

“I heard a Fly buzz– when I died” by Emily Dickinson

I heard a Fly buzz– when I died–
The Stillness in the Room
Was like the Stillness in the Air –
Between the Heaves of Storm–

The Eyes around– had wrung them dry–
And Breaths were gathering firm
For that last Onset– when the King
Be witnessed– in the Room–

I willed my Keepsakes– Signed away
What portions of me be
Assignable– and then it was
There interposed a Fly–

With Blue– uncertain– stumbling Buzz–
Between the light– and me –
And then the Windows failed – and then
I could not see to see–

“She Rose to His Requirement” by Emily Dickinson

She rose to His Requirement – dropt
The Playthings of Her Life
To take the honorable Work
Of Woman, and of Wife –

If ought She missed in Her new Day,
Of Amplitude, or Awe –
Or first Prospective – or the Gold
In using, wear away,

It lay unmentioned – as the Sea
Develope Pearl, and Weed,
But only to Himself – be known
The Fathoms they abide –

Elegy with Peonies

by Amy Gertzler (from *Dearest Creature*, 2009)

Peonies may indeed be the sluttiest
flowers. Sunk in their ruffles, high on
their own old-rose perfume, they're

all voluptuous appetite. Heavy-headed
billowy blooms in botanical drag,
they make showy hibiscus and

thick-pistilled lilies look like wallpaper
motifs from a more uptight era.
Peonies' lives are exceedingly brief.

The tawdry blossoms babble drunkenly
to passing bees in midsummer till they lose
their splendid crowns, which lie

shattered on wet, trampled grass. Queen
Anne's lace stands by smug, correct,
the picture of decorum. Dear Ed, intemperate

old friend, a phone call this morning
brings me news of your suicide. Angry note
stuffed in your pocket after you'd gulped

your overprescribed meds all at once, you
collapsed wending your way up to the roof.
I wept, remembering how you sometimes liked

to wear skirts, and how handsome you looked
In them—*Braveheart* meets Catholic schoolgirl.
Could your brilliance and beauty ever be prized

from the fact that you were always agonized,
always drowning? I hope the heaven you're in
is replete with heavy metal riffs, science quizzes,

bisexual angels, endless wildness of mind,
and fields of eternally peaking peonies.

Letter to Bruce Wayne

by Matthew Olzmann (from *Constellation Route*, 2022)

A good place to hide a drop of water is a stream.
A good place to hide a stream is beneath an ocean.

A good place to hide a man is among thousands
of men. Watch how they rush
through the city like water through a ravine.

I've searched many famous cities for you.
There are three listings for "Bruce Wayne"
in Houston, two in Pittsburgh, one in Miami, and one in LA.

In Tampa, Bruce Wayne is a retired chemistry teacher.
In Flagstaff, he drives a taxi and hopes
to procure a diamond for his soon-to-be fiancée.

A good place to hide a star is a galaxy.
A good place to hide a galaxy is a universe.
Look at the night sky. Justice

used to be a cowl and cape, the flicker
of wings under an etiolated moon. And you,
like a gargoyle, crouched atop some stone edifice.

To conceal a universe, place it in a multiverse—that hypothetical
klatch of alternate realities. The dilemma of the word

alternate is how it implies a norm, a progenitor stream
from which the alternate diverges. Which is the alternate?
Which is right here, right now? There is no such thing

as Gotham City, but here is Gotham City and I've been
so naïve: believing the truth of the old mythologies.
How they promised a recognizable villain,
a clown with a ruby-slashed mouth, a lunatic's laugh.

In the universe where I exist, supervillains
look like everyone else. Give them an old flannel
to wear and a square jawline to smile at the world.

They're hanging a noose in a middle school bathroom.
They're shouting, *Get out of my country*,

from the window of a passing car.
They're pulling a pistol in a crowded barroom,
or bus stop, or the middle of the street.
They could be anyone. They could be everywhere.

A good place to hide a sociopath is a full-length mirror.
A good place to hide that mirror is the heart of America.

In the battle of Good versus Evil, I was so sure
Good would win. Now I just hope something Good will survive,
get a job cutting hair or selling cars, make it home for dinner.

I suspect there's a parallel dimension where you, Vigilante,
long for this as well. To have a normal life is victory enough.
To remain anonymous and not be spat upon on the subway.

In Boston, Bruce Wayne owns a pawn shop.
In Milwaukee, he plays pinochle and feeds stray cats.
In New Hampshire, he goes fly-fishing on the Sugar River,
reels in one brook trout after another.

When he removes the hook from a mouth,
he might place the fish in a cooler.
Or, he might set it back into a stream—
the alternate or the original—no longer certain
in which he stands.

Other Emily Dickinson Poems:

- ["Because I could not stop for Death"](#)
- ["I measure every grief I meet"](#)
- ["Faith is a Fine Invention"](#)

Other Contemporary Examples:

- Fresh Prince by Cameron Barnett (from *The Drowning Boy's Guide to Water*)
- Black Hole Itinerary by Nicky Beer (from *The Octopus Game*)
- [When My Dad Says My Poetry is Pornographic by Dorsey Craft](#)
- [Ode to Definitions by Chen Chen](#)
- [When I Say Love by Meredith Martinez](#)
- [Sharon Olds' "Ode to Tampon"](#) (and many others)
- [Elegy on Toy Piano by Dean Young](#)