Susan Firer

LILACS

The rebellion toward joy . . .
—Neruda

Before his doctor cut into his
7th cervical disk,
like an old Swede's goat he clumped
climbed the black garage roof next door
thump thump to throw
down on me the lightest, most
fragrant bunches of lilacs. I lusted
for the perfervid lilacs, the drunk
lilacs, the purple flabellum,
spodumene, sumptuous benedictional lilacs,
the Nerudian excessive lilacs.
(Neruda's desk came to him from a wave
off Isla Negra.) "Matilde! Matilde!
My desk! My desk!" he yelled,
spotting the wood in the ocean.
Together Matilde and Neruda
"went down to the beach and sat
on the sand, waiting for a wave
to wash up the wood. . . ."
Neruda placed the wood ocean view
in front of a window and placed
a photo of young Whitman on it &
a photo of old Whitman on it.
How Whitman loved lilacs. You can
smell lilacs when you read Whitman.
Breathing lilacs our house falls dark
around us, drops like night clothing,
days' faces. Convalescent hearted
lilac pilgrims cannot stop breathing
the wet dark lilac nights.

Put a bed of lilacs down
and I will meet you. We will not sleep.
Friends all over are falling.
There are so many ways to fall.
Lilacs offer their transfusions.
In the Houghton Mifflin New
College Edition AMERICAN HERITAGE
DICTIONARY OF THE ENGLISH
LANGUAGE, on page 757 (like/limb),
they show photos of the perfectly-postured
lily & the very well-behaved lily
of the valley. What about lilacs? I write
the editors. What about scratch & sniff lilacs?
All over late May, lilacs like burglars
surround outbuildings,
& houses, & hospitals, & bus stops.
(On your way to your morning
bus, if you stop to pick Gabriel's lilacs,
you will miss your bus.)
Lilacs heal lovers'
quarrels, and I swear they floated
the ship from Singapore
anchored outside our Memorial
Day lake breakwater,
making the huge ship look
like a ghost ship,
floating on lilac water. You
already know a lot about a girl
if you see her carrying a sprig of lilacs,
if she tucks a sprig in her hair,
if she bathes in an evening tub
full of lilacs and water.
Night commendatory lilacs brush
the windows with lavender stars
of fragrance. Dirigibles
of lilacs cover us beautifully
as a garden's bell cloche.

I raise my lilac scratched arms
for the mammogram lady.
She arranges my breasts on her
just spray cleaned plastic plate
like cut flowers. I believe in evening
she might be giving a formal dinner.
She sends me to the oncologist;
he arranges me like irises.
He is transplanting
clumps that have overgrown.
He cuts the corm on the angle.
He leaves the beautiful
angled stalks above ground,
the rhizomes almost unburied.
He knows rhizomes need air & sun.
He puts me where he thinks
I will grow best. So much is
conjecture, subjective, history.
In the Downer Theatre yellow-starred,
emerald-green-tiled ticket booth,
the ticket seller sits like a fortune
teller. She has put a wavy-script sign
in her window. It reads: HOLD ON
TO YOUR MONEY OR IT WILL BLOW AWAY.
It should read: LILACS ARE ALWAYS
LOVELY. They sign pleasure (On our
dark, night living
room floor, he surrounds me with lilacs
& whispers, "Now you mustn't move"),
sanctuaries, and refuge. Tulips & pumpkins
trip me. I feel misplaced as poodles
in Lake Michigan. Poodles in Lake Michigan!
My mother told me I was mailed to earth
in an envelope of lilacs,
there is not one reason to disbelieve her.
In lilac days, my mouth full
of ripe, yellow starfruit,

I swallow and listen to the already almost
lilium & tomatoes & delphiniums &
the always too brief flowering lilacs.
In the dark I sneak
out on the soft, moon shine yarrow-
yellow-caterpillar-like seed softened
sidewalks. I stand pelted by soft
green maple seed wings that helix fall
wind whip to earth. (In sunlight
the children will split & wear
on their noses the same winged seeds.)
I stand in the ample
lilacs, the only flower with enough
fragrance to convert everyone
in the city to crime.
Dorothy visited the Emerald City. Yearly
I surrender myself to the unrestrained
wash rabble lilacs,
the windy caravan of lilacs,
the narcoleptic steambath
invitation of lilacs.