
lyn lifshin

PATAGONIA

PATAGONIA

1

guanacos sea
lions penguins
dolphins rats
that live in
the sand the
whales hug the
shore armadillos
that have been
here 45 million
years

2

wind dusty
sky yellow
soil full of
small round pebbles

at chubut the
yellow cliffs

where desert
eats the sea the
birds and animals
are brown grey

earth colored
like the desert

a little black
and white from
the seals whales
the sea birds

3

a wave of penguins
stretching out like
star flowers on
point lobos

4

indians ate the huge
ground sloths horses
an animal that crawled
along in a shell

the tehuelche boiled
penguins down for
oil when everything

got used up the
people went away
then the seals sea
lions and penguins
came again every

thing that magellan
saw in 1590 except
for the indians

5

mostly its the winds
keep the idly
curious away if

you want to see
patagonia just
sit still long

enough and it will
all blow past you

7

young indian women
painting their skin
red with berries
soaking the sun up
soaking their men
up in the dry leaves
like the opossum
storing fat in its
tail for leaner times

8

birds the same
color as the desert
nests and eggs
the color of sand

birds nests
of thorny twigs

tiny birds you
can't see

whirring trilling

disguised hard
to see as

water in the
fleshy base
of a patagonia
cactus under
the sand

10

punta norte

sea lion bull
with his
harem of females
and their dark pups

like smooth black
stones yelping

11

killer whales

sometimes sea
lions tease
them up on the
land try
to beach them

off punta tombi
tho the whales
can throw a
several hundred
pound lion in
to the air

like a cat
with a mouse

in a few minutes
just bloody scraps

for the kelp
gulls to scavenge

12

on one beach
10,000 cormorants

white throats in
the sun

only one day
in the wind

the birds came
back seaweed

dripping from their
mouths to line

a nest and there
was a huge thud

two birds hit
midair crashed

flopped over
twice dead

TUCO TUCO

not a mole but
a kind of mouse

it drinks the roots
of desert grasses

6 inches long
scratching hurrying

it gets its name
from the tuco tuco

noise it makes
under the desert

MONDAY

white berries on
the pachysandra
for the first time

sun thru yellow
willows the
trees I planted

in May lugged
in heavy plastic
imagining plums

and peaches
cherries out
into the sun

in a daze
from what I'd
burned and dug

huge holes for,
much taller
than I am now

PICKING BLACKCAPS

1

buckets clanging on
suede around your
waist like the quiet
when people make up
their minds not to
fight but really want
to the walk up the
gravel road in baggy
pants nothing seems
possible the bags
are so big and the
thorns the poison
ivy we get stoned
on the berries tho
kneeling in the sun
then in the shade
reaching over barb
wire as if that
purple was some
thing good inside us

2

dragon flies in the
sun deer flies
mosquito bites

the blackcaps
buried in thorns
in rose vines

in poison ivy you
can't tell the
blood from the

juice you have
to dream of
the berries in

a dish by some
november fire
as you lean deeper

into the branches
as if all things
that were hard

to get to
mattered more

POEM FOUND THOSE TUESDAYS

be careful theres
a kitten in the
house who must not
go out or be stepped
on please bring yr
coats downstairs and
keep the toilet
seat down

ROOM

huge desk six
cats could sun on
and never catch
each other's fleas

clay bowl with
pale apples on it
huge brass bed

half the room's
way out of reach
bust of shakes
peare one of a
sort of david

a mermaid lady
on a jug with
bird breasts

there's 12 lamps in
the room and still
everything's in
shadow it's so

big many people
could fart in here
and who'd know

WRITING MADONNA

ink on her fingers
a mixed up pair (one
brown one black) of
shoes on her toes

MAGNETIC MADONNA

rubs you the
wrong way
strong its the
danger you smell
when she puts her
hand down there
you thought you
came to write a
piece but you
know she plays
the field you
can't resist
she holds you
like those
12 magnets on
her old amana

SHRINKING MADONNA

her skin is so
delicate you can
almost see the
nerve endings
capillaries
break down dont
dream its just
no vitamin c or
that she's pull
ing into her
self like some
leaf growing

backward its the
incredible shrink
ing its some
thing growing turn
ing to stone the
dirt on that
leaf pressed in
to fossil pressed
hard and thin
leaves in a book
nobody opens
she's so thin
when she shaves
her arm pits the
hair's too deep
in to reach
like her anger

CANDLES

the snuffing out of a
miner's candle is
taken as something
bad if your
candle goes out
you go out too
candles don't burn
in bad air if
it goes out three
times something's
wrong at home
maybe a man's at
home fooling with
yr woman not a
few men have been
known to leave
their work to
check this out

HOLLY

from the holly
tree to heal
sick protect
a house from
lightning hang
it in the pantry

hang it outside
put it in the
stable and the
cattle will
get big

some branches are
men the others
those smooth
ones are
women

whatever kind is
brought in tells
who'll rule for
the year if the

holly is brought
in in fair
weather it will
be the wife in
a fierce storm
the husband

STOCKINGS

in an old town
a man was bank
rupt had to sell
his daughter to
keep out of debt
a kind old man
threw gold in
thru the chimney
it fell into a
stocking so now
children hang
up a stocking
find a tangerine
in the toe
the gold

