

ROBERT LIETZ

BOBBY GREEN

Radios walked us everywhere
and —late —the music
we heard from Chi / from Buffalo
/ from raids moms made
on the Goody stacks downstate —on
Wilkins' shop —at Madison
and Townsend —where seventy-eights
meant Orioles —meant
Ravens and Five Keys —sounds
in the dark —from Harlem
/ Boston or "da Burgh" —the music
like dreams / the *gist*
of dreams and —sure — whole
neighborhoods inspired —when
Mr. Rhythm balanced his sweet wax
on summer weather / and
songs like these would
sweeten the night air
in Syracuse.

*

Night-times

were candle-scents / were chill —
windows left open —advancing
the spices and factory-summoned
summertime —were
dance-steps in church-lots / Saturdays
/ and spot-lit tunes
the ballplayers showed another grace for —

ready or not to wait –
but sure – shared in the air around –
what we heard in songs
boys ached to learn
the words for.

See how the moon – like a coin so thin
the slot can't see its value –
holds its own tonight – and – clarifying! –
shines – on these kids
still peddling seventy-eights in school yards –
forty-fives from the stage-steps –
from cartons after singing. And what's this
from Kabul? Maybe a breath?
Lips moistened a little / closed – when
the laughter seems / or the unlacing
seems first cue / and we improve
on smiling – improvise to say
how we will be tonight / how
you will be tonight – until
we are side by side
and answering
the hunger!

I'm getting home Elizabeth – and
picking the right thing out –
through miles my thoughts for you
must occupy – beginning
the day's drive earlier – the *medium*
depending (as poems) on miracle –
entered again as points / again
as complimentaries – from
the first (unskilled) first steps
done out-of-kilter – knowing
so much so long / from
that first glide

in arms / your arms
/ and *that* first
impulse to be
singing.

*

Dangerous (somedays) or simply
out of place deciding
rivals —some four or five -somes populate
their jokes about tight places.
Then the smile your brother flashed
and blues for half a century
speak for all of them —bright
as these sunflowers
I missed just days ago / lining
the drought-burned
shoulders west
of Canton.

*

Fingers hip back ache —sharpening
every sea-change phrase
I might discover —with poems
to begin / be drawn by —
and love I'd have lived without —
only seasons ago —
when every reason to doubt
weighing on creation
seemed reason enough —
and so! more
than I wanted
(after)
once!

*

How could I imagine love — or
sense *love* somewhere

in the music — in the change and chance —
and (who knows?) earlier —

with the first light filling in creation —
cued by desire / journeying —

when *any* (*every*) *where* began to feel —
and what would have been

first light sprawled widely on duration —
straight to your smile today —

and how you ask / how I keep close
a little longer — to feel

such promise love — as sunflowers
rise and turn — if only

to see about a morning — bringing
me from and back — unable

to say or to deny
their influence.

*

Lodging for less. The best in family recreation.
Believing in tread
I know is wearing away to history. And
voices the Lord assumes —
when verse and megaverse make points
by repetition. First light
was all the more and lovelier. And
these — ruing the lengths
of shared four lanes

and news and
speed-bars!

But since I am home almost – and
home in ways
no family talents had predicted – to be
with you's my schoolroom –
to be in love and fifty-five – remembering
how the kids' rooms glowed
on Hickory / West Onondaga – on
Seneca / Tioga. But
how can I say / serve – when horrors
abbreviate – when newscasts
stick all kinds of knowledge
to the children – setting
their sights on blood – with
cruisers / stun-guns
/ the shadowed sideyards
no greening
has relieved for
centuries?

Then think of the whole outdoors alive
with music and night-skating –
moments before the skating changed –
and the grey –skewed blue –
blue-black and stars –and galaxies
/ spanning the winter blocks
and bungalows –no nearer
to Sebring now
than the northside porches
were to projects –
not with the news tonight
/ the Bonneville's
front end playing
tag-ball with
disaster.

