

Reply to Lapo Gianni / Charles Wright

Lapo, we're all slow orphans under the cruel sleep of heaven.
We're all either creased and sealed or somebody's cough.

Outside the window, twilight slips on its suede glove.
The river is fine balsam, fragrant and nicked by cold feathers.
Under the grass, the lights go on in their marled rooms.

Lapo, the dreams of the dog rose are nothing to you and me.

The Closet Dwarf / Russell Edson

A man goes to a closet to fetch out his coat. He wants his coat. It is his. He has paid money for it. He may even want his umbrella and galoshes; and, of course, his hat.

Is this an unusual desire? He doesn't think so.

But then just inside the closet is a dwarf wearing his hat and coat, holding his umbrella and standing in his galoshes.

The dwarf puts his finger to his mouth and says, shhh, I'm not supposed to be here.

The man notices that his things are way too big for the dwarf. Those things don't fit you, he says.

I know, isn't it a shame? says the dwarf, but, oh well, we've got to make do with what we have . . .

Those are my things. They are in my closet. This closet is mine, it's in my house, says the man.

You know, says the dwarf, once you get dwarves in your closet they're almost impossible to get rid of, because they always lie . . .

You're not a closet dwarf, are you?

Me? Of course not. Why would you say that? Just because I'm a dwarf and I'm in your closet . . . Don't you believe in coincidences? . . .

Then what are you doing in my closet?

I must have taken the wrong turn. You see, I'm a coal miner; I thought this was a coal mine . . . all this coal on the floor . . .

Coal? Those are my shoes!

Listen, can't you hear the miners digging; their pickaxes? . . .

My closet is not the entrance to a mine, this is my house, it cost me a pretty penny. The closet goes with the house, they threw it in to sweeten the deal, as it were . . . and I know this closet as well as I know my mother with all her lack of child rearing ability, and it doesn't go anyplace except to the back of itself and out again into this hall!

Shhh, I'm not supposed to be here, whispers the dwarf, I wish you wouldn't talk so loudly.

And so the man and the dwarf continue their exchanges, their voices become the whispery sounds of mice in a dark kitchen . . . only this and the distant pick, pick of pickaxes coming from deep in the closet . . .

Daughter / Kathryn Stripling

The whole world lay before me those Saturdays.
In good weather I could sit down beneath any tree
and for half a day gather a tow sack too full of pecans
to be carried. Then there was no reason
to hurry. My mother, a few yards away,
let me dream. At the next tree

old Autry sat slumped on an oil can
still mooning for Lester who'd left home for good
this time. Worked both her hands to the bone
for him she had, she said and considered her fingers
as if they still wanted to grab a strong oak limb
and stir one last washpot about to boil over.
No wonder sad Sugar Boots sang the blues
all afternoon, looking up through the branches
for nothing at all, five months gone
and no good man to find. Not one good man
in three hundred miles. No one spoke

while she sang. There was nothing to do
but to listen. The telephone wires festooned over the fields
hummed with messages. Soon all
the pigs in the county were rattling their feed troughs