

# **Breakpoint and Other Poems**

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## **Breakpoint**

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Red on your lips a little blush  
on your cheeks. Close  
your eyes *Where's Daddy Did you see  
Daddy Mommy's at the other house*  
How about the blue what goes with blue *I feel  
like a clown I'm like in a circus I don't want  
to look like a clown* Close your eyes  
I'll make you nice *Where's Daddy  
gone* Just you stay still  
*How much is five minutes* I'm  
not done *Mommy wants us out  
of a house* I'm trying  
to fix something here *We're going  
to get it from Mommy* You look  
pretty *I look  
like a girl who hasn't slept in five years*  
*I can't move my face* It's  
just paint. *Mommy's  
back from the other house Mommy's  
taking us to the other house Where's  
Daddy's upstairs  
Is Daddy awake*  
How much is five minutes  
*Let's wake Daddy*  
Close your eyes.

## ***Six Sorry Questions***

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Did I come on too strong  
like I spelt your doom?  
I'm sorry, but you got it wrong.

There's a new girl, in a sarong,  
in your wipeout-white room.  
Did I come on too strong?

Don't give me that sweep of a long  
line, love sudden, abloom,  
again. I'm sorry but you got it wrong.

Oh to hold the moment yet prolong  
the sore need to consume...  
Did I come on too strong?

Youth's a spent song.  
Let's not resume  
the 'I'm sorry but you got it wrong'.

Now you belong  
to the already-chosen. Why fume?  
Did I come on too strong?  
I'm sorry? But you got it wrong.

## ***Quotes on a 64<sup>th</sup> Birthday***

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A table, a chair, a bowl of fruit, a violin—  
what else  
does a man need to be happy?  
Books have led some to learning, others  
to madness. We laugh because  
we are full of self  
-doubt, full of vague  
feelings of inferiority, full of a desperate  
need to be assured.  
Now we remember the futures  
that were, that the only true wisdom  
is knowing you  
know nothing, yet nothing  
is to be feared, it is only to be understood.  
What else does a man need  
to be happy? Golf?  
Knowledge comes, but wisdom lingers.

## ***Consuelo***

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Like you said,  
I'm a whore to want you  
(on streets,  
among maps  
and metrorail tickets,  
along fountains, ruins, cul-de-sacs,  
at museums, the opera,  
gelato and tea,  
by the entrance or exit,  
weeping,  
again, you)  
weeping inside me.

# Survivor Guilt

after Alicia Suskin Ostriker

But it's really guilt you want to talk about  
and cannot find the words  
so you punish yourself

you call yourself perpetrator  
you text past 9 p.m. thinking *criminal*  
*liable*, unable to ring *unable to ring*

meting out a self-imposed death sentence  
your crime  
poetry, books, sport—perhaps

but always you've been busy, always  
afterwards sincerely apologetic  
*this is treachery, they say,*

*to have survived death*, to go on living  
in a house built out of love  
for the dying, the dead, memory

now still life, the photo collage on the wall  
your children, your wife  
and you candid, happy over the years—

you try hard to make amends—  
you've clutter thrown out, the brickwork  
repaired, patio chairs

rearranged for that perfect view of the stars,  
after pizza and an old movie  
about the guises of love, of grief.