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STILL LIVES

Jennifer L. Price

A Thesis

in

The Department

of

English

Presented in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Master of Arts at
Concordia University
Montreal, Quebec, Canada

August 1991

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ABSTRACT

Still Lives

Jennifer L. Price

Still Lives is a collection of poems that aim at translating the visual art of portraiture into poetry. Each portrait in the collection is a rendering of an individual as he or she appears for one observed moment. These portraits are arranged in five sections. Each section has, as a setting, a specific urban milieu. These settings have been chosen for their very public and common natures.

To display each individual in its setting, the portraits have been interspersed with pieces describing contexts and locations. The nature of a particular place predisposes the observation, affects the attitudes with which we see and judge. Still Lives explores this and other facets of the act of observation: the attitudes of observer and observed, the effect of one upon the other, the unspoken interaction between the viewer and the object of his vision.

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THE LIBRARY

*The musky smell of aging books,
tweeds in muted tones and
fireproof padded carpets.
This is the home of restraint,
solid wing backed chairs
and the whispered secrets of words.*

RARE BIRD

She flits, criss-crossing aisles,
runs long jewelled fingers over spines.
She is all spiking parts and feathers,
wisps and puffs and trailing filaments.
The heady odour of flowers.

Our heads swivel as one,
rotate slowly, follow her progress
from shelf to shelf,
spike-heeled hummingbird.

She has collected her wardrobe
from long ago childhood dreams
of beautiful swaying ladies,
of bangled, palm-reading gypsies,
mata hari seductresses,
princesses and mermaids.

Lined face eclipsed
by her too-big hair-do,
her too-bright clothes,
she belongs between the pages
of the fiction at her fingertips,
pressed flat and dried
next to last summer's rose.

*Library like a smaller city
of avenues and side streets,
leather-backed high-rises
lining the aisles,
wino sleeping it off,
the rushing of too many people
with too many things to be done.*

BLUE

Finger waved hair rinsed blue-silver.
Webs of vein track across papery skin,
see-through thin and dry.

She drifts through the library slowly,
lingers on fringes of conversation,
savouring tunic clad student whispering,
drinking in librarian's full-voiced advice,
a mother's impatient hushing.

Spidery fingers move across powder-blue
matching wool skirt and sweater,
tugging and patting
everything in its place.

I imagine she's dressed for a tea,
bridge party or lunch at the club.
She has outlived her passions,
the art of conversation
and those who would know
how to pour properly.

She retraces remembered footsteps,
filling in time, waiting
for hours and days to pass,
trailing her days from the time
before cataracts clouded her eyes,
watery grey and lifeless;
before she awoke with a start,
surprised suddenly to be
so alone, old and so lonely.

*You find a certain comfort
in all those books
and the quiet
of thought,
the steady exchange of ideas,
uncompromising memory
of words preserved on paper.*

INJUN

In the pale white of the reading room
he lies stretched across the couch
like a cat
or like a lizard sunning
hardened skin on rocks.

Knotted at the base of his neck,
his hair is tied, dark and uneven.
His jeans and plaid, spotted and ripped.
I picture drunken bar fights
and he stares back.

I finger pages nervously,
thumb through periodicals,
glimpse stories of the day.
My scalp tingles.

Visions of pioneers raped and bloodied.
My blood stirs,
a thumping in my ears,
maddening beat of war drums.

I will him to leave,
resent his native rights,
his claim on couch and room
and the ground where we find ourselves
in mute and wary stand-off.

*Forgotten fathers line the walls,
sternly monitor the study room;
water stains darken their features
framed in mahogany and gilt.*

FICTION SECTION

Your eyes follow beams of bookish light,
dusty and filtered
through lead-paned glass,
past throaty whispered words,
around rows of muted volumes,
seeking and finding
the figure of my form,
line from round to crest of thigh,
curved underside of breast.

I feel you watching me.
Hear the catching in your breath
and you picture
 books tumbling around us
 a floor tiled with tales
 words spilled like seed on the ground
 my hair breathless soft around your face
 against your mouth your ears
 my lips soft, open and everywhere
 the sharp of my hips bruising your chest
 the hard of my nipples under your nails.

I reach for a book while you watch,
hold the moment in your mind,
the shift of my buttocks
the stretch of my back.

Your gaze is friction between my thighs,
your thoughts, a whisper in my mind.

