

a little middle of the night




Molly Brodak

I O W A P O E T R Y P R I Z E

A
Little
Middle
of the
Night

WINNER OF THE IOWA POETRY PRIZE



A
Little
Middle
of the
Night

Molly Brodak

UNIVERSITY OF IOWA PRESS, IOWA CITY

University of Iowa Press, Iowa City 52242
Copyright © 2010 by Molly Brodak
www.uiowapress.org
Printed in the United States of America

Design by Richard Hendel

No part of this book may be reproduced or used in any form or by any means without permission in writing from the publisher. All reasonable steps have been taken to contact copyright holders of material used in this book. The publisher would be pleased to make suitable arrangements with any whom it has not been possible to reach. This is a work of poetry; any resemblance to actual events or persons is entirely coincidental.

The University of Iowa Press is a member of Green Press Initiative and is committed to preserving natural resources.

Printed on acid-free paper

ISBN-13: 978-1-58729-858-5

ISBN-10: 1-58729-858-9

LCCN: 200932828

*For Nora, Pinnie,
and my teachers*

*O earthly animals, o minds obtuse!
The Primal Will, which of Itself is good,
from the Supreme Good—Its Self—never moved.*
— Dante, *Paradiso*, Canto XIX

*I give myself a second thought. Life is just forgetting
ahead like the carcass of a dead horse by the Niger Dam.*
— J. A. Okeke Anyichie,
Adventures of the Four Stars

Contents

Niger Lullaby	1
Poem for a Child's Voice	2
Make Belief	3
Under Age	4
And How Did Your Rapture Turn Out?	5
Before Memory	6
Les Blessures Graves	9
The Horse Museum	10
Ought	11
Underneath Underneath	13
Underneath at All	14
Underneath (Side Effects)	15
Underneath	16
Diary of a Year without Pictures	17

(((

Mild Peril	23
Going Back to Sleep	24
Mars Black	25
White Trash	27
Lake Superior	28
Appalachia	31
North of North	32
Funny Old	33
A Little Middle of the Night	35
Whoever Said Hell Is Not Beautiful	36
I HOPE YOU'RE HAPPY: A Novel	38
Pale Yellow Throat	42

(((

Lake-like 45

Lacan as an Australian Settler 46

Folkways 47

Cabaret Voltaire 48

Like Your Jesus, Only Mine 50

Roman Girls 51

Drawer of Cardinals 52

Vermeer Sounds 53

Snow White 54

Joseph Conrad's Last Novel (Which Is Comprised Entirely
of Face Colors Used in His Previous Novels) 57

The Greek Theater 58

The First Poem 59

Ramp of the Chinese Dog 60

Scene from an Unknown Painting 61

Midwest Wilderness 62

Past the Sawmill 63

Real World Magic 64

Notes 65

Acknowledgments

Grateful acknowledgment is made to the editors of the publications in which the following poems first appeared:

“Niger Lullaby,” *Colorado Review*; “Lake-like,” *FIELD: Contemporary Poetry and Poetics*; “Roman Girls,” *Hayden’s Ferry Review*; “Like Your Jesus, Only Mine,” *the Journal*; “Cabaret Voltaire” and “Les Blessures Graves,” *the Laurel Review*; “Snow White,” *Malahat Review*; “I HOPE YOU’RE HAPPY: A Novel,” *Ninth Letter*; “Before Memory,” *Northwest Review*; “Midwest Wilderness,” *Sou’wester*; “Joseph Conrad’s Last Novel (Which is Comprised Entirely of Face Colors from His Previous Novels),” *Washington Square*.

Some of these poems appeared in a limited-edition chapbook entitled *Instructions for a Painting* published in the Midwest Chapbook Series by GreenTower Press, 2007. Thank you to Mary Ann Samyn, Ed Haworth Hoeppepner, Jeffrey Insko, Kathy Fagan, Dennis Allen, Marit Ericson, Mary Ruefle, Holly Carver, Matthew Porter, and to my family and friends for support.

A
Little
Middle
of the
Night

Niger Lullaby

Night comes,
icky baby,
born under the four coins—

on our reed raft,
even the good storm
moves off.

Every knife
you push in a man
will want out.

So the heart's room is black.
Listen, cloud curls, even
grackles bear a gold mouth:

they say *stay in dreams*
born on a sickbed,
o night beach—

bring your flame
under black burlap,
no matter what.

Poem for a Child's Voice

The first sound I hated came from the forest, so I went there.
I didn't wake up blindfolded. I didn't come to a door.

The moss was all

above me, half-lit, map damp.
I thought: *it will never be easier than now.*

Fought barely at first
against a steady massacre of clouds

in the arms of the pines, unashamedly
sharpened. Soon, trees were not tall enough—
their seeds rustled

like they owned the only longing,
& all the flaws that render a future.
Kept turning under and under every buried thing
until deep was not under but across.

To think I started with actual traps,
and the advice that my own notions were encoded:

instead, I found a trash heap, and train tracks. Heaps and heaps
of leads.

Make Belief

My live-in nurse says optimistic people will often see
brown as a shade of purple. *But the self implies a horizon,*

I don't say. She rouses me in order to change the bedclothes.
Just be thankful you have a breath to hold! Strange I have risen

at all, into this weird, white body, which I have not forgiven
for bruising up, freezing over, trying to leave me. Outside:

distance. The self is always on the horizon. How can I help it
if I look forward to a little loss. And actually, moonlight is warm,

yellowing—sunlight is bluish. Be careful of false clarity,
she says. *How little I need to breathe!* In three seconds

I will unfold and allow myself another blanket,
even if it brings nightmares: headless doves, singing.

Under Age

—under a crusted hair cascade I won't move for school photos.
I see this planet, ok: ticking insects blanketing an egg.
I ignore most everything.

I don't believe the film of me will survive anyway
so I just keep living it. Ever under teachers in their foul clothes,
a curdled joke in a locker, pinned by the dream of an English boy's
torso.

Lives are too long. I'm tired of being half-formed and perverting
everyone. What haven't I tried? Pleats will go on without me, sweet
sucky knee-socks and lavender blubber about the mouth. I was born

on a bad raft, thanks; I'll loom where my power creeps out.
I'll enact me a black boyfriend and find my fringes
under the weekend. Next century, up my skirt. Once I was a sponge,
now neon, lunatic.

And How Did Your Rapture Turn Out?

Once I
woke up laughing.

Saw the limbs of the pine
row and paw. I heard bells, split geologic.

*Did anyone take a photo of me
while I was in the coma?* Why, no. No one thought to.

Before, the nights froze in acid orange
streetlight, and we walked in thin shadows.

That was the first time I felt young.
There was no future.

But I came out on the other side—so
your millennium wasn't like mine,

so what. Remember catching that wet rabbit?
How did it feel. Like dusk—

start at the stars and drop west & the light goes apocalyptic:
indigo, ultramarine, cobalt, turquoise, cerulean.

I said *come watch the bats with me*,
once. I just kept up.
That's how.