

## Old Family Photo

A child might've taken it.

*She didn't like  
having her  
picture taken.*

But no kids at the time.

He loved  
to bust her chops.

Having it all ready.

Under the  
table.

Her eating.

Film locked, flash fired up –

*One, two, three*

*Say cheese!*

Her glare back:

fixed, bold,  
burned.

## **Holiday Cocktail Lounge**

Just a regular night out.

Then some women walked in.

Late twenties, early thirties. Glanced around: no one else there except us and Stefan, the bartender.

(He didn't own the place,  
the other way around.)

The women took off their coats,  
headed for the back room. Re-  
appeared again up front for drinks.

My friends and I were quiet,  
waiting for our twenties to end (or begin).

Or for Stefan to close early, like he did every night.

He always drank too much and shouted at the jukebox  
for Nick Cave's "I'll Love You (Until the End of the World)."

(Soundtrack courtesy of Bono)

Stefan tried to match its baritone.

Legend had it a photo on the wall  
was a soccer team he played for.

Legend had it they made it to the World Cup.

Commotion: the women in the back moved the tables aside,  
added money to the jukebox.

Then passed an invitation – just for us: just for tonight.

We danced.

Brown Sugar, I Put a Spell on You, Let the Good Time's Roll,  
Hard Day's Night, Immigrant Song, Suffragette City, Heartbreak Hotel...

It went on. They were glamorous.

Got close. Then left. Settled tabs. Put coats back on.

Went out in the cold. We were by ourselves again.

With nothing left but the mirage.

And for Stefan to disintegrate.

## **Smith and 9<sup>th</sup>**

The highway and  
steeple, luxury  
condos and  
more boxed-  
in affairs  
all stretch  
(even cramped  
offices, half their  
windows lit – or  
less) out their  
legs, surrounded  
at 8pm by blue – two  
deep, rich, different  
tones of it.

## Joaquim Phoenix

dates a  
cousin of  
mine. She's  
older, from  
Ohio.

It's said  
in the news  
he's going  
through something..

They stay at  
an upscale  
hotel, in  
a room  
on the  
fortieth  
floor. The stairs  
are outside  
the building  
and wrap  
around it.

I have  
trouble  
going up,  
so does he.

All eyes  
are on us.

My cousin  
waits at the top,  
looking down.

Just before  
getting to  
her, I fall.

It's exhilarating..

I'm no one  
again.

There's milk  
in the fridge.

I have no  
fear of heights.

Joaquim  
Phoenix

is no one  
to me, or I  
to him.

## **After a Friend's Dinner**

Car up ahead,  
center lane,  
juts over left.

It hears  
the horn,  
pulls back.

The damage, as they say,  
is done.

We're about  
to make love  
with the  
divider.

We brace for impact: my  
girlfriend and me.

The wall's RIGHT THERE,  
Then starts to recede.

One more blaze of the horn,  
our driver finishes  
the turn.

We're back in the rush again.

## **Hart Island**

Was it bought  
with thirty  
pieces of silver?

## The Italian Ambassador's

They wait  
in the waiting room.

To see  
the ambassador. Office  
hours

nine-to-twelve during  
the week, open

to the public

for visas; closed

on weekends. They  
wait in the waiting  
room. Sometimes

it's just her  
attaché, or

secretary. If there's  
business elsewhere: meetings

at the U.N., a conference  
in Washington. Fleur-de-

lys on the carpets, lamps  
with glass  
shades (kept

low, but good  
for reading).

They wait in the  
waiting room.

The double-window

which lets out onto  
the street

opened for the early  
fall breeze. She's from Italy,  
they think. There's  
a picture  
of her with the Pope.

Another  
with a former  
President and ex-Prime Minister.

They  
all look so young



and comfortable  
in the public sphere. It  
wasn't taken  
that long ago. They

wait in the  
waiting room.

Her degrees

and awards, certificates – for excellence,  
charitable work, attendance;

homemade tchotchkes  
from kids and families

around the world. Pictures

of Africa – an internship,  
more carefree

days. They

wait in the  
waiting room.

## **Character (Not a Good One)**

The room: a mess. Clothes on the floor,  
tape holding windows together, half-empty (or full)  
glasses lying around... the morning  
had no choice but to be nice, and  
let a big belch of storm cloud take over at noon.

## Orlando

You're not following me out  
of the Brooklyn Publick House  
but the Berkshires instead  
in 1999, the night  
your stepfather  
was hit by lightning  
in a fishing boat  
on a lake in Orlando  
casting off despite  
storm warnings.

Are you thinking about it, too,  
as the door opens. Your arms  
on my shoulders, following  
me down a trail, trail

laced with pitfalls – rocks, divots  
clefts (the twelve years it's been?)

at three or four in the morning.

## **Drinking Beer & Eating Oysters Alone in Malmö**

I turn  
the shells  
face down, one  
by one,  
along the  
edge of the  
plate, the way  
she does,  
the way no  
one else  
I know  
besides  
her does.