

Introduction

by Maya Spence from *Pivot* 1974)

You never know whom you may meet
May burst in upon you
Throw open wide the doors
To your carriage house
Take a bite of you.
You never know so always be prepared
For the day when dictionaries explode
With unsaid words and graphic
Descriptions of the whirling universe
Spin gigantic snowflakes into oblivion
Or devour tiny ants with one soft lick.

Missa Papae Marcelli

(Palestrina 1525-1594)

by Deborah Austin (1920-2013)

from *The Paradise of the World* (1964)*

For Palestrina, heaven was only singing.
The bodies stayed below; the voices, ringing
serene and flawless through crystalline air,
touched the sky's dome and hung down, hiving there
piled on each other deep, like swarming bees,
until celestial impulse made them move
off on mysterious tangents, seeking love,
and bringing home triumphant harmonies.

Milton saw seraphs in a burning row
who, burning, sang. Not Palestrina, though;

for him the singing burned.
The voices, lost
for a moment, found their rest the same –
 paused,
 crossed,
caught on each other, and
burst into flame.

Out of this burning rose a passion proved
by fire of every earthly guilt, and moved
higher by dissonance that cried for peace
until the fire-scarred found cool release
in cadences that fall like flowers of ice
in a long garland, down
linked in a garland, down
slowly and purely down
to earth
from Paradise.

from *Gathering of Friends after the Fall of the Sung Dynasty*

by Emily Grosholz from *The River Painter* (1984)

I say that any man is equally brave
who can confess he loves his friends,
gives himself up to love of wine,
draws out the secrets of his heart
and hangs them up in black and white. . . .
Especially when outside the wing of night
engulfs the moon; bad fortune everywhere
plays with the bones of men; unearthly war
casts his red eye and brandishes his sword.

Furniture

by Dorothy Roberts (1907-1993) from *Extended* (1967)

The tables, chairs, sofa
Involved in their own arms, legs, feet, backs, stuffed seats
Were once quite an absolute form of law.

The children spill over them in the eternal flow
Of time and the generations, in a curious complication
Of how life is to grow.
The children break up the furniture from within
Without letting the parents know.

Reading at the Arts Festival

by John Balaban from *Pivot* (1981)

What are you doing here?
Why listen to this prattle?
What do you want a poem to do?
You can't take one home
like a pot or a painting.
A poem won't do
to spruce up a kitchen.
It's awfully hard
to find a place to hang one.
You get one home
and it makes a mess.
Strays don't know how to behave.
Even chihuahuas can bite.

The other day
I was parked at Grossman's Lumber
about to buy a sack of cement.
A soprano on the radio
was singing "Un Bel Di."
The hunger in her voice
was enough to make you cry.
Imagine, crying in a parking lot
in front of Grossman's Lumber.
It was the surprise. The haunting voice
that tells us that we're human
not just a jerk who wants to fix a porch.

When poems come calling,
they call from long ways off,
from distant places suddenly familiar
as words unlock
the shutters on our hearts
and windows are thrown open
to clearest morning light
on the finest of days
as we sit in a room furnished by the air.

Song for the Thumb Piano

by John Haag (1926-2008)

People come in so many pieces
People crack behind their masks
People stitch and patch their faces
And hope nobody asks

When people's faces fall to pieces
People stitch and patch their masks
People try to change their faces
Because nobody asks

People gather up the pieces
Dump them all into their masks
People throw away their faces
when no one

no one

no one ever asks.

Note: The "Thumb Piano" has no sharps,
no flats and no chords – only eight full notes.