MADONNA WITH HER FACE IN ROLLING STONE

gets 26 letters

and phone calls
that dont help

a rock star sends
her a ticket to
come calls to

ask if she has
a jewish nose or
stretch marks

from a baby
does she mind
if he does

on the phone
listening to her
would she read

to help him please
some dirty poem

MADONNA WITH A MOLE SHE'S GETTING
SLICED OUT

like a husband
she knows she
has to wants
to but it
scares her
shes sure it
will hurt feels
the pain lying
inside her
tho theyre
things she
cant use
and will be
better off
without she
throws up
thinking of
both losses

THE STUCCO HOUSE AND THE WALNUT SHELLS WITH CANDLES
IN THEM

shadows on branches
my sister and I in
flannel with feet
and a button seat
for peeing kittens
in a basket under
the stove when
mother leaves the
house gets cold
theresa forrest is
twisting the ring
between her nipples
upstairs under 2 big
quilts I try not
to think of fire or
bombs or tunnels
wonder if the wild
cat theresa says was
seen in the backfield
could climb the elm
near our sand pile

MADONNA WITH A HEART SCARRED AS
A FACE WITH BAD MAYBE SMALLPOX

its like a sponge
all the pain sticks
inside of like the
worst of a junkie's
arm not much that
hasnt been used on
it its a wonder its
still making rounds
some say theres no
more blood just a
little wormwood i
dont think new nice
clothes would help
its like a window
still with the thumb
tacks from curtains
for the past maybe
million years

MINCE PIE

3

in early england
a king and his men
were lost in the
forest someone came
to put everything
together -- mince pie

soft roads hills like
multiple breasts
narrow valleys

men moving inland
moving north

like a glacier

MIDDLEBURY POEMS

4

1

small dark
room of glass

pewter dark
cupboards full of

jars from england

a woman's eyes
painted on china

glancing down
looked in
to the tea leaves,

left her name there

2

walking from ticonderoga
leaves in their faces
carrying grain

stopped in the
one log cabin

there was just
one towel some
one had to go to

the river to wash it
in the morning to be
ready for night

all this hair from
one family hung
on the wall

wreaths of hair
blonde hair pulled

from a baby hair
like grave grass
twisted under glass,
all this cut from
the heads of

myricks russells

100 years ago

5

3 years in the house
it must have been july

my mother walking out
into the garden
touching the
vines leaves of

mint, lemon
hating to leave
then a

neighbor came
scared, crying the
men cut canoes

and waited hoped
the rumor was wrong

my mothers fingers smelling
of mint on the raft

people crying all the
way to pittsford

PHOTOGRAPH

this one's at a
tilt no people
in it really 2
white cats the
ones saved when
we moved from
the stucco house
to the apartment
on main street
gave the fluffy
one to nanny the
grass needs a
cutting some
one's shape be
hind the etched
front glass as
unclear lost
as the year this
was or what wld
happen finally
to these white
cats that had
come on my 6th
birthday after i
dreamed they did

HEAT WAVE

after the mist burns
off the whole
house starts dripping
smells you hadn't

smelled for years
the hall where
a rat died old
flies smells

like chunks of
ugly times you want
to forget july
your man sneaks

around on you
sneaks the steiglitz
prints out of
the closet

coming back in
dreams like the
smell of the
rat thats gone

KYOTO

someone sweeping
leaves with a
straw broom

incense sticks
in the reeds

huge leaves
on the water

ADIRONDACK

1

chickadees nut
hatches junco
at night a pair
of ducks beaver
pushing arrow
heads in the
black lake

2

blue herons
otters near
the dock
one climbs

the granite,
trout clamped
in its jaws
so quiet you
can hear the
bones crunch

NEBRASKA THEN

sod houses

no trees the
land hard

as the men the
women who

came here
had to be

COLORADO

one man went in
to the mountains
ate all his friends
now there's a
grill named
after him

NORTH DAKOTA

geese in the
black holes

prairie marsh
the stretch

from up there
like black swiss

cheese wetlands
sticks a cross

the water huge
nests in them

THE WOMAN WHO LOVED HER HOUSE

because it was wood
and admitted it
because it didn't yell
back except nights
with the black walnuts
banging on the window
it wasn't jealous
of her mother it wasn't
pissed off by the
new cat she could
go to sleep in flannel
and be sure it would
be there in the morning

THE LIFSHIN MUSEUM

this is where she
slept and smelled
rats under the
purple. the water
was loudest in
march. now the
room is smaller
the purple orchid
peels to grey.
these sags in the
bed the yellow
dress letters
coins from a
country that
never was

HOUSE

no door fits
holes in the floor

night comes thru a
hole in the window

the cat runs in and
out the moon the

only furniture a
huge bed covered

with blue dust
red juice tiger

hairs and a
little come

CHOPPED LIVER

bad feelings were heaped
as high as that hill
on my father's plate
when we went to
visit aunt sophia

she didn't like the way
we called him ben and
not father she didn't
like the christmas
trees in our head

the mole on her cheek
seemed to glow when
we said we hung up
our stockings my

mother grew the chopped
liver story for years
on main street how my
father's sister treated

him like a king while
we were starving
each year she told
it the liver on his
plate grew closer
to the ceiling

THE EAST IS UNDER A DARK CLOUD

the mad girl is pacing
in her room her head
full of the darkest
weather there's

a hurricane under
her skin that old
going in different
directions blues

she can't read her
own lines on the page
the wind is increasing
it's freakishly cold

for this time of year
someone in ohio
is uncertain the
new york lover

knows something's
threatening feels
the shutters rattling
down his backbone

-- Lyn Lifshin

Niskayuna NY