

Roosevelt
and
Assunpink
Poems

by
Rod Tulloss

the path back

from the post off-

ice, black-

birds flushed from cherry trees.

The ragged flights, the

flock, the rain, the

trees, in-

terstices.

vii.30.77
Roosevelt
for David Herrstrom

“AGONY IS THE NORM,” SAYS POET BRODSKY

Again and again the cat
throws herself against the window
where scarlet heads of finches
thump against the glass.
Although she knows of the barrier
(Certainly!)
the hunt overcomes her completely.
Salivating and careless of her nose
she throws herself at these brown flutterings.
Careless of catching her paws on
the hard hearth as she falls,
she hurtles into the air cackling in Russian frenzy.
Now she sits like a monk in silence,
and six finch couples eat in front of her at the sill.
They flaunt their feast before her
electrostatic silence.

Christmas Eve, 1980
Roosevelt
for E. A. Poe-purr-ee
a.k.a. Winky

Where we sat in a patch of dry rattlebox,
there were three clumsy webs
of bobbin-size spiders
striped like tigers. One
had a grasshopper husk—
two black bean eyes.
(Two buzzards floated over yellow aspen
that spun like swarming bees
at the field's edge.)
The seeds in the rattlebox
were greeny brown and
little polished hearts.
When my mind stopped, I heard
the hillside of vetch,
alive with crickets,
sing.

x.22.78
Roosevelt
for Mary

A CHINESE PHOENIX KITE

Carrying a Chinese phoenix kite,
walking to the schoolyard. . .
Two little blue butterflies are
like violets that leap stuttering
into the lower air.
The little boy cannot twine them
in the bracelet of flowers he
makes for his father's new wife.

v.5.79
Roosevelt
for Mary, David, and Mark

Every day the same birds come.
A white-throated sparrow
searches for cracked corn in the snow.
A cardinal lights on amassed ice and millet.
By noon tomorrow, a cold front will come in.

The long-broken doorbell rings!

Its cut wires, too,
reach ground,
take root.

Each year we gather notoriety
to sow in old age.

xii.23.80
Roosevelt
for Mary

OCTOBER

You notice constellations of white fleabane.
I see that the field,
the Queen-Anne's-lace,
the last yarrow
evolve toward dry stalks.
Dirt in the path is dry,
lumps and powder. A
slim black beetle hurries over rugged ground,
stumbling on dirt boulders.

On your sweater, a marigold—
namesake riches radiating.
Sitting quite still, we are passed by
hunter's cars, four gangling men in camouflage,
an old man in First Aid Squad green.
The field sings its high, warbling, daylong note
in the face of winter.

x.17.82
Assunpink Wildlife Preserve
for Mary

I love the cool, sunless October morning.
I sit by the garden watching one bird-deflecting pie plate
hung on the wire fence,
reaching out in the wind like a kid trying, trying
to turn somersaults.
It is a ghost of a headlight reflecting
remarkably in the muted brightness.
There are dying grasses in the garden with wild feathery hair—
and fleabane and goldenrod.
The crickets race their whistling motors.
The yellow squash are grown enormous and hard as stone.
My revered crows are crying. Their cries
wander endlessly in the distant less-green trees.
Yesterday, we saw the season's first migrating geese.
In the sweetgum, in the bird cherry, the wind sound. . .
The invisible worlds rush through us!
Joy!
 Joy!

x.10.83
Roosevelt
for Mary and
for David Keller

LYING ON MY BACK IN THE ASSUNPINK

Small clouds from the southwest slide
across pure blue and a higher, slower moving haze.

In the cool morning, with dew-soaked shoes,
I lie on my back where red pine grove
goes to birch, oak, maple, and sumac scrub
and can't remember the last time.

The duff is warm under me, warmer than the morning.
I'm so still, heartbeat shakes my eyes; and
clouds pulse; one, an open-mouthed dragon,
milks the blue sky's teat with stiff arms.

I've scuffed up a clump of moss:

a long-legs inches over the coarse terrain,
needles, and newly dead leaves—its
seedlike body moving up and down.

Quite often it loses its footing.

I expected more sureness from the not human.

All the time, I look to be taught something;
and all the teachers I elect are stumbling,
going south, dead on the road, losing their leaves,
blowing themselves out over the North Atlantic.

I find their yellow feathers in the barrens
and give them the wrong names. I
am not talking about being stupid at Biology.

“Boys!” said Mr. Hoskins in the middle of trig,
“I just told you where to go to get free ice cream!
Look at what happens when you don’t pay attention!”

In the stem of an orange bolete, a large brown slug
eats into wounds the air turns turquoise.

16.x.85