

Instances of Blood in Iowa · *John Engels*

1

Often I try remembering
how blood beat in my wrists
the day I stared
at the fat model, whose big breasts
were the first that I'd
seen bared; or the night

I chanced on Veronica, naked
on the stairs,
clutching a white robe
to her chest. I tried

making a picture out of this,
but the burin leaped,
and cleanly sliced my palm;
whereupon the proof
displayed itself: red meat
and yellow fat, the white
shine of my mortal bone before

the blood streamed
on the copper plate,
and dried. I loved

Veronica: for all I know
she did not know, and would not
have believed it if
she did. I made
a drawing of her hand,
and have it still; I
wrote her once: "*Light*

*rushes through your fingers
like a wind!*" (for often
I'd thought about
her fingers on my face, though
nothing came of it.)
Blood

deeply stained the plate;
for days
I scraped at tarnish
with a burnisher; and meantime,
having waked up one day fat,
tried hard
to get my belly flat
with fasting, but it broke me,
every time. In time
I was considered for Suez,
though in the end
Ike spared my life
to this mean evidence of breath,
beyond which circumstance
not much.

2

I think of Karl, who,
when I asked him why it was
he bothered to write poems, sighed,
laid wrist to pale forehead, closed
his eyes, and said: "*Because*

I must!" And then of Calvin,
who is dead,
and gives me back the lean
and distant look
from far beyond return of favor for
the night he wrestled down

drunk, crazy Karl, who'd run
a bread knife through
my hand; with one knee
held him there, and took
my wrist, and turned my hand
palm-up, his fingers
streaming with my blood,
his feet in blood: blood
everywhere.

3

Today I mourn for Calvin, who is dead,
and carried with him everything
we knew: how
in the last good days of that
last year, we nearly fled,
took to the boats,
jumped ship in Peleliu,

but in the end
did not. I think
of Calvin on the cliffs at Palomar,
staring down at the sharp screens
at the base; I see him
with his arms like wings
stretched wide to hold him
steady to the air;
and finally, as if I were
on the sharp, receptive rocks,
and looking up,
I see him, far too high
to clearly name,
in the last free instant,
arms wide, hanging there.

4

So fall Veronica and Karl and I,
though not so steeply, not yet
tasting stone,
believing still how nothing
that can fly is ever
trapped, thinking we know

how, in these deaths by falling,
these dreadful givings-way,
there is time to see the slow,
flowering planet rise
and open to us,
for us to think,

loving this vision, with what
power, how
shatteringly we shall be
embraced;
or even that
we might with safety penetrate
the grass, the cold rock,
survive the fire, fly

upwards through the green
lightening seas
of the far side of the world;
but knowing, knowing the whole time,
how in fact we mark
the last hard rimstones of the world
with what there is of us
that even though it may fall lightly,
does not wish to fly.