

30x30

by Paul de Denus

1 Hand Shake

My handshake is steady. It trembles so slightly. Make a deal with the devil, you'll need a firm grip. Extend your hand with confidence. There's sometimes a shock, making your hand shake all the more.

2 Arrowhead Beach

We sat together in assembly, lame ducks in a row. Margaret's behind us, I whispered. On stage someone mentioned your name. A prize for you was a surprise for me; the camera flashed your picture, in print, Margaret now smiling.

3 Old Bird

Old bird eyes that redbird, jumpy round rough blackbirds who have the sharper eye. Gray doves waddle over ground; a feeder above plays house. Old bird coughs, allowing everything to fly.

4 There's a House

There's a house growing in the weeds outside my window. Two days ago, they dug the roots with taps and thumps, shouts and saws, men wearing foreign language pounding the air. From my dream I rise and build another day.

5 The Waitress

Napkins cruise like white triangle pirate hats, cutting cloth across a smooth white sea. The table's turned, forks north and south, the archipelago rises, a central haven of delights. Sidling up, she bows - she is Asian - and made to order, she brings us tea.

6 Busy Bee

I watch for the return like the swallows of Capistrano. Honey bumble, carpenter, killer, the males patrol, pursue, hover, ambush passing females. Probably a killer out there, the way he murders the air.

7 The Melt Down

He works the Melt Down serving classic americans and little meltdowns, happy faces at the window spending their \$8 bucks for the cheesy sandwich. That's the trend, the trend while at the beach to keep up with the trend. Gotta have it! Gotta fit in! Discard your custom! Discard your clothes! Here you walk the resort walk along with exotic faire; goat cheese and cranberry walnut bread swallowed by the upper crust as you discard yours.

8 Canadian Girl

We kissed, hers the softest lips. We should have stopped. I didn't. She watched my mouth, a coy grin. I fell and everyone got hurt.

9 Private Ceremony

He leaves Monday, up early to beat the coming storm approaching Pensacola. His usual room is waiting with all the extras: doctor and

nurse, drugs and good science to tickle his body. He drives alone, a private ceremony there and back, month-by-month, year-by-year. We don't talk about it, much I don't understand; how he lives this way. I would drive him there, pick him up too, should he ask but I've not been invited.

10 Sunday Is Silent

Sunday is silent, Jesus on the stick, not a lot to say unless you're one of those who listens and needs to hear something, anything even if it's silent, if that's what you need to hear on a quiet Sunday.

11 Man In Tow

Calhoun tells me he once gutted his entire dashboard, the whole interior baby! - everything! - steering column to glove compartment, like a goddam cesarean. I called my mama, he says above the rain, asked if I could use her place since she had the room. She looked at the parts on the lawn with bug eyes. Do you know where all this goes, son? I better, I told her with a mechanical grin. The rain punched the windshield and I glanced back worriedly at my car on his flatbed riding high and regal, a beauty queen on a passing float. Some men are law-yers, he shouted beneath the rain. They have the mind for that. God gave me these here hands to do my work. You know what I mean? Put the pieces together? His eyes beamed headlights. I'd be lost in a courtroom.

12 All Washed Up

Through the plastic window, I let some of it in, the news I mean and damn if it ain't a washed up world. The news leaks radiation. Shit! Put a lid on it! We'll blow us up, I swear or someone will. Take

us to the chopping block, use a rusty axe 'cause we're sinking in the mud where only gas and gold will rise. Our heads are empty so let's get it over with. No one's coming - I repeat — NO ONE'S COMING!!! If I were god, I'd a' given up too.

13 UpstairsDownstairs

Should we move upstairs? He's still living here. I mean when he moves out. When will that be? When he's ready. I'm ready! For what? To move upstairs now! So he could live downstairs then? That's not moving out? It's moving out of the room! Should we tell him? That he's moving out? Well, at least downstairs.

14 Along The Little Colorado

They took us out to a stand, a line of thick trunk trees that poked an opening in the sky. Their canopy caused a shadow to fall upon us though I believe the shadow was there long before. Do you want a blindfold? A smoke? Torres laughed and spat at that, asked for a horse and a gun instead. In silence, they pulled their itchy triggers; the air whistled, that shadow became a flash of light.

15 Red, White & Blue

Have you ever posed in the nude? Red lipstick smacked her mouth in an O. Only in baby pictures, she said. White talc powdered a cheek in a C. Why? Would you like to see me nude? Blue eyeliner lashed her eyelids in WWW. Of course. I was just curious. Have you ever not worn make-up?

16 YardSale

The boy, maybe ten has a chipped toothbrush holder and two Scooby-Doo cups which I tally at two dollars and he gives me five for the three. His companion stumbles and twangs over my dented guitar, asks how much and I say, depends... do you play? Men and women in shorts and long faces pull up in beaters and Volvos alike to run the tables and gamble on my cheap winners. I got most everything worthwhile to someone else but not for me, no more. I'm out of here after they're all done ransacking my life.

