

## **Lester William Polsfuss, 1915-2009**

When he was 10 years old he devised  
A harmonica holder from a coat hanger  
Soon afterward he cut open the back  
Of a Sears acoustic guitar  
And inserted, behind the strings,  
The transducer from a dismantled Victrola.  
The phonograph needle was wired to the radio  
So his guitar came in loud through the speakers

Later on he built a pickup  
From ham radio headphone parts  
A recording machine from a Cadillac flywheel  
With the belt from a dentist's drill  
By then he played semi-professionally  
Underage in the roadhouses in Waukesha,  
And later Saint Louis, then New York City  
Where he made a name for himself

He met country western singer Colleen Summers  
In nineteen forty five  
When they began working together  
She took the stage name Mary Ford  
Throughout the fifties he played his guitar  
On increasingly innovative recordings  
With echo, reverb and multi tracking  
Which he invented. They topped all the charts

After rock and roll came in  
He was known less as a star  
Than as the man who created and played  
His eponymous guitar

When he died in August of 2009  
Luminaries spoke reverently  
And attended a private funeral service  
And burial at Prairie Home Cemetery  
But in Milwaukee's Discovery World  
A public memorial service was held  
1,500 attendees were given free tickets  
To the Les Paul House of Sound for the day

## **I Wanted to Tell the Story of My Life**

I wanted to tell the story of my life  
So I wrote a poem about a river  
How else could I say what I really mean,  
And hope to be forgiven?  
History will reckon by its own sleight of hand  
What I did, what I said, what I meant, who I loved  
But when the truth is mine to tell  
I have to make things up

*My heart is a thrush singing on the wire  
It's a burning bush and a house on fire  
My heart is a wheel where the water flows  
My heart is a red red rose*

I walked into the river at Cape Roulet  
I wanted to let the water carry me  
To surrender choice and will to its power  
And feel the pull of my mortality  
The river took over, took me under then it let me go  
Tossed up with storm debris thinking – oh, I guess I do still have work to do  
And if the river was a highway, a bottle of whiskey and a close call  
Would my story be any more true?

*My heart is a thrush singing on the wire  
It's a burning bush and a house on fire  
My heart is a wheel where the water flows  
My heart is a red red rose*

©2012 Annie Gallup

## **Girl in the Ruins**

She was brushing her hair in the ruins of the coliseum  
Remember that, Bernie?  
We were there with Alice, seeing the world  
Just three lost souls on a journey  
After Rome we went to Paris, saw towers and arches  
Then Amsterdam, flowers, barges  
Switzerland, cows, cars  
And that hostel in Heidelberg where Frau Ehrlich overcharged us  
But after all this time, the only thing that still matters  
Is the girl in the ruins of the coliseum, brushing her hair

It was long hair, she threw it all to one side  
Shining gold like the sun on her skin  
And I looked at you, Bernie, I noticed for the first time  
How gray your hair had become, and how thin  
And Alice's hair was coiled against the sweat of her neck  
Like a poisonous snake  
My own hair felt like weeds growing out of a gravel pit  
Of a headache  
But after all this time, the only thing that still matters  
Is the girl in the ruins of the coliseum, brushing her hair

Must have been a hundred tourists that day  
Maybe two hundred, I don't know, a crowd  
Strolling past with their tourist maps  
And their ooh, ah, oh wow  
But only one of them, and it had to be you  
Staged a gladiator reenactment and caused a fracas  
Alice said, pretend you don't know him  
I said, hey, it's the summer of love, you jackass  
But after all this time, the only thing that still matters  
Is the girl in the ruins of the coliseum, brushing her hair

How many years has it been, my god  
That girl must be in her middle ages  
The Roman sun must rise and fall  
And cats run wild in the lion's cages  
Swallows stir the hemispheres  
Earthquakes shake the ground  
And grain by grain through the hourglass  
These walls are crumbling down  
But after all this time, the only thing  
Is the girl, brushing her hair

©2012 Annie Gallup

## **Adam's Ribs**

There were no other women, at least not yet,  
Just the one that was made for him. He was not lonely  
Still he eased himself to sleep at night, counting his ribs  
Thinking he could spare one or two more, if only...

He tasted the apple she held to his lips  
What I wouldn't give, he thought, counting his ribs

She was fruitful and she multiplied, drew from her body  
A tiny man. A miracle! Such alchemy!

Might he draw from his body tiny women to keep him company?  
No, God in his wisdom made anatomy

He watched her weave bull rushes into a crib  
What I wouldn't give, he thought, counting his ribs

His first born fought the second, tiny hand to tiny hand,  
Their perfect little bodies bruised and bloody  
What daring! They terrorized him by growing strong and manly  
Would his role be overtaken by his understudy?

She gathered her sons in a sheltering kiss  
What I wouldn't give, he thought, counting his ribs

All you love can be taken away  
Only your longing is yours to keep  
His first born a fugitive; the second buried deep  
He counted his ribs to ease himself to sleep

Her grief was a fortress, and she was lost to him  
What I wouldn't give, he thought, counting his ribs  
He tasted the apple and heard the snake hiss  
"What I wouldn't give..."

