

Landing in Philly
Lets me think I understand
The nature of man.

Taking off from there
Is another story but
Not worth telling you.

-- Brian Gallagher

Toronto, Ontario, Canada

KADDISH

Flo was a big, good-looking, blond shiksa;
a registered nurse a hypochondriac
fell for and married, once she'd converted.
She played cards with other Jewish ladies.
They had no children, seemed quite contented.

Once Flo disappeared with the Cadillac.
Then she reappeared and what's more, she told
anyone who would listen where she'd been
and why: Flo was driving home from the store
when work on the road forced her to drive slow.

"I saw this gorgeous man stripped to the waist
digging ditches and told him to hop in."
Once Flo was broke, he left her. Her husband
welcomed her back. He died. Flo stood up, dressed
in black, in Temple. She's one of my saints.

BLACK SHEEP

A whole year before she died, my mother
handed me a package wrapped in brown paper, tied.
"This belonged to your Uncle Clarence...." "What did?"
"It's pornography, Michael. Please destroy it."
Before my father died, she'd never said a word.
I promised to throw it out unopened.
As soon as she left the attic I undid
the knot. Pornography? It was a joke book
from the Twenties, privately printed and rare.
I read it sitting under a naked bulb.
At once I knew where Paw got his best stories.
"What he stole," I mused, "he sure could make his own."

Uncle Clarence, my father's much older brother ...
"Son, we'll talk about that when you're older."
"Bubble, that's something you'll have to ask your father."
When I was young, I thought, like Duke, the bulldog,
Clarence passed away right after I was born.
Later, I believed he died much earlier.
Photos show like Nana he was unattractive,
small, had her voice yet did little with it:
no congregation gave him a grandfather's
clock or silver and though he never married,
"every dime he had he spent on women."
"He worked at the Store but he was no business man."

"You must have been four when your Uncle Clarence died."
So he too lived in Nana's big brown house.
I cannot recall once having seen the man,
much less hearing he'd shot himself. Was my father
sitting beside him in the Model A,
trying to wrestle the gun from his brother's hand?
Was it out hunting squirrels my father spied
Clarence's coonskin cap above a low stone wall,
aimed, and fired? I asked another friend
of the family what he knew. "If that's what
happened, Michael, your Dad got away with it.
Michael, your Uncle Clarence deserved to die."

-- Michael Lebeck

Coconut Grove FL

ON AVOIDING BANKRUPTCY

There's no free or
unconditional
love --
one has to pay
for
everything.

The situation
is really:
how much does one
pay in advance --
and how much with
each installment?

-- Sonia Topper Weller

Kiryat Ono, Israel