

HANDFUL OF HAIR



Jack Veasey

JACK VEASEY is one of those rare individuals who, by exploring the dark patches within himself, can point out similar splotches of darkness in the rest of us. His laser is clean, hard and ruthless like the bite of an excellently controlled trumpet. There can be no question about it: Jack Veasey has us all nailed. He goes unerringly for the gut.

—*Barbara A. Holland*

Step inside the mind of a monster as it stalks and devours its human prey. . . consider what to do when your wife gives birth to a polished metal cube . . . listen in on the fears and dreams of a werewolf. These, and others, comprise the haunting world of Jack Veasey's poems.

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GRIM REAPER BOOKS
New York, N.Y.

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GRIM REAPER BOOKS

*155 West 95th Street
New York, N.Y. 10025*

Brett Rutherford, Editor

Some of the poems in this volume have previously appeared in STONE SOUP POETRY, LAZY FAIR, HYDRANT, and PAINTED BRIDE QUARTERLY.

Cover Drawing by Keith Newhouse

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HANDFUL
OF HAIR

*for Jet,
who saved me from drowning*

morning,
the dry laughter,
uncurls yawning in my mouth . . .
his feet are dirty.

i reach for sleep,
who's left no warm dent in my bed.

he has stood up;
his name is now confusion;
but
he is still the place i meet you in.

what am i to do with these eyes full of hair,
this cotton mouth?
where does my voice go
when the sun rises?

all night,
beside your bad ear,
i was talking

YOU TOO

“You too can be a dream,” it said, hovering over my bed, a comic strip thought balloon with an insinuating voice. “You too can go into a person’s mind in any form you wish.”

It changed shape, flowering into a woolly sheep, stretching into a brick windmill, still in midair. Even with no face it stayed smiling.

“You too can produce any reaction you wish . . . calm, warmth, terror . . .”

It shrank into a beady-eyed spider, elongated into a lantern-jawed snake. Then suddenly it was in bed with me, it looked just like me, snuggling its warm human body to mine, flaunting its feet, its eyes, its seductive voice. It stroked my hair, its hand beginning to change again.

“You too can be a dream,” it said.

THE MONSTER EXPLAINS

i strain my eyes
on the smallness of running things,
who scream into a crunching warmth,
trickle into energy
that moves me.

it's not their flesh i thirst for;
it's their hunger.

it's the need
that builds these brick shelters
i sort through,
weaves this cloth
that sticks between my teeth,
drives these footsteps
running through my shadow.

for before my shadow falls,
in their shadows
small animals are run to earth,
eaten
by the reason why.

my food,
my brothers,
our guilt is flesh;

it grows.

its life is always.

i can only see myself in mirrors;
yesterday
my hands were luminous,
my face,
not quite blue.
today
i see the room
but i'm not in it.

you are like a mirror.
i breathe near you
to check if i'm alive,
though i've never trusted clouds.

you are the room i watch for flaws in,
where i am,
where i am not,
the smooth dimension where i lose myself.
i kiss you,
and the grey outline
of lips appears and fades,
and i'm cold,
untouched,
unseen and
unconvinced.

someday you will shatter.

someday i will see myself,
feel my ripping flesh,
i will stand in two rooms,
bleeding,
breathing.

i will find my face,
my hands,
my pain;

revel in the jagged,
gleaming
pieces.

WOUNDED ANIMALS

know my secret;
their three-legged dance
follows me home.
the one who i kiss, loveless,
has their eyes;
the bed brims with lost hairs.
downstairs
the sound of scratching
swells the cupboards.
i can feel my locked car, outside,
smoulder with dark stains
like the armpits in the shirts
of running men.
i'm naked without it.

headlights sweep through the window.
i dodge into clothes.
i grope for my gun, my
nightstick.

many trios
of small footprints
gather, whimpering,
on the lawn.

WHILE YOU WERE OUT

a man called
with me on his breath;

said
he saw you in a mirror
and waved
(you weren't looking),

hung up
before i could find out who he was.

and it's important;
please
call
back

NOTE FOR THE TEACHER

when i was nine
i threw rocks,
had dreams, had
you.

you were forty.
you were the reason i behaved so badly.

the cardboard boxes
were houses
only to hide me from you.
my plastic spacemen gunned for you
inside their bag.

you stood in the daytime pointing;
at night

your fingers sprouted from the fields
i dreamed through, running,
tripping, ankles
tangled in that poison grass.
your face

was the sky, a blackboard screaming
in my handwriting a hundred times,

I MUST NOT ACT LIKE AN ANIMAL.

i didn't act;
i was.

you trained me.

the absence of your handprint dangled
bonelike near my face.

i sniffed i sniffed; i followed;
you will never know the things i learned.

your screams broke those windows.
heat from slaps left *your* face red.

most important,
forty was your age;
nine was mine;

students eventually will outlive their
teachers.

that burning house i drew in class
was yours.

RESOLUTION

being invisible,
i come giftwrapped;
i am the end of mystery films
you must leave early.
i am the yes or no
of everyone you'd love to.
wherever i sit
becomes the end
of some long road.
my name is If,
and i go on
behind your back.

loving,
in your language,
means i tear chunks from you like some half-
starved bird;
in my language,
means i tear them from myself.

we talk all night.

THE WOLFMAN'S DREAM

1

i won't wake up again;
i woke up late this morning
with a handfull of hair.
whose is it?
how'd i get it?
last night
so far away,
so dim, so
gone
except for a bad taste in my mouth . . .
what's happened?
i try to drop it;
it clings, magnetized. . .
remains unmoved through
even soap and water.
did it grow there?
is it really mine?
there is a flash of my dad's shining head;
the room goes grey.

