

The 2003 Editors' Prize Contest Winners

THE
SPOON
RIVER Poetry Review

*Melissa Stein
First Place*

(How to Fall from) Grace

It's as easy as whistling
to a man in a pickup truck, letting him
put his hands on your hips,
letting him touch your face
with his whiskery lips

it's as easy as listening to the nonsense
of somebody oh,
so much younger than you
as he traces the map of spider veins
behind your knees, and up your thighs
entranced by the way the blood ends there

it's as easy as whispering
to the pear trees *i once fell here,*
ripe as a felled pear,
sticky with wasps—
i once lay here
with a boy
on top of me
in the sun
in the slatted light
that comes between the leaves
in the latest afternoon—

it's as easy as forgetting
where you put the keys
and it occurs to you it's just the last
in a string of things

your mind has let go
dropping like marbles
in the spaces between your fingers
one by one to roll away in clear glass
infinity

it's as easy as turning over a shell,
flipping it over to see what's underneath
and pocketing it, and walking away
across the aching sand

it's as easy as—once you get a grip
on the tip of one feather
of one wing—pulling him down,
putting your hands on those shoulder blades and
keeping him down, it's as easy as stroking
the feathers of the angel
till he does what you want, till he wants
exactly what you want

it's as easy as taking
the hand of a boy
and walking through the orchard, stepping over
each shadow of each trunk, the basket weave,
keeping the luck that you have
as the hair sweeps across your shoulders
& your back
and he puts his hand in your hair and
pulls you to him by the back of the head
and you sway in the orchard light
and you kiss in that orchard light
and the air is still and silent
except for a pair
of redwinged blackbirds
off in a tree at the edge of the stand

it's as easy as the way your thighs
stick to the seat on a searing summer day
the way your skin seals to the vinyl
and the noise it makes
when you peel yourself off it
and slide your hands down
to pull off the sweat
that's gathered there

it's as simple as taking the curve too fast
so the tires squeal,
hands gripping the wheel so tight, almost
almost going too fast
and just violating the center line
just transgressing the center line

simple as buying the most expensive meat
the largest, leanest cut of filet mignon
pointing and saying *that one, please*
at \$26.99 a pound, *that one's for me,*
i deserve that

simple as throwing out a pen
that isn't finished yet,
that's been used to wish things
away that you didn't ask for,
that's been used to ask for
what you've never had
that's been used to build words
out of strangers, out of the backs
of cars, out of bracelets dangling silver
and light on the most delicate wrist
held very, very softly
by a rougher hand

warmed by the sun
scratched by dried grasses and straw

it's as easy as wanting too much
as the sun sears the grasses
to straw, bleaches them gold
and aware, gold and awake,
bleaches them to brushfire, waiting
to happen, in the core,
in the seeds, in the hollow
in the center of the straw

it's as easy as wrapping your legs around
a boy you now love
and pushing harder, saying *for me, for me*

easy as dropping what you've worked on
all these years as if it were a marble falling
from your hand, as if it were a straw,
poised at the end of a lit match
as if it were a bird with one wing
clipped, lurching in the air-earth air-earth

as cleaving to a remembered night
in the stiff summered air
hands sliding past the waistband of your pants,
warm and urgent, drawing closer,
shadowed by the stars
in the sky's rough bowl, leaning
in the quiet
punctuated only by katydids
announcing themselves
in the blackness

and letting him

for there's no moon tonight,
only stars
to show what goes on between the rows,
the spiders strung across
and holy
in their appointed tasks—
ours, too, to thrash
wholly in the chaff
overwhelmed
with the beginnings
of gratefulness,
trusting
with a whole life

most of which
is still ahead