©2012 Annie Gallup

## Careless Lover

The one whose legs were stout and strong like trees,  
Tossed his limb across your back while he slept,  
Pinning you powerless beneath  
All through the sweet sleepless night you were kept  
You can't ever forget him, not for a moment of peace,  
You'll remember that night over and over  
To hold on to the one who held you only once  
Then left you searching for another careless lover  
Another careless lover

The one who left you bruises on your arms, your back, your thigh  
Left you no memory of being bruised,  
So you can choose the story you'll remember him by  
You were found, you were tossed, you were well used,  
But the marks tell the truth, it's the burden of proof,  
Under your skin, secret blood letting  
You can feel the purple and wonder that the pain  
Never hurts enough, but it keeps you from forgetting

It keeps you from forgetting  
Another careless lover

The one who wore a crucifix around his neck and a wedding band,  
Double negatives cancel out  
You were fearless in his hands, and unafraid of dying after,  
What about it do you still remember now?  
Is it familiar disquiet of soundtrack tv laughter  
In the flickering blue light  
Was it almost ordinary, almost free, almost forgettable,  
And therefore, maybe, almost alright,  
Maybe it was almost alright  
Just another careless lover  
Almost alright

©2012 Annie Gallup

## Poets

Of the seven around the table at the Little Five Points Bar, only four are poets  
The other three are just pretending  
All wear their hair long, but only six are wearing black turtlenecks  
The seventh is wearing a black corduroy jacket with a Nehru collar and epaulets  
He has red hair and his name is Max. He has been sleeping with Sarah, the blonde to his right  
Who is talking with her hands, even as she holds tightly to one of his.  
And he has been covertly composing a love poem for her that cleverly revolves around a marriage proposal  
and he is considering reciting it to her later that night as she lies naked in his bed.  
She has just said "ailanthus, tree of heaven"  
Spreading her hands, and his by default, to indicate sky and branches  
Ailanthus makes him think of alimentary, and he holds that thought a moment  
Remembering the garbanzo and collard curry Sarah made him for dinner  
And imagining a brood of strawberry blonde children, conceived in love  
And growing up strong and brainy from genetics and good nutrition  
But then alimentary makes him think of alimony  
And he is suddenly so tired he extracts his hand from hers in a pretense of scratching his face  
And at that moment the relationship ends  
Although Sarah will never understand his sudden change of heart  
She will find him easy to replace

It is Nick, on her right, whom she will eventually marry. They will move to Indiana, have three normal  
children in record time before Nick runs off with an exotic dancer from the Kitty Kat club who is madly in love  
with him, so exactly fulfilling his persistent fantasy that for the rest of his life he will have a hard time  
distinguishing reality from fiction.  
Nick, who is at this moment saying—  
This denigrating attraction to archaic charm is a bourgeois affectation –  
Proving that he is one of the pretenders.

But Sarah is impressed with his use of the word bourgeois, which makes her think of boudoir  
And she has a moment's regret that she is coming of age at a time when black turtlenecks are de rigueur  
instead of the catalog fashions that would show her figure to better advantage  
And then boudoir makes her think of bourbon and she hails the waiter  
Sarah is also one of the pretenders

Unlike Kate, across the table, with her dark cloud of hair, who is saying n-i-e-t-z-s-c-h-e  
In response to a question from Harry who is actually taking notes  
And making Rick feel a little like the family dog, Chump,  
Who has learned the meaning of w-a-l-k and t-r-e-a-t  
But who has also learned that spelling out words is an attempt to trick and confuse him  
Rick however is not a pretender.  
His poetry makes cognitive leaps that cause the poets to lose sleep  
And that cause the pretenders to order absinthe, knowing it's unavailable  
Rick is silent at these meetings, except for an occasional sharp percussive laugh,  
Sometimes at unexpected moments, which makes the other poets nervous

And which fascinates Heather, who only comes to these meetings to be near Rick  
She has a dangerous and inappropriate desire to lick his face  
And she'll often follow him down the street after meetings  
Paying close attention as he brushes the greenery  
And covertly using the public washroom at the corner of Harrier and Spitz after he has come out  
Heather is, at this moment, quiet but alert and restless,  
Wishing she had come of age when absinthe was an option  
Absinthe makes her think of Abyssinian and her pulse quickens  
Her mouth falls open unselfconsciously and she pants a little  
Then Abyssinian makes her think of abstinence and she settles back down  
Feeling more like herself

In time to hear Max say – twenty years from now, we'll have our own press and Little Five Points will have a  
place in history alongside the Beats, the Fugitives, the Bloomsbury group, the Language Poets. And they all  
look around the table at each other, awed by the potency of their collective possibility. But of course the  
group has already begun to break apart below the surface from the stress fractures of lusts and betrayals  
and ambition and jealousy and suspicion and doubt, short sighted acrimony and ardent bad blood and in  
twenty years they will, to a person, all be strangers.

