

Palm Sunday –
my brother and I
whip each other with palms

Turkey

The kids shouted as they
circled me on the
schoolyard play ground:
“turkey-gobble-gobble!”
“turkey-gobble-gobble!”
It was Thanksgiving:
because I was a “Burke”
I was also a “Berkie”
which some evil kid had
translated to “Turkey,”
a name I disliked –
I was sensitive to
slights;
I ran at them and
they scattered
but shouted even louder,
a hellish chorus
faces gleeful with malice:
“turkey-gobble-gobble!”
One kid was slow to move
and I caught him with a punch;
he was in the retarded class
taught in the basement
and it was rumored he had a tapeworm.
We fought it out:
he was tough
and with a head hard as wood;
the fight went on a long time
before he said “I give.”
Afterward, no one called me
“turkey” again,
not to my face
anyway.

Last Supper

In grammar school we were
alphabetized
and I sat behind the same kid
every year
the back of his head
his perfectly combed hair;
he invited me to his home
an apartment on the 2nd floor
neatly arranged as his hair
and his father
who worked in a shoe factory
agreed I could stay
for supper
and I was served a hot dog
that crunched when I bit into it
and tasted good,
unlike the pliable 5-inch specimen
of unnamed meat products
I got at home,
and the pretty mother
who had a crippled leg
asked
would I like another
and I said "yes"
and ate the last dog
which
they could not afford to give,
but I did not know that—
did not know why I was never invited back
either.

Shot

I need to take a pill
because
of allergies;
I used to get shots
when a kid and
went with Gramp
to the doc's
dog-faced Doctor Dworkin
his pretty and slender
nurse
I was friendly with
until the night she
stuck the needle in
without warning me
and I flinched
and the needle stuck,
she could not pull it out,
ouch
I had no use for her
after,
did not want the lollipop
that was offered me
either,
but Gramp insisted that
I take it.

Naked

The lion roared into
the hearts of everyone
in the theater
and the movie began,
Elvis, or The Three Stooges,
or, once, The Naked Prey
which scared me
Friday night
I had gone to meet
my new Junior High School friend
who did not show
and I sat by myself
in the dark
as half-naked dancing girls
shimmied on the screen
in coming attractions
that did not attract
but terrified me
I felt an aura of evil,
of adult-somethingness
beyond my seventh grade
understanding,
and then the movie
which featured the torture
and mutilation
of white men
who intruded into
darkest Africa,
and I stood up and
went out to the concession
run by the theater-owner's kindly-seeming
mother
only she was not as kindly-seeming
as on Saturday afternoons
she seemed Gypsy-like and strange
dressed all in black
and part
of the evil
I had stumbled into
and was in danger
of somehow
becoming a part of.

Chicken

The kid in the road
gets a funny look
on his face
when I do not slow
and he scoots aside
as I drive by
and I remember
Dicky
in the high school parking lot
early in the morning
how he hit the windshield
of my car
and went over the roof
and how I watched him
in the rear view mirror
drop
as if out of the sky
and how I stopped
and ran to him
asked if he was alright
and how he got up
and gave me a look
and began to limp
toward the school
and without even one
of his smart-assed remarks
and how
during homeroom period
I felt
when I heard my name
announced
over the intercom
by the vice-principle.

Cousin

He was at the skating rink
one night,
somebody's tall and lanky cousin
from another part of town,
and I did not like the look on
his face
and started a fight with him
while on skates
and charged in
and ate knuckle sandwiches
off his fists
and backed-off

and tried again
and got hammered
and could not get inside no
matter what I tried
and grew frustrated
and started to call him names
but nothing I said
got me any closer to
him
and I quit,
beaten
and feeling chastened
because the kid had arms like
toothpicks
and was so thin
he looked like he would blow away
in a big wind.

Chipper

I pulled back the rubber band
of the slingshot
and hit the chipmunk
with a rock
and the chipmunk flopped
about on top of
a stone wall
and
to put it out of its misery
I beat it with a stick
but the thing would not
die
and I beat it some more
but
still alive
and I began to cry
and
beat it again
and again
saying "die! die!"
and finally
it did
and I felt ashamed
of myself
because I knew

then
how badly that chipmunk,
like me,
had wanted to live.