*

Wasn't that old Joe Clamm — with weight
to shed — getting
the colors right — a paint can clamped
and vibrating — until
the hues seemed right for Catholic school rooms —
part of this dream about a dream —
begun by this call I need to place — invited
to phone but nervous now —
for Ohio stars tonight — for places
we knew apart — before I worked
with Ray — had even
heard of The Eldaros / for
these nine years
two count between
two winter
birthdays.

Then this busy signal twice — a son
on the line — grandchild
loved so much his disappointments crush you —
while Bobby's thinking Dinosaur
/ thinking blues — best ribs between
South Boston and Fredonia —
until I'm this third try through — and
Ray's bro's remembering
Ray Green at thirty-five — when
"Dearest Dorise"
meant calls / "Surrender Baby"
/ "Baby Child"
brought on the collectors
/ cameras
made points / bass
points / and
sky lively
falsetto.

*

Maybe the cards did not fly right. And
duffles (stuffed) changed hands.
Maybe I'm eight nine ten —and unaware
of shades-drawn spots and barbecues —
places where kids with kids joined voices comfortably —
and cannot — even a few bars — harmonize —
entering the dark —with plans for questions
and quiz study —but listening —for words
to fall from the night air to my blank pages / be there
when I wake — to make them something else
and more surprising —until the poem's high lit
and sharing the chromatics —though
this would take years —take galaxies
/ guitars and streets
and pencilled scores / seasons
away from the proof-stone
blocks that I grew up on
/ and *forgiveness*
finally.

*

It's *all* an eye and ear can ever do.
Bob Green and Ray from Almond St. —
the shivers when Clyde (The Dominoes)
turn hearts to Capistrano —and
listeners —in Syracuse —or any canal city —
hearing the voice again —and
seeing the stagelights / the tables in clubs
where the kids sang
but could not hope to share a supper —
whispering (to themselves)
the promises : the demos / guarantees —
counting on sums
his Alladin letterhead made real —
but that letter

vanishing / the moment
absorbed
in magic hearts
would have to
pay for

leaving the kids / clefs to factory lines
and weekend singing – and letters
that kill and kill – recalled by the colors
of August wheat and evergreens
/ the classroom pace of history – by this
three-quarters moon tonight – observing
/ alien – lending its light to dreams – over
this freshened joe / this tank I follow
along Route 30 at State limits – returning
to you Elizabeth – with east-going
barrels down – at dusk – that
by next week's dark – while tables
are warmed and thanks go round –
and *finally!* – past
all doubt – the schoolroom's
shut tight – and God
lifts up the veil.

*

Had God desired these dotings on –
these homes made fast –
serious as prayer / praise – as the gaze
that burns – as if abstract
were ever again made bearable – these
barns abandoned – farm-homes
deserted for day-jobs after all – for
the uniform cuts of fabric
and coiffures – when dusks (alone)
would make another thing
of targeting – and we (for the record)

pay — forever wrong — see
to the ways the mind appreciates —
how the fields have to be
/ the (medieval) prompts
and disciplines —
poured chalk I suppose
and even odder
dalliance?

*

Was that Catawba or Isabella near Salina —
where some Irish mischief
played — or — in (inspired) clichés —
beyond the burger huts
and package stops / behind the quick-lube shops
where the strip ended — where
the dark seemed generous — where influences
such as schoolbells had never promised
sparked desire in boys — with much more
ahead than boys could row toward
afternoons — clocking the same meantime
and waking again in rooms
the size of open vowels — remembering
the perfumes — the grey-going
ebony — the scuffed orange
and grey-banded barrels
and glad wheels — the hawks
upstaging hawks / ignoring
the search-lit skies / the calls
for house-arrests
or deportation / the gas
poured over / into
(still) another
story-line?

*

What was a little glass or more? What
was the noise outside — where
the dancing then / and ends of winter
meant police — sirens and stuff
the boys would memorize the names for —
a spotlight and splendid ice
that asked for their attention — until
they were shooed away from that —
dared to peek — shooed down
to ordinary evenings
near the park swings — and —
working off
catastrophes — in less
than a keystroke
gone — then gone
in deep-water
pajamas.