

JOHN WALSER

**The Daughters of Thespis Will Bring Forth**

Waiting: mouth of light  
that leads into the hallway  
that leads to the bed  
that leads to the coarse  
horsehair covers  
they will briefly  
thrust lie on:

my sisters  
one behind the other  
in front of me line up:  
hand in hand:  
like a nervous excited chain  
of forty-nine jonquils.

The first day of spring  
throbbed pale blue  
today with warming:

late afternoon sun:  
a week-old blister:  
soft skin paper white  
as a wasp nest cell.

But fast fronts  
quickly replaced  
each other:  
cold: warm: cold:  
warmer: ice cold:  
feverish:

like a child's game  
of hiding  
that always feels  
cruel to me.

My father paces now:  
expectant.



I know who my father says  
his father is:  
I know who my father says  
his sons will be.

But the seam of my sister's nightgown  
frays a little at the right shoulder:  
her hair needs washing again:  
her sun-peeled neck a pumice.

Why can't I remember  
her name?

Every seven minutes:  
every eight:  
the unlatch: the opened door:  
the closed door: the latch:  
systole: diastole:  
diastole: systole:  
and we each take  
one step forward.

The firsts already walk  
slack lack legged  
across the parquet  
of stone and cinderflame:  
like after a long summer party  
when dancing and birdsongs  
are transcribed in the past midnight trees.

I hear my sisters whisper  
*He stands eight feet tall:*  
I hear *His eyes are a red kite's:*  
I hear *Until he's again woken*  
*he sleeps like a bluff boulder*  
*fissure fallen to a path below.*  
I hear *We are lucky.*

Seabird flecks all day rooftop gathered  
now fly both directions  
a perforated line stretching  
back to the sea and back to the sea.



I could leave out  
the side door and no one  
would notice:  
call myself *Vapors*:

but my father is counting heads  
like a carnival barker  
letting us onto a ride:  
Zipper: Scrambler: Gravitron.

Some nights I hear coyotes  
in the fields south and west  
of the city howling  
like directions:

but now just a train  
working over rails  
over spike drive rattle:  
hard set etching  
across the mud fields:

and these birdsongs  
like specks of plastic  
radio tubes, medicine bottles  
tinctures and iodine  
play in counterpoint passages  
over those cars, those ties.

And now  
like standing on the rock edge  
watching the backwards rush  
hard crash tide:  
I can't remember  
my own name either:  
I don't think anyone  
here knows it:  
I'm not even sure  
I've ever had one.

In the garden:  
out the window:  
two barn swallow shadows  
the thinnest construction paper  
yanked across the path



on stage wiring:  
the monofilament that hides  
the manipulation of flight:

a whirligig spins:  
a single mourning dove plump picks  
at the pea gravel ground:  
gnats like sawdust sunlight scatter:

two starlings stare down  
like temple imps  
for a gutter edge:

gray soft spreading:  
somewhere something trill rattles  
like a match strike:  
that first sizzle burn:

I can't read here  
anything in the path quilt stones  
in the almost night clouds  
in myself  
that counts as duration.

I want to lounge  
distracted as a cat  
under a wet tree:  
listen to a cardinal sing:  
watch a redwing blackbird chase:  
leaves shaken like an abbreviate shower:

I want a crow to hop drop branch to branch  
to stalk the ground:  
talon and beak menace:

I want to sketch the landscape:  
India ink smooth budding.

But.

Another step forward:

Will I call myself *Box Car*?



Will I call myself *Ground Squirrel*  
*Water Shrew, Bank Vole?*

Will I call myself *Black Fig Split*  
*Eggplant Halved?*

Should I call myself *Pallas's Gull?*

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**JOHN WALSER**, a professor at Marian University, holds a doctorate in English-Creative Writing from University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. A two-time semifinalist for the Neruda Prize, he has had poems appear in numerous journals, including *Spillway*, *december*, *Iron Horse*, and *Mantis*. His *Edgewood Orchard Galleries* has been a finalist in the Autumn House Press Poetry Contest (2016) and a semifinalist for the Philip Levine Prize (2016 and 2017) and the Crab Orchard Series Award (2017).