©2012 Annie Gallup

## **1000 Miles Away**

You had cause to be frightened, I'll give you that  
But that's all I'll say  
You held your telephone up to the window  
So she could hear the spring frogs sing a thousand miles away

And oh you were drawn to her beautiful body  
In your mind you filled page after page

But if she was drawn it was to your body of work  
Which means something halfway polite at your age

And on the night you might have claimed her  
As she lay undisguised on your floor  
Your heartbeat pounding like steps in the hall  
Her body so perfect and unexplored

So why did you stop with your hand at her knee  
And a dark ambition to break her?  
Did you bring her so far just to prove to yourself  
That you had the power to leave, or take her?

And oh the sound of her step in the hall  
And oh the trouble she took  
And if she left something like nothing at all  
That won't be the story when you write the book

You had cause to be frightened, I'll give you that  
And a history of turning away  
You held your telephone up to the window  
She could hear the first snow fall a thousand miles away

©2012 Annie Gallup

## **Speed of Light**

Looking at an object from extremely far away  
Is the same thing as looking into the past  
Said my lover, who was an astrophysicist  
He took my face in his hands and tipped my head back  
And I thought he might kiss me but no he was saying --  
See that star honey, the blue one in the south?  
And though I squinted up at the blurry heavens  
All I could see clearly was his beautiful mouth

My lover brought a vintage 1970 merlot  
Same year he said from which the light from Arcturus fell  
Thought we'd sit beneath the stars, raise a toast  
But the night was cloudy and the mood went to hell  
So we lay on my floor in the dark  
Watched the light from passing cars cross the ceiling like shooting stars  
And he turned his telescope around the wrong way  
Pretending I was a long way away

My lover caught a flight to Vancouver  
And he sent me a postcard with a picture of a schooner  
It said – I see these tall ships sail out across the bay  
I can almost believe that I'm back in the day  
Well history is passing at the speed of light  
Past the planets and the galaxies, it all goes so fast  
And looking at my lover from extremely far away  
Is the same thing as looking into the past

©2012 Annie Gallup

^

## **Movies**

If I didn't remember my dreams I might go to the movies more often  
I'd watch policiers, film noir, and the psychological thrillers  
Where somebody knows what somebody doesn't and the story lets trust bleed suspicion  
'Til there's terrible language, harrowing editing, a violent soundtrack, or a silent killer

If I didn't remember my dreams I could sit in the dark with a critic's detachment  
But in dreams the terror on the screen comes back and I am cast in the lead  
The stories are strange but the feelings are familiar, and deep  
And still true when I wake trembling and alone, to remember my dreams

In the same way that I am alone remembering you, since you're gone  
Gone and never seen again, just a flash across the screen  
Once you knew something I didn't, suspicion bleeding the truth from deception  
I am never more terrified or more in love as when I dream of you

Last night I went to a subtitled thriller, black and white movie, a man and his daughter  
He knew something she didn't. I knew her watchfulness  
As her trust bled suspicion until he died dreaming the words she whispered  
Then I went home fell asleep in my bed and dreamed you had a secret

©2012 Annie Gallup

## **Vanity Fair**

I remember you in that hotel room in Vegas, Davis  
On this night flight to New Orleans  
There is a stranger on the aisle who has hands like yours

He's holding a copy of the same magazine  
That you left on the nightstand, open to where that page was missing  
You said – Jane, bless her heart, makes me cards with pictures she tears from magazines  
Of couples kissing  
Yeah, it's sweet and yeah I love her  
But oh Vanity Fair cover to cover

Somewhere over Texas when the cabin is dark  
There are stars and a glittering city we are flying over  
Stranger on the aisle sighs in his sleep like a child  
Then turns and rests his head on my shoulder  
Scent of vanilla  
It's too familiar  
To be so wrong, wrong, wrong  
I wish this moment would just go on and on  
I wish he was the one I wanted  
I wish you were free to be my lover  
Vanity Fair, cover to cover

It you think in contradictions you can make it all make sense  
If this flight is over soon that will not mean it never mattered  
Stranger on the aisle will wake with a start and I'll  
Look out the window, give the moment some grace  
Then after time goes by Davis, and this airplane lands  
I'll remember you in Vegas, just like a stranger, with your hands  
And that's all  
But oh the secret way we knew each other  
Ooh Vanity Fair, cover to cover

©2012 Annie Gallup

## **All My Old Lovers**

All my old lovers  
All the ones who ever hurt me  
Came to my dream last night  
Such a handsome crowd  
But they argued with each other  
They saw through the other's jive  
They knew how to twist the knives  
They were ruthless and loud

All my old lovers  
They were at each other's throats  
It was dog eat dog  
It was dusk to dawn  
But I slept through the commotion

I slept deeply on and on  
And when I awoke this morning  
They were gone

©2012 Annie Gallup