Kim Bridgford

THE ARGUMENT

1.

I couldn't tell which one of us was wrong,
But what's the difference? Pride was between
Us, like the ice that's shaped from unforeseen
Weather, or like the recollected song
From another life. And who was headstrong?
Both. Who, with heart in hand, would intervene?
That's pride for you—unwilling to come clean,
And start again. I could speak of lifelong
Promises: like a lightning crown of leaves
That draws the eye in momentary gasps
Of brilliance, how the falling we love too,
That graceful drifting, like parentheses
Around the air, the lovely in collapse,
Surrender as the twilight rendezvous.

2.

Surrender as the twilight rendezvous
Of desire and desired: in short, your
Fulfillment—was that what the fight was for?
But what was coveted? You thought I knew,
And icy words kept preventing a true
Discussion. It was like a dark mirror
I struggled to make out, the interior
In shadows. You explained that you were through,
But with what? What did you want? Glittery things
Flashed in my mind, in heaps of falsity.
You never were that way. But maybe now
Was different. A baby's mutterings—
All sweetened vowels. But it couldn't be.
I couldn't have a baby anyhow.

3.

I couldn't have a baby anyhow,
But maybe you could. Maybe she was there
During the moments lust was everywhere
You looked, and when the notion of a vow
Seemed faint as buried words that won't allow
The reader passage, ruins of a prayer
Left for the scholars in the dust. In an air
Of incremental silence come somehow
From good—like any spoiling beauty, rust
In all the subtle crevices—I stood
With memories in hand, the days when all
Wherevers and wherefores were there with us,
And casual sounds of jazz and traffic would
Be counterpoint for love as usual.

4.

Be counterpoint for love as usual;
Be salt to hand; be sugar to my lips;
Be water to most casual of sips;
Be data for the bibliographical;
Be mine. But no. Some preternatural
Force had become the twin of love, like whips
Inside our hearts, but ice, two frozen ships
Whose hulls scraped pieces of occasional
Touch. Anger never aided anyone,
And yet, like reinvented angry wheels,
We spun and spun. I wanted you to laugh,
But laughter needs to draw from unison—
The symphony a loving look reveals—
Not from the remnants of love's epitaph.

5.

Not from the remnants of love's epitaph,
But from its former wealth: was it too much,
This feast? I guess that paradise of touch
Like any other thing can go to chaff.
Yet constantly you scoffed at half and half—
Pure cream for you, fresh bread, and fruits with such
Unbearable undoing, like each clutch
And falling we had. In one photograph
Of you I love, you're biting off a peach,
The juice of miracle upon your chin.
You're six. You're sweet. You loved it even then:
The perishable passion in your reach.
Consider. Taste. The metaphor of sin.
The question tempting each of us was when.

6.

The question tempting each of us was when:
When would you say? But on the other hand
I'd put the blame on you, your self-command,
When you might long to talk and think that men
Get placed in boxes—silent type again—
When it's just you. You tried to understand
A route with words, an inky, glutted land
Where language was the daily regimen,
The texture of existence filling the chink
Of despair. But for you it couldn't be.
How could those radiant phrases tip the scale,
When aching was inchoate, poised at the brink
Of nothing? With a lack of fluency,
We started making up with lovers' braille.

7.

We started making up with lovers' braille,
The hieroglyphs of passion, the other route
We both could take. I closed my eyes to doubt
And, later, in your arms could hear each frail
Reminder of the world. With such detail—
The trees' languid treasure, with wind throughout
Its passing wealth, a laugh, a passing shout—
The ordinary life. Sloth? Ah. The scale
By which it all was judged. The after-time.
The stillness there. Exquisite hiding-place:
The kind the lonely search for in the long
Impressionable hours. It was sublime,
You said; I said that we were saving face.
I couldn't tell which one of us was wrong.