2

somehow
all these things make me think of you;
under the full moon,
on a balcony,
wringing your hands,
waiting . . .

3

footsteps through the french doors
turn your head.
your eyes grow wide.
you scream.

i've got to go to you.
i've got to find my gloves
although it's August, look alright.
so you won't be afraid.
brush my teeth,
brush that taste from my mouth,
look in the mirror,
comb my hair, my
face,
my face . . .
my *face*?

4

footsteps through the french doors
turn your head.
your eyes grow wide.
you scream.
you,
so far away,
so dim, so
gone . . .

my toothbrush comes out red.
my mirror comes down off the wall,
it shatters.
i'm scared to talk to myself,
make strange sounds.
scared of the bad tastes
in the mornings after.
scared to wake, find
strange hair on my pillow,
find night so dim,
so far away, so
gone.

i won't wake up again.

WHY I PREFER THE COMPANY OF UNICORNS

like talking to the snow;

no language but silence,
gleaned from the eyes of
people lost in the woods,
out of food and screams;

watchers,
listeners.

they give no answers.

or talking to the moon,
the mirror,
the echo of your voice.

you know someone is with you,

creating the hunger; the

question
looking in,

filling your room

with light.

ORIGIN STORY NO. 1:
PLASTIC MAN

the surprise is that the formula
really works

sudden empathy with women's stockings

legs and arms now seem
the way December sees a year

high ceiling dust

white fingertips
whose blood has not caught up

most of all
crossing the wide room

without letting go of the chair

or moving it

needing a costume
that will

fit

GEARS

Sally gave birth to an appliance,
and then died.

Left with it, I don't know what it's
for, what it does.

Though I see my face reflected
in its bright metal,

I know it can't be mine;
she must have cheated.

But with who? I touch my friends too much;
they are all soft. I watch them carefully;
no glints of metal at the hairline,
or the cuffs;

everyone is innocent, like me.

The mirror testifies;

pink, and warm, rough shadow in the mornings,
sweaty

just like Simms, and Block, and Stoddard.

The cold blue eyes at six o'clock
snap open. Just like everyone else,

except for that lump of steel
in my kitchen. It

won't leave.

Its tendrils quiver.

It hums softly.

The junkman will be by for it on Sunday.

It doesn't matter what Sally'd say . . .
she's out.

The alarm still rings in the mornings;
the car still runs.

Simms, Block, and Stoddard file in smoothly.

The conveyer flows,
eight hours a day.

No matter what's burned out
i go on working.

SLEEPING THROUGH IT

Once a year, in some deserted wing of the heart, the emotions have a party while we sleep.

For once, they are not naked; they wear monogrammed shirts. For once they stop scorning our nakedness-antidote; they express themselves.

Love runs around kissing everyone. He neverstands still to stay with anyone. He laughs. He spits when the others say his name.

Contentment sits in the corner, scratching his armpits. He smiles, wrinkling.

Pride has an intelligent conversation.

Anger also talks to himself. He can't decide where he should sit. He keeps spilling his drink.

Greed tells wonderful jokes and riddles. He seems to be the center of attention. Security hangs on to his sleeve, silent.

Courage, Perserverance, and Self-Worth hang on to Security.

Happiness gets ignored. He does birdcalls standing on one leg. He wears a lampshade and a shirt that says Napoleon.

The others don't believe him.

One night a year we groan and sweat and dream this.

Anyone who wakes up kills himself.

BLEEDING, PASSING IT ON

and i,
who have been your pulse,
run down your chin;
i, who have been blue,
blush red and glisten.
i am the different warmth
in this new kiss;
his eyes close.
i slide into his smile.
this is the first real taste
he's ever had;
this relief in his hands,
this stillness in your throat,
this gentle, gentle lack
of troubled breathing.
the struggle between you is over.
you lie still,
the calmest of two havens,
cool and peaceful.
now
i breathe in his heart
till tomorrow.

TO THE FISHERMAN

for Drew Knapp and Paul Wagner)

1
as the waves
devour each other, coldly,
high above my back,
i wonder where in that dry world
you are . . .

shafts of its light
taunt me with its warm brightness.
i could never live
if i should go there.

you are there right now,
walking somewhere on those legs,
with another of your kind, and you are
speaking.

2

when my mouth opens,
only bubbles rise;
no one hears.
the others of my kind drift by,
oblivious.

there is no place for eyes
in this dark sea.
there are no ears here.

somewhere in my cold blood,
a warm voice swims;
hunting a light i've never seen, a place
i've never breathed in.
it cries.
it chokes.
it swallows.
it wants to call you back.

3

once, in a dream,
something in me lit up, and stood up
screaming;

oh, the sound of that scream,
drowning out even the sea,
whose endless roar had dulled itself
to silence.

the scream stood up and walked away,
dripping sunlight, gasping air,
somewhere behind it silence closed again.

i stared long after its shadow
left the surface.

had i awoken with a voice,
i would have cried
to sense it off somewhere,

clothing itself to shed me,

treading time.

4

come back.

my mouth gapes wide for you.

bring me the pain of breathing air,
white heat to light my gills.

bring me your strength
to thrash against
and die for.

look deep into
the great mute mouth
that spoke you.

devour my deafness.

carry on our life.

DECEMBER 31st

the kitchens of mourners
have a soft light;
it shines the outline of a face
under the tablecloth,
settles into oilcloth
like a face into two hands,
clouds the rims of glasses
like someone's breath
would.

in every final kiss
we drink a bowl of it,
the unseen sunrise just outside our windows.

it will be there when we open our new eyes.