

## **Gail Rudd Entrekin**

### **Rearrangement of the Invisible**

And here he comes again, that querulous old man  
with his pointy hat, his knobby walking stick,  
curl-toed shoes, pulling behind him the next installment  
of your life, whether you're ready or not,  
sweeping ahead in his push broom the scraps  
and shards of your story so far –

Just as you were getting used to the white roses,  
those blowsy blooms along the edges of the lawn,  
the doe steps delicately out of the dark  
while you're sleeping, incises every bud,  
every blossom, leaving naked sticks piercing  
the night, and despite the dog throwing herself  
against the door, by the time you push it open,  
stagger out in your threadbare nightshirt,  
the deer has slipped away like a ghost  
into the woods beyond the pointless fence.

You wake in the morning to a whole new landscape,  
and when you cry out, wringing your hands and cursing,  
the dog sits down and fixes you in her patient gaze –  
she tried to tell you (but you wouldn't wake up)  
that the old man was passing down the road  
rearranging your future, and the thing growing  
in your bones, which won't be identified for weeks,  
is the seed of a whole new order.

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### **Something Coming**

We are beginning to understand something  
of what is coming, to go beyond sensing a shadow  
in the woods watching us, and to see it take shape,  
see it coming toward us across a field, zigzagging  
as it does, now standing idle and watching the sky,  
now heading directly for us at a trot. And realizing  
that we are seen, that it will find us no matter  
what we do, we are slowing down.

We are  
standing very still hoping to blend with the waving  
greens of this raw springtime, to stay upwind  
of it as warmer breezes pick up and buffet the leaves,  
the grasses, tossing everything in a moving salad  
of life; we sway on our legs, trying to move with the air  
that surrounds us, and we stop thinking of what is around  
the next bend in the path, stop planning our next  
escape route, and begin to merge with the moment;  
we have slipped into a painting by Van Gogh;  
something is coming again across the fields and we  
are open as sunflowers in full bloom  
to these last moments on the earth.

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## **Shaving Our Heads**

I say I'll shave my head, become a moon-  
face bald pink shining defenseless-  
seeming creature in some kind of funny hat,

when your hair falls out in tufts on the pillow case  
in the morning, your crisp silver beard thins,  
soft flesh under chin shows through.

When we shave our hair, our skin-covered skulls,  
which we have never seen, will be revealed,  
embarrassed in their naked whiteness,

their lumps and bumps and funny spots, no help  
for the unfortunate contours of our faces,  
our strange prominent nose or ears,

heads that haven't been seen by anyone  
since we were babies and our mothers  
ran their fingers through our delicate fuzz,

our fathers palmed our noggins  
in their callused hands, admired how like  
heavy fruit we felt, and wondered who was waiting  
inside these perfect structures,  
these elegant bony domes.

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## The Benefit of Dreaming

*for Denny*

I hope this is a dream. My brother is cutting wood in the yard at his old farmhouse, the one he sold after his divorce 20 years ago, and the power saw he's holding slides along the branch, slits his jeans, bores into the white flesh of his thigh in the time it takes him to gasp. He stands and we all stare at the color sinking out of his ruddy face, collecting somewhere in his body and appearing all at once at the tear in his pants, welling up in a long line before he drops to one knee, shaking.

But isn't this real? Don't two or three of us spend the whole afternoon and evening at the ER in Lancaster, watching farmers with severed digits and old men with heart attacks carried into the inner sanctum? Don't we wait and wait and wait, my brother holding his leg together, lowering his head now and then to avoid fainting, until finally they sew the tendon end-to-end and we all go home?

In another dream or memory, my brother and I sit on dirty orange shag carpet in his living room – no furniture – no food in the fridge – nothing but beer. We lean against the wall of this last chance apartment and both of us are crying. We look to be in our twenties, yet already each of us has failed at something we really wanted: law school, marriage. At least we are a little drunk.

If there is some important secret our parents forgot to impart, some family curse we are swimming in, at least for tonight we are swimming in it together. This is the benefit of dreaming.

Doesn't he call to tell me from 3000 miles away that though we thought things could never get worse, though in fact things got a lot better and stayed that way for years and years, now they are decidedly collapsing around him. He has lost all his money; his wife, the very bloom of his heart, is leaving him and taking the little boys whose growth sustains him; and he has just come from the hospital where they looked grave, murmured *insulin, needles, blood pressure, pills, ulcers, pain*. And then he saw that for all of this he cannot pay.

In this dream I tell him  
that I too am waiting, listening to the word *lymphoma* repeat  
itself again and again in the discordant music of my nights. And though  
we don't cry, holding our phones, looking out on opposite oceans,  
we confess how we do weep suddenly in our car or shower,  
how this breaking is a small and puzzling comfort.

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## End Game

Not so much death as an end to decision making,  
being bright and brittle, embarrassing mistakes,  
bald spot at the center when you bow under lights,  
the name of the thing you saw, that image  
walled up forever in the catacombs  
of your mind, and what is that thing,  
that bicycle or ghost approaching  
from the right?

No one touches you.

Where are the hands, bright words? Stories  
you read before sleep, the ones where  
you stood up for the underdog,  
brave or funny or smart.

What's left is sand and paper in your pockets,  
pieces of something stuck between your teeth,  
occasional fury, crying in your car. Reduction  
continues, a teaspoon at a time, until you're  
a watery mess in a chipped brown bowl –  
even your taking in and letting out,  
no longer a dream machine but  
a contraption, too much  
of an old thing.