THE STREET

*Driving on the Champlain Bridge
is like descending from clouds.
Orange glow in the sky
separates
into thousands of points
breaking the darkness.*

DRIVING

I am touring the dark hours,
my car wrapped around me like armour,
prophylactic shield between me
and the sweating bodies and long shadows
of night city--
place of neon stealth,
hushed transactions, muffled whispers,
fumbling caresses in unlit corners,
glances over shoulders, waiting
and the swollen lips of hungry desire.

Weight of night blots out day,
briefcase swinging bustle,
snaking long line-ups.
Business chatter and taxi-cab horns
dwindle and recede
swallowed by distance.

Dash-board glow illuminates my face
a thin, watery green.
Shadows obscure, distort my features.
I lean closer to the windshield,
press into the gloom.

Smell of oily smoke oozes
through cracked-open car window.
Hot breath clouds cold glass.
They are all around me.
I feel their eyes study me,
waiting and taking
the measure of my thirst.
Eyes like holes in the dark.

I shift gears,
point the car toward daybreak,
tongue stuck to the roof of my mouth.

*From this angle,
the neon and fluorescence stretches forever.
In Four A.M. quiet you can hear
the hissing and crackling
of gases trapped in tubes.*

BEACHED

He sits on the sidewalk
feet planted in the stream
of one-way traffic,
ass oblivious to the sanded
snow-covered asphalt,
to the cold rising from the ground,
like steam from a sewer.

You notice him seconds too late,
collide with his unexpected presence
appearing suddenly in the wash
of oncoming headlights.

Unheeded, your grunted excuse me
rolls over him,
drifts by him,
words washing away
like a moment in the sand.

You falter a beat,
pause in your steps,
held by his becalmed face,
his easy poise.

You have just enough time
to see the palm trees in his shiny eyes,
to smell the salt in the air and tangerines,
hear the tide break over rocks,
before a wave of pedestrian traffic
picks you up and sweeps you away.

*Rain falls in sheets.
Outlines pale cones of street lamps.
Drops fall on the still-hot sidewalk
with an early evening hiss.
Perfume of urine and trash and dust
rises,
a low cloud over asphalt*

STUDENT

You feel the weight.
Your feet weighted by winter,
thighs thickened
by daily trudging to and from
a humourless job,
empty hands abandoned at your side.

He coasts along the spring day
rapidly narrowing the distance between you,
new shoes barely gracing the sidewalk.
School colours proudly displayed,
felt letters on his back,
read like a passport to everything.

His syncopated, hip-swinging step
jars your body's memory.
Muscles recall the effortless movements
of striving and climbing,
arching forward for the prize.

You remember when you would have been.
Remember wanting and planning
and knowing, always knowing.
Remember days stretching before you
like shadows at sunset.

Your hard eyes weigh down his ankles,
line failures across his brow,
bend his back with trying.
You picture him depleted of hope,
see him without his sure straight shoulders.
Could say he deserves it,
could say, arrogant prick.

Only then do you begin to feel
the caress of a fine spring morning.

Every Spring, shop doors open, leaking the spicy taste of sausage sandwiches and smoked salmon into the afternoon. Tables and display cases of wares appear overnight on the sidewalk, the blossoming of the street's spring flowers.

Like crocuses in April.

SCAVENGER

Cracked slabs of concrete map her world.
she drifts onto the sidewalk,
jettisons her pride,
last cherished excess weight
inflight for survival.

Looking quite at home
among piles of castoff unwanteds
relegated to landfills
beyond memory and sight,
she rummages through trash.

Clothed in pieces and patches
of anyone's yesterday,
she walks quietly through a daylight
greyed by high-rise alleyway.
Calloused heels scrape
against littered asphalt.

My clean skin crawls as I watch
her blackened feet pad
over shards and broken bits.
She emerges triumphant
clutching a discarded bottle,
down payment for the rum
on whose wings she will soar.

*Moving through corridors of glass and concrete,
you see yourself reflected
myriad times,
segmented endlessly,
arms, arms and torso, legs and heads.*

INVISIBLE

He hurls insults at the void--
 angry space behind and beside him.
Thin shrieks swallowed by sky-scraping glass.

His frenzied movements
frantic charges and retreats
scatter him across the sidewalk.

He wrestles with his shadow.
Pedestrians step gingerly around him,
like dog-shit in their path.

I stare at him openly,
as invisible and insubstantial
as the phantom foe at his back.

