

*Sample poems from*

FOLLY

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## IN THE PARKING LOT OF THE DRY CLEANERS

Three spaces over a teenage girl  
has a teenage boy pinned  
against the door of a candy apple red  
1973 Z28 Chevy Camaro  
with white racing stripes, leather interior  
and chrome Mag wheels.  
Their lips are locked. I can almost hear  
over the thumping bass  
the knocking of their teeth.  
His grubby fingers hesitate  
at the hem of her shirt like immigrants  
waiting at the border, nervous, alert.  
From where I sit I can see  
the soft, golden hair of her lower back  
as it follows the curve between two dimples,  
the Dimples of Venus,  
toward the forbidden shadow  
just beginning to show  
at the low beltline of her jeans.  
My hand leaves the steering wheel  
and finds the warmth swelling  
between my legs and the spot of pre-come  
that has seeped through my pants.  
My wife in the rearview mirror blurs  
with each thump of the bass as she exits  
the dry cleaners with my only suit  
hanging like a minister inside a plastic sleeve.

## GOD AND TENNIS

He asked if he could share the bench  
with me. His name is David Crawford  
and he wanted to know what I was reading.  
William Blake. Poetry. Do you get into  
spiritual things, he asked. Sure, I replied,  
still not seeing what was coming.  
Do you mind if I share my beliefs with you,  
and he continued with the usual—finding salvation  
through Jesus Christ, the Bible as God’s word,  
and so on. I had looked hard  
for a bench in a secluded area  
with no luck and settled on this one  
alongside the walking path  
in the busiest section of the park. As he talked  
I watched two teenage girls play tennis.  
I asked him who he thought was better,  
Venus or Serena Williams. He said  
he doesn’t follow tennis. He said he is a student  
at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.  
I asked who he thought God was talking to  
when he said, “Let us make man  
in our image.” The thock, thock from the tennis court.  
The laughter of children from the playground,  
the squeal of a swing set.  
He said it was Jesus and the Holy Spirit.  
He wanted to talk about atonement.  
I tried to engage him in a conversation  
about metaphor when a tennis ball landed at his feet.  
He looked at it as if he had never seen a tennis ball before  
then chucked it back over the high fence.

## A YOUNG GIRL

Three boys stand poolside and talk  
in awkward syllabics to one  
of two girls, trying not to let their voices  
crack. She has an August tan in June,  
is the prettier of the two,  
and she knows it and regrets it  
and answers each with terse replies  
hoping they will go away and not  
make her friend feel bad about herself.  
Yet they don't take the hint  
and continue to show themselves to her,  
to tighten their stomachs and cross  
their arms to show some kind  
of definition in their chest and biceps.  
Part of her enjoys the attention  
and her friend knows it—the one  
we've neglected to notice, the one  
sitting beside her eating cheese puffs,  
the tips of her fingers blazing like tiny  
shriveled suns.

## READING AESOP TO MY SON

It seems like yesterday  
he fit into these pajamas.  
The kind with feet and a zipper that runs  
from the ankle to the vulnerable  
flesh of his neck.  
He is about to grow right out of them,  
the neckline pulled down  
over his clavicle.  
There's Simonides, who took  
only the poems he knew by heart  
through the storm  
while the others, loaded down with  
material possessions, sank.  
There's the wolf in sheep's clothing  
shut in the fold, and the one  
where the beaver,  
being chased by a pack of dogs  
bites off his own testicles,  
knowing this is what they are  
hunting for.  
How did he get so tall? His long body  
draped across my lap, feet nearly  
touching the floor.  
I turn the page, another storm.  
A giant oak is reduced to splinters.  
It refused to bend.

## PAIN'TING

By the time I got around to it  
there was a hole in the canvas  
from my children peeking  
into the next world.

ETC. ETC.

Everybody has a patois  
or a gunshot wound or has  
simply overdosed on heroin.

## AT THE AUTO REPAIR SHOP

Everything,  
even the gumball machine, is grimy.  
The mechanic has his name on a patch  
above his heart. His fingernails  
and the deep lines in his cracked hands  
are forever black. The shop smells  
like tires and stale coffee.  
Chilton's service repair manuals  
and parts catalogues are stacked  
behind the counter. No one notices  
the zweep zweep sound of an air  
impact wrench torquing lug nuts.  
Cigarette butts float in the toilet  
above which hangs a pinup  
showing a woman wearing only a pair  
of bright red high heels  
that compliment  
the bright red muscle car  
she sprawls over.  
She has thick, dark pubic hair  
which upon closer examination  
is only the smudge  
of a greasy thumbprint.

## PHANTOM LIMB

Looking down upon the bay from this high ridge  
I see kayakers, all pointing different directions.  
They are learning the art of moving straight.

They say that when one loses a limb  
he can still feel the presence of that limb,  
an itch perhaps, or a caress on the hand.

Those below me have no clue  
I am standing high above them.  
Like their god, there is nothing I can do  
to set them straight.

## CANOEING BLUE RIVER

Is it wrong to set my best poems on the water and watch them drift away  
as the great Chinese poets were known to do?

Yesterday canoeing Blue River

I threw an apple core toward a great blue heron near the opposite shore.

The elegant bird lifted itself with wings that unfolded  
as if out from nowhere  
and took the breath from my children, proving to them  
not in words but in image and surprise

that there is a heaven and earth beyond the world of men  
as we were pulled along by the river  
without putting our paddles once  
back into the water.

## THE CHILD NERO

*for Adam Zagajewski*

He looks, dare I say it,  
sweet. A boy like any other  
who would have enjoyed  
baseball, had it been invented,  
a few stolen cigarettes  
in the bathroom between classes,  
who would blush every time  
his Latin teacher called him  
Claudius or Caesar Augustus.  
See how he nearly blushes now  
in this gallery far from Rome,  
this cherub, far from his new home  
in the Louvre.  
Look at his chubby cheeks  
and those winglike ears.  
See how he stands  
indifferent in his long flowing toga  
among these school children  
in their starched blue uniforms  
who are being told about  
the man this boy would become,  
murderer of his mother, half  
of Rome burned, stabbing himself  
in the heart while uttering  
with his last breath, *Jupiter,*  
*what an artist perishes in me!*  
See how he pretends not to hear.