Put it down – cyanide under the tongue or helium  
tank and mask – afterward someone to remove  
the evidence, make you legal, make you  
properly dead, straight and serene,  
more whole than in a long, long time  
more true.

(Previously published in *Persimmon Tree*, Summer 2011)

## Recovery Room

A cheerful nurse has come for me  
to say that you are waking  
and she leads me through the swinging door  
into a room with three cream-colored mummies  
lined up on their cots, and the farthest one,  
unquestionably, is you, my boney balding  
silver-bearded angel, just returning  
from your flight, your dream sleep  
someplace where no tubes and wires  
pin you to this world,  
no machines swallow you up,  
take pictures of your organs,  
find out things about you  
that you don't know yourself,  
no men cut and paste and fail  
to tell you what they know  
and we, so desperately, need  
to know.

The blue of your eyes  
is the only color in the face of your absence,  
and for a long time you drift in and out  
so it's hard to know when you are here.  
But now you part your dry lips, search  
for your voice, and ask again, *What did he say?*  
I tell you again, unfazed by this repetition,  
not so very different from our daily forgettings,  
our system of gentle reminders, learning  
to set aside our pride, our touchiness,  
to laugh because sorrow is so wearing.

I take your long cold hand in my two  
warm ones as I have taken you again  
and again into my heat, and I tell you,  
*We have to wait and see.*

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## Fairies

we meet at the intersection of Dream Wish  
and What-Is-Possible Streets  
you are wearing glasses  
and your eyes are rimmed with fear  
I have in my arms a covered cage  
with two green and gold fairies  
flitting inside like parakeets beneath  
the dark cloth I do not show them  
to you

we sit down and order:  
from every section of the menu and  
we will share the last part  
dessert

during dessert we take a pill  
and the restaurant disappears  
I push back the table  
climb onto your lap  
straddle you like a whore  
I pull your lips up into my mouth  
lick your eyes your terrible eyes  
with their overflow of fear  
I unbutton your chest open your heart  
to my hands gently I lift you out of your mind  
like a jewel and I tell you *I have fairies*  
and you say *you have fairies*  
and we look in at them and they hold  
the bars in their tiny fists and look back  
at us and their tears are diamond chips

and we see they cannot save us

but isn't it good to have fairies?

you said we would never go down God St.  
where the white-bearded old man in the corner house  
yells at the kids who step on his perfect lawn  
I never wanted to go  
I held your hand

I let you go now and we are drifting up  
death is not so bad all of it is  
all of it but  
I want there  
to be fairies.

(Previously published in *Indiana Review*, 2009)

## After

He never said white horse, she  
heard the deep melodious South, felt  
the blue gaze piercing, was pierced  
lay down in the long, soft grass,  
opened her lips, let her body  
rise under his hands, gave up  
everything, fell  
into the dream  
where  
one, two, three,  
they crashed out the hole where his seed  
went in, she called out  
his name.

In due time, the story goes,  
the kids grew accomplished,  
left. There really was  
a white steed ... the father  
rode above the fray by day  
by night, lifted her  
out the casement  
they flew  
her blue nightgown billowing  
her thighs burning  
for him.

Autumn came as autumn does.  
The Arabian went lame, the man  
dismounted, tired and ill.  
There was no more flying  
and very little tossing in the long  
grass. She held  
his spotted hand, she  
carried him over the sorrows,  
light as bone. She folded  
the blue night gown.  
She shot the horse.

**Gail Rudd Entrekin** has taught English and creative writing at California community colleges for 25 years. Her most recent book of poems is *Change (will do you good)* from Poetic Matrix Press, which was nominated for a Northern California Book Award. Poetry Editor of Hip Pocket Press, she edited the anthologies *Yuba Flows* and *Sierra Songs & Descants: Poetry & Prose of the Sierra*. She is Editor of Canary, an online literary journal of the environmental crisis ([www.hippocketpress.org/canary](http://www.hippocketpress.org/canary)). Her poems have been widely published in literary anthologies and magazines including Cimarron Review, Nimrod, The Ohio Journal, and Southern Poetry Review and were finalists for the Pablo Neruda Prize from Nimrod in 2011. She lives in Orinda, California, with her husband, writer Charles Entrekin.

**Gail Rudd Entrekin** est écrivaine et poète nord-californienne. Ses poèmes ont été publiés dans diverses publications littéraires qui comprennent THE CIMMARON REVIEW, NIMROD, THE OHIO JOURNAL, et THE SOUTHERN POETRY REVIEW. Certains de ces poèmes ont été choisis comme finalistes pour le prix PABLO NERUDA de la publication NIMROD en 2011.

Rédactrice de poésie chez HIP POCKET PRESS, elle a révisé *Yuba Flows*, 2007, et *Sierra Songs & Descants : Poetry & Prose of the Sierra*, 2002. Plus récemment, elle a publié un livre contenant de ses propres œuvres, intitulé *Change (will do you good) - Des changements (vous feront du bien)* - qui a été désigné pour un prix littéraire californien.

Auparavant professeur universitaire de l'expression écrite pendant 25 ans, Gail est actuellement rédactrice en chef de la publication électronique CANARY ([www.hippocketpress.org/canary.cfm](http://www.hippocketpress.org/canary.cfm)), qui se concerne de la crise environnementale.

Elle habite avec son mari bien aimé, Charles, leur chienne espiègle, Chloé, et leur chat tigré, la mystérieuse Scout.