The outer edge of the sidewalk is reserved for people with somewhere to go. Their hands clutch defensively at keys, groceries or briefcases. Their uneven, hurrying steps carry them onto the streets to bypass those who linger with the even pacing that marks the citizens of the street who pass their days walking and watching and leaning against sun-warmed brick.

PARENT

You are beyond the pale
wash of street light,
cold and impersonal.

For a moment I don't know you.
Never slept, brow swept worry free
by your soft warm fingers,
butterfly wings.

Never rode your shoulders bravely into the unknown,
the adventures, the out-there.
Never cried out in the dark for you.
Never promised you, never begged you, never left you.

With new eyes I scan your form,
hear something inside me break and drop,
hear your departing steps,
your feeling and shifting
shuffle of weight.

You are old.
I see at once the child you've been and
the dust that begins to climb your bones,
bent shuddering under years.

I watch your shoulders recede,
blend into dusk blues and greys,
rush hour milling of other strangers.
A trick of light has turned you ordinary.
I wonder where you are going. Away.

*From the lookout on the mountain
the streets map out below you.
Street lights blur into solid lines,
criss-crossing over the city.
Grid repeats endlessly.
Dizzying lengths of road
stretch into the flat black of horizon.*

FAT

She emerges through the alley,
cast glow of faraway neon
moon-pale and flat upon her face.
She rolls through the night street,
legs and arms forced wide,
floating on waves of skin.

Your ears prick, your head turns
to the sigh of her rubbing thighs,
taut and stuffed in nylon casings,
sausage meat in a skin.

Damp petalled flowers cling
to her back, her armpits, her vast
breasts swaying side to side.
Pendulous metronome,
slapping out the beats,
the steps of her bloated ballet.

There is an awkward grace
as tiny feet roll heel to toe.
You fear for her precious balance,
picture her beached,
turtle shell down,
stranded.

She passes, even and sure.
In her wake, the gentlest breath of warm wind,
traces of jasmine in the night air.

THE HOSPITAL

BREATHING

They wheel him into the pale green room
like an aquarium, like underwater, like the sea.
His body shudders,
a fish beached at low tide
gasping for water.
He fights for air,
chest heaving, mouth twisted,
skin too white and red,
too damp.

Wheezes rasp against air,
shred the silence.

Mouth dry,
armpits wet,
I conceal my effortless intake,
a soft steady sound,
waves over sand.
I breathe lightly and quietly.

Family rings his bed. Stoney sentinels
Their shapes throw shadows on the walls.

An oxygen tank leaks in the corner by his bed.
A mask ties over his face
ties over his head
catches in his hair
presses cheeks flat and tight
clamps over mouth and nose
like a hand.
His eyes fly open wild.
He is strangling.

He fights for air, drowning
in his own mucus.
I try not to watch
the liquid weight in his lungs
rise and fall as though the moon
were pulling to high tide.

One hand lifts and moves through the air.
A diver tries to surface.

*Outpatients cling to the clinic
as to a life raft.
Around the waiting hopefuls
controlled confusion,
hurried procedures and treatments,
reassuring knowledge
someone is doing something
and all may be well.*

HAPPY FEET

She wears her smile like new shoes,
a touch too tight and shiny.
You eye her feet padding a soft-shoe.
Tippity tap across the silence
of a roomful of waiting
hardbacked chairs in a sterile death row.
You are listening for a nurse's call.

Tippity tap from her too happy feet
across a tiled floor of sculptured scalps
of shaven skulls.

You know she doesn't belong,
patent leather pumps among shuffling slippers.
Her smile and her dancing feet
beat an insane tattoo,
tip tap on your grave.

She tries to lace up her smile,
to fall into grim and solemn step,
to keep laughter under heel.
She is very brave to laugh
in the face of your death.

Sunrise brings the daily routine of drawing blood and checking rates and volumes and weights; the parade of averted eyes and stiff smiles; the constant presence of the desire for release from pain and for sleep.

LANGUAGE OF PAIN

Radiation technicians' uneven tattoos,
indelible blue and red x's mark the spot
where they took his voice,
left scar and fear and quiet.

Vigilant, I watch him,
always watch, to read
his every movement,
his words encased in gesture.

His muted jaw immobile,
eyes squeezed shut with effort,
silencing the pain that screams
across the space that was his larynx.

He carries his new voice in his pocket
but can't remember to use it.
Can't identify the metallic whine as his.
He asks questions with his eyes.

