the third

finger of his left hand and the cotton
queen cries by the jukebox she's cashed
her two dollar loan for nickels
and asks the waitress
punch another loud one the g.i.

buys cheeseburgers-to-go
and a half-pint *out of five*
says the waitress *twenty-five*
fifty *three* and the bill
the two dollar bill comes back

tomorrow
the cotton queen takes a train
east to texarkana the g.i. says
he'll catch an early plane now

he parts two strands of barbed wire
for the girl and her suitcase
they'll spend tonight in this field
crickets
and the dew that wets her back
tell the blind girl it's night
the g.i. describes the moon to her
as a bottlecap in asphalt

but the night is moonless
and he lies again
when she asks *will I see you*
you'll go if I sleep you will
I'll bet

I'll bet two dollars

v

she wakes because of the way she slept
in a sunburned cottonfield
a leg folded under her bodyweight

the busdriver with a fresh
t-shirt and shave this morning
reads that the war has ended
a silver bomber flew
over a country that's impersonal to him
hard to imagine
like anything a blind girl
can't touch she gave something

last night to a soldier
who told her he'd stay
who's flying now over a cottonfield
that he can't separate from other
uniform shapes of field

leaving dallas
the busdriver sees
in a cottonfield a pink
sunburned girl standing naked
who was as pale before today
as florescent factory walls

she can't see pink
but she can feel her stinging
shoulders thighs
even eyelids
and all of her is pink

except for a tiny mapshape on a breast
where her silver necklace slept

vi

in cities
educated men are ending

important elegies and still
I haven't said a word about death

or a woman who wasn't
blind a poet so I return

to my Black Angel the night
is moonless and her lamp

is blind
perhaps someone threw a stone

you're alone tonight Angel
where's your sister gone a rock flew

at a streetlamp and took her
the part of you I knew best

I lost someone too when she died
she gave something it flew I pretend

her soul is round like the face
of a coin or clock but hollow on one

side to ride the wind (I know
this is the soul's shape

because I raised my hand
in church and asked and was passed

the soul of a saint a wooden saucer
deafened the fall of the coin I gave) Angel

the poor say
that greed is the moment

that hasn't time or strength enough to hold
a blessing and kiss for each possession

death I think is the same to the
living a moment like birth

too full to carry itself longer giving
into something else something new

when young poets die
the words they would have used

survive as when lovers go
they're given each to spend

the unshared balance of the other's love

BLUEBONNETS: *Last Words*

All things claimed by barbed wire
On this lonely farm-to-market road
Become individual
In the slow progress of dawn
Like tiny, purplish wildflowers
In a sun-burned Texas meadow.

I remember ivory colored dominoes
And my grandmother's hands
Shuffling
For another game of forty-two. For her,
Life was just this:
Face down

Equal values at both ends.