

Strawberries

by Jenni Russell



I eat strawberries by the fistful.
It seems appropriate, they are heart-

shaped, red and symbolic of Venus.
Queen Anne Boleyn, the second wife

2 of Henry VIII, had a strawberry birthmark
on her neck, which some claimed

proved she was a witch. I was born
with a strawberry-shaped birthmark

on my left arm, below the shoulder,
where little boys I fell in love with

in grade school would punch me.
The spot I touch there feels softer

than the skin on my areolas. It sinks in.
Most birthmarks fade in the first years

then vanish completely, but I've kept mine
like a branding, a target, a bulls eye.

Fragile

by T. Birch

The boys wake — Grandmother
doesn't hear the noise, the small cries
exiting their room. What matter
how long the day becomes? *Please lie
still*, four says, just like his mother
used to say, and little two will try
what's impossible for him to tame.

Where is Mommy? Where is Daddy?
That was last night, when thunder came
with its great shake and flash of light
where none should be.

Now quiet in the room, four's hands
reach and clutch two's smaller ones.
Small heads with sweaty hair, a scent
in bed their mother loved, with sun-
light stained through curtains, slightly bent
in red and orange.

Roadkill Blues

by J.R. Hume

These empty eyes are a blatant
plea for attention.
Ignore them.

In a time of youth and lust
a preacher mugged me.
Lacking a suitable sacrifice,
I was sold into spousedom.

Frisk your hands together,
whisper words to the dead dude.
That's how us groomed men cope
with the time between heartbeats.

Those cracks in the asphalt
resemble a virtual escape route.
Do you like this shiny-eyed stare?
No more near-death for me.

MIPO-PRINT

Impulse Buy *by Bharat A. Trivedi*

I bought this coat
from Vicki at a garage sale.
I wore it all winter.

Isn't that the one you got from
Vicki? People ask me.

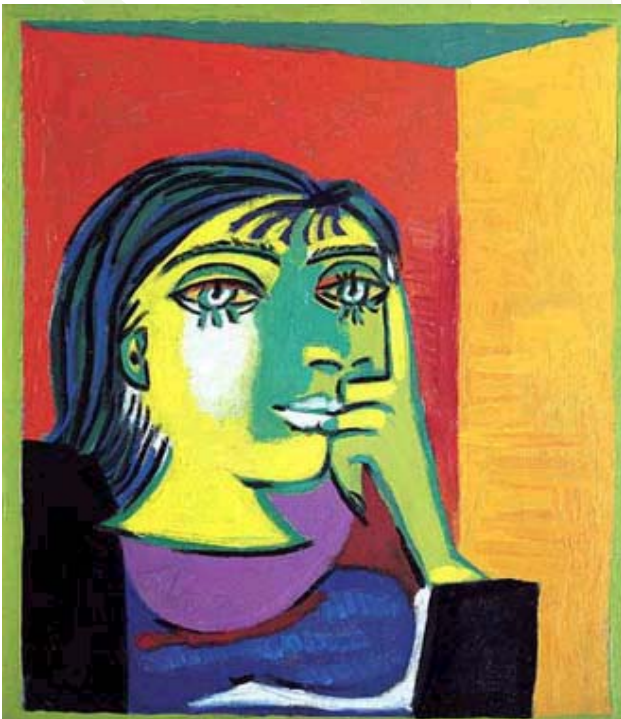
I do not wear this coat
when I go to church, or
to the Mall on weekends.
I wish someone would steal it
from the Laundromat,
or I'd find I lost it at the Bar.

I've thought about putting
it in a closet buried
behind the other junk,
but I get scared
of my own thoughts.

It's not yet spring and
I think of wearing a cotton dress
and high heels, walking in the park
whispering confessions.

I knew all along
that I shouldn't
have fallen for that coat in the first place.

But in winter
you hardly think rationally.



Invisible Women of Sorrow

by T. Kilgore Splake

youthful new picassos, future dharma bums,
anyone with nervous rush of creativity, unsated
desires for adventure, challenge,

run, walk, crawl, hasten to small town
limits, flee beyond the addictive lure of
village mediocrity and respectability, the
black rages silently devouring a young girl's
soul,

homebodies becoming old women watching
youth disappear, daily mirror spot checks,
faded pom poms, wrinkled white boots lost
in dusty closet darkness,

married to simple men, satisfied to live
on the surface of things, made for television
"speck effects" personalities,

making babies to fill spare time of dull
boring lives, aching for feminine gossip, the
security of group behavior, constant imbecilic
"cluck, cluck, cluck." drowning out painful,
timid femmes,

prisoners of sexual fascist husbands
suspicious of one who doesn't beat on "his lady"
now and then, owl-eyed children going to bed
frozen in fear, told next morning "love changes
everything,"

trapped hopeless women feeling life, things
out of control, dreaming nights of making themselves
bleed, sure it will cure the pain, yet ever at home,
waiting for their man so life can begin again,

spending precious few dollars, local stores and
business run by colorless men lacking humor, solid
sunday churchmen, greedily pursuing wealth rest of
the week, married to haughty wives who dwell on what
others own,

all pervasive community ethos that resists any
challenge to middle class values, quietly ostracizing
those who don't "live our way,"

small town morals pronounced by churches, devout,
zealous ministers and members, mad virgins declaring
puritanical correctness, ever ready for the "letter,"
a burning at the stake,

mass mindset that values learning through
experience, condemning those seeking truth in their
imagination, sadly declaring irresponsible affections
of the heart,

poor, trapped invisible women of sorrow, living
in exiled desperation, wishes, desires mutely incognito,
true selves buried deep, lost,

one day forced to admit nothing has been
real, none of their experiences have counted, suddenly
alone, without warmth, another honest heart to share
love with.