I study him for messages,
shudder of fear, wince of pain.
I watch him ring his hands,
unheard plea for release.

*Nursing station sweet with cut flowers,
perfume riding on antiseptic.
Flowers unneeded,
abandoned in haste to be home,
to be freed of
the clinging smell of the ward.*

FEET

You lie naked behind open door,
under hundred watt light.
No need for privacy now.
You've been left for the orderlies,
a package to deliver.

Your family has already gone,
left behind their newly departed.
Their moans recede toward the elevators
and their tears catch
against inside of throat,
tearing it open.

I steel myself for the gruesome,
sneak a look but see only feet
and ankles, white and still.
I pretend that even they
expose the terror of your death.

Better than to think of your feet,
no more dead than yesterday
when blood still leaked through your veins.
Better than to think of the disease
that left so little to die finally.

*I carry flowers to your room,
stop in the corridor,
compose my breathing,
arrange my features,
smiling mask of reassurance.*

SOLDIER

I stand at the door
opened to his privacy.
Whatever that meant before.
First sight attacking my eyes is him,
lying curled on his side,
ass bared to ward and his shrinking world.

I step gingerly past
open sores and broken skin,
tissue turned on itself in war.
They won't mention that fight
though his obituary will bemoan
 a long, valiant battle with cancer
before it lists the survivors.

Nor whisper even, about that war
his flesh wages against his will,
against his breath,
against his flesh.
No mention made of feet,
raw and ruined
of bone rejecting skin,
of days and hours measured between vomitings,
of nights unslept, open-eyed terror,
walls and barbs of pain,
the fight for dignity on a urine soaked mattress.

And I think
through the fog I let settle
(a blanket of numb unseeing)
over the room, four beds and my mind,
He has soldier's feet. Trench rot.

I breathe through my mouth
against the smell of rotting meat.

The Royal Vic is a Gothic stone mass against the darkening shadow of the mountain. Its cold, uncompromising architecture gives a face to the century of pain and suffering, illness and fear to which the hospital has been a home. For those who are healed, there remains the fear of eventual return. The hospital looms large on the skyline.

THE HEALING

They look on,
faces carefully hopeful.
Try to muster a celebration.

Baseball cap barely conceals
his near-bald scalp, patches of fuzz,
throws shade across watery eyes,
too old for his beardless face,
open with fearless smiling.

He feels better,
he tells them.
And they think of a university career
curtailed by pain,
of tears at four a.m..

He walks across the room,
almost like the teenager he should be,
showing them
the healing in his legs.
And they think of a muscled kid
skateboarding past danger and fear.

He promises them success,
only four more treatments
while they picture him grey,
in isolation from infection,
unable to walk, move his head
or breathe deeply even
for risk of retching.

They study their child,
his features cleared of pain,
loosened, eased from tension,
picture him as before.
They embrace him,
sharing his joy.
Dare for a moment
to believe in tomorrow.

But they remember the resilience
of the mass that devoured his kidney
and a muscle on his back.
They turn aside,
harden themselves,
wanting to be ready for his death.

BARS

*You feel the bass resonate
in your chest, behind your eyes,
music palpable as smoke in the air.
Your walk, your breathing,
heartbeat even pulled into step.
You join the bodies
swaying against the sorrow and solitude.*

STILL LIFE

He, carved from building's foundation
and from bedrock beneath,
holds up one end of the bar.
Atlas unshrugging, immobile.

His bearded face is obscured,
erased of time, of lines of thought.
You don't look at, don't see his eyes,
don't notice if, but feel
they must be dark and cold
and bottom-of-the-sea deep.

Bits of pale skin peek
from between reds and blues.
Your eyes slide from tattoo to tattoo.

Banners unfurl from under sleeves
rounding wrists, like shackles,
like twine and cord.
He is granite, bound by ropes and chains.
A ship in full sail, cresting a surge,
snake coiling, panther fanged and snarling,
bare-breasted beauty writhing in ecstasy.
Still. All poised for motion.

You wait and watch then wonder if
needle's relentless etching,
slow deliberate ploughing through skin
pulled his jaw tight
and if it turned his eyes with pain.

*Bodies caught in strobe light
jerk like marionettes.
Warm bodies and loud laughter,
invitations to belong.
The vodka tastes like courage.*

THE ANGRY MAN

He stalks the night dangerous,
slides hissing to the barstool.
The rub of leather on leather.
Shade of grey rage under his eyes,
eyes of robin's egg blue.

He brings the night inside, it
clings to his hands, it
sticks to the soles of his boots.
He swallows all light from the bar,
bends music to his pulse,
a raging in his ears.

He has sucked in the hard, white venom,
cocaine, freezing, hardening into
a glacier of anger.
Cocaine, seed crystal in his veins,
clustering and building
the framework of hatred.

Conversations still, gestures hang in mid-air,
frozen by his slow, challenging glare.
We watch him clutch his beer
like a weapon, ready
to battle the thoughts that twist his brow,
carve an icy geography of pain.

His swollen lips crush together,
map a line of protest.
Rage erodes the borders of his mind.

The washroom in the bar, a patented design: the scrawlings and scratchings on the wall - who sucks whom beside hearts with initials, dustings of cocaine on the back of the toilet, and always the sodden wads of toilet paper stopping up the drain.

DEALING

We signal your entrance,
semaphore messages around waiting bar,
a complex coding.

We avert eyes pointedly,
cross, uncross legs,
drum shaking fingers on sticky bar tops.
Tension ripples across the small of our backs
like pain.

We study you in our periphery,
ears raise your sure, deliberate steps from the din,
follow your progress through the room,
track the stalking of your clientele.

Wolves on the hunt,
we smell your approach:
after-shave and sweat,
leather and money.
Eyes close against the wanting.
You smell like desire.

Your pockets are rich with promise,
the courage of laughter,
a darkness like death,
the forgetting,
the tireless hard-ons.

We buy what you're selling.

In the summer, the bars open their sliding glass doors, splashing tables and chairs and loud music into the night street. On the sidewalk, you can sit in roped off safety, sip cold beer and watch the over-heating city stroll, cruise and cycle by. A hot July night will swell with the sounds and smells of bistros and café turned outside into the warm wind.

QUIET

Something of the silence
that follows harsh words
hangs about her head.
Limp hair frames her face,
pale and still and alone.
Lips a little too soft and slightly open,
still frame those words
that must have flown
like mad birds rising and spinning
on shaking wings.

Her eyes are blank, almost lidless,
not seeing as you walk by,
brush by,
graze the point of her shoulder,
all bone and shirt and skin.

She stares at the empty
forgetting
that a watched pot never boils.
You wonder
whom she saw sitting there
when time stopped.

*Air inside the bar, dense,
rich with swirls of smoke,
sweat and hair spray.
They dance together,
moving in foreplay,
high on the perfume of their sex.*

FIRE EATER

Folded in upon himself,
elbows propped on knees,
legs crossed mid-thigh, wound
one around the other,
foot locked at ankle.

Faded Levis fall loosely
away from bony buttocks.
He commands only a small space
and he smells of boredom:
stale cigarettes, day-old beer
and the coffee cooling before him.

Hands acting out their own whim
pick at a hot pink disposable lighter,
surprising spot against backdrop
of faded blues, washed-out greys.
Sparks flash out from between his fingers.

I'm absorbed in his performance,
half-time show in this circus
of happy-hour strutting and posing,
of milling and meeting and filling in time.

His hands move to his mouth.
Eyes closed, he sucks in butane,
holds up the small, disposable lighter flame
and spits fire out into the dimness.

*Last call comes
like a slap in the face.
Swollen dark of the music filled bar
illuminated by cold silent neon.
Empty glasses, stale smoke,
bodies turned out into
the solitude of four a.m..*

ONE FOR THE ROAD

Maybe you were there the night
his bowels emptied and his head shook
and he took his last trip
into darkness, into denial
of all the days in store for him.
His last night.

You knew him well, at least
you know the stories about him.
Know he occupied the last
stool at the bar, a place in the light
that presses against the bowels of dark.

A sad old drunk with eyes
like an open wound
and wet.
Did you laugh?
Or did you see his surrender
and look away from his abyss
and the darkness beyond
to the bottom of a beer glass?
Oblivion?
The sweet seduction of the night?

Perhaps you, too, dreamed as you drank.

Perhaps you missed his final drunken smile,
final bliss,
final dream,
final falling,
final.
And drank on,
savouring the atmosphere.

THE PARK

BROWNIE

She polices the park.
Tiny heels click along the concrete path,
parading through the cultured countryside
with all the authority
her starched brown uniform can muster.

She is on the alert for good deeds,
quests for new badges.
Bright yellow squares like shining medals
commemorate acts of childhood valour,
uncommon bravery and cheerfulness.

Diminutive Superheroine,
she is able to leap pruned hedges
in a single hop,
help old ladies across the street,
pick up litter,
skip rope Double-Dutch

I picture her spindly legs
rising and falling:
rehearsed march,
drills and rifle practice,
obstacle courses and calisthenics,
hut-two-three-four and a smart salute.

Her beret is tilted to perfection
with the practiced assurance
of a midget soldier.

Only grass-stained knees
betray her as a child.

*Lying flat, sunned and sleepy,
your back against the manicured grass,
seeing only trees and sky,
clouds like lions and castles.
Far-off whine of sirens
and the steady drone,
tires on asphalt,
whispers from the city.*

BEAUTIFUL YOUTH

I see you from behind,
backside fashioned by divine artistry,
immortal buttocks.

Through the brownish haze of inner-city sky
the midday sun has fired your skin
to the sheen of glazed potter's clay.

The dark line of downy hair on your belly,
the movement of muscle under skin,
draw my eyes and open my lips.

You evoke Olympian fields of ancient Greece
and the age when the gods gamed with men
on the here and now of Mount Royal Park.

Athletic shorts and a frisbee
in place of fig leaf and discus.
Marble gives way to living flesh.

Your body speaks of pleasure,
promises firm warmth under my fingertips,
the coiled rhythms of my dreams.

You have stolen life from my fantasies,
stepped boldly from my visions.
Your thighs betray my secret passions.

I turn Pygmalion,
turn away, afraid to see your face
and the inevitable, unforgivable flaw.

*Entrenched in cement,
muted cannons protect
the perimeter of Westmount Park,
guard the memorial to the war dead -
boys robbed of sneakered Friday afternoons,
tossing the pigskin and watching
high-heeled secretaries
rush home from work.*

KARATE MAN

Under perfect cover of shaded book
I watch him move.
Against rough comfort of nearby tree
I feign disinterest.

A shift of eyes propels me
from silent sterile paper world to green,
wet pulsing screaming laughing,
the park and him, armless karate teacher.
Kicksteps in the park Thursdays at six.

Cartoon body, Thalidomide form.
No arms, just odd little hands gesturing.
Step Turn Kick Hai
Jab Jab Hai Hai.

I watch for moves that call for arms,
eyes flying from him to book to him.
His body flashes. A boy tumbles
over back, across armless shoulders.
Thuds mutely against wet grass.
Kick Step Turn Jab Hai:
triumphant, he lifts his face into the sun.

You step over the no-wading sign to wet your feet in a cement-lined stream. For one green cooled moment you are far from bus stops and trash cans, noise, ripples of heat rising from concrete and the brown haze that hangs over the city like a hot-house roof. A breeze ripples across water and the tension of the day slips away.

TENNIS ANYONE

Athlete, you sidestep me like trash,
vault by my nest of leaves.
My world in bags behind me,
I am hunkered down for sleep without walls.

You are wrapped in sun-bleached tennis whites.
Your sneakers bread and milk white,
a month of meals encase your feet.
Sculpted muscles propel you forward,
straining for the safety of the courts.
Chain link will guard your recreation.

The late sun does you justice, sets off
your silhouette, ignites your profile.
You are glossy page perfect,
posed before a backdrop of shadowed park.
air slips past cat gut,
your racket hums.

Rubber soles grind against gravel.
You rush to be free
of overflowing waste bin, street
spilling onto grass of green velvet.

Your eyes scan past me unflinching
but your rabbit nose quivers,
flares with the fearful smell of danger.

*By dark the park is quiet,
trampled grass spotted with abandoned toys
dropped by children fleeing
darkness and the creatures
who own the park by night.*

WATCHING

He is black-clad.

Eyes hidden by tinted glasses
reflecting the playground in miniature--
 tiny swings tracing perfect little arcs,
 mini-slide with Tom Thumb children
 clamouring and squealing and wearing
 the smallest pink dresses.

He slumps on a bench
on the edge
of the laughter and hopscotch,
the wide-open faces of childish glee.

He is long and sinewy,
out of place in this chubby universe
of pastel T-shirts, mud-caked knees
and mothers, drawing their wagons
in a circle of supervised sunlight.

He is watching,
lips curled into a wolf smile,
the parading of someone's little princess
wearing only blue underpants,
tiny crescent wedge of promise.
His pelvis tips slightly, straining.