17 Fast Talk

reallyIhadnothing
towrittenadablank
flatonmyfacezero
exceptthisrantthat
wasquitecleverasa
filleranddeservesa
passsinceIswearI
didn'trealizehowhard
writingthirtypoems
wouldbewhenIbegansoI
promisetomorrowwillbebetter
reallyitwillbeIpromiseitwill

18 The Wait

It sat ugly in his thoughts like a vulture waiting. He wondered how many people had died in the room, in that particular hospital bed, how ordinary death is, how ordinary it was to accept it, how impatient the wait, how useless her suffering, how he hated them all, how heavy this burden, how unbearable the pain and when they pronounced her gone, he kissed her forehead, the weight lifted

19 A Cop Can Make You Twitchy

A cop can make you twitchy, his lights an intermittent strobe flash disco. Your eyes cock crooked in the rearview mirror, fingers tighten snug in the glove compartment. You've seen this movie before: the tap on the window, the click- HANDS IN THE AIR ASSHOLE!!! You've done nothing wrong, well, maybe a mile or two of speed. The cop looks shaky; he's a drinker too. You can tell. His hand trembles proudly. As he issues the citation you'll throw away later, bars cross your minds.

20 Listen

When you talk, my ears drown in airwaves swamped, white wave crashing, receding, forgotten. When you write, I read you easily, over and over. On the deeper surface, I read you naked and clearly remembered.

21 Tossing Cards

In hand, my extra deck - doubles, singles and triples - bent around the edges, some plain worn out, lesser players I've already saved, held together with a thick rubber band like a wad of pure cash. They sail through the air like lazy fly balls, good sports hoping to hit the wall perfectly, as close as possible for a win. Wilson flips his own deck of losers; he's hard to beat. I hope he'll make a rare mistake like a Hank Aaron in the outfield.

22 Whisper In The Dark

I whispered in the dark, *'bless me father, for I have sinned'*. A spool of lies unraveled one after another. I swore three times -*you mean one million*- I fought with my brother twice -*you wanted to murder him daily*- I thought bad thoughts once -*you mean like now*- Father forgave me but I wondered how God could not see? -*you can't fool me*- I began again.

23 The King's Speech

He is the one I look up to. He is popular and funny as all the girls seem to drift his way. He stammers, trips on uncertain words like 'would' or 'won't', 'don't' or 'try', simple words to me that become for him long drawn out sounds as if he were learning a new language. It pains me deeply to see him struggle during these times. Nowadays when we talk, I hear caution in his delivery but not a trace of a stutter at all. He is still king.

24 Convict Grass

They attack the sod, a skinny green victim not able to defend. Manhandled, tossed from the truck, kicked and stomped, left on the roadside, only to live. It will heal and grow and be cut down again. It will mend. I hope the same for those who left it here.

25 Should You Ever Get Back to California

Should you ever get back to California, remember it for me for I cannot. I only have dreams (are dreams ever real?) a patch work garden of dusty emotion, over run with sun and so much growth. Our feet planted, we never died. Should you ever get back to California, remember it for me, for maybe we never lived there, only dreamt it and ain't that what they say?

26 Down the Aisle

Breakfast was a revelation as I rose from the dead, a taste of Lazarus in my mouth or one of those ancient dudes downing cranberry pomegranate and dry Ezekiel bread, sprouted whole grains and poured juice carried from down the Nile, down the aisle, JUICES - aisle 3, EXOTIC BREADS - aisle 12 from Publix.

27 The Passing Window on a Dark Train of Thought

In the middle of the night, the passing window on a dark train of thought etches lightning on glass, snapshots flashing.

In the middle of the night, the passing window on a dark train of thought flees an abandoned house, a closet door slowly opening.

In the middle of the night, the passing window on a dark train of thought stares deep into dark water, no life savior to save me.

In the middle of the night, the passing window on a dark train of thought traces my shadow in the corner, my crime now forgotten.

In the middle of the night, the passing window on a dark train of thought focuses on the girl in the body cast, her eyes move me.

In the middle of the night, the passing window on a dark train of thought follows a walk across a frozen lake, oh what lies beneath.

In the middle of the night, the passing window on a dark train of thought slams shut; I sleep.

28 Girl Gone Wild

I told her during our steamy spell she should go crazy on it and so she did. Her fingers caressed my head, ran her fingers around it. As I pulled off my shirt, she kissed my neck and damn if she didn't take it all off, cut my hair short, really short. I mean really, really short.

29 Desperation

I moved again, fell down the coast to a small fishing town where I hid at the bottom of a bottle for a while. All the fresh fish I caught wore murky faces, wall-eyed and pucker-mouthed so I slipped out of Louisiana into desperation, the current state I'm in. Leave me alone; I didn't do no wrong.

30 Empire (Children's Poem)

come up, come up, come up with me,
on top of the world, what do you see?

here I stand, the tallest tower,
my shadow stretched, well past an hour,
far beyond the horizon line,
the miles of squares and grids combine,
in patch-quilt parks, and streets that stitch,
that weave around most every niche,
duck down the lane
then turn about,
to humming noise,
the people shout,
at lines of cars,

the human hustle,
the city sounds,
the push and bustle,
up thirty-fourth and fifth they go,
a practiced pace, of fast and slow,
that flows along, a sea of feet,
that sails on down, the hurried street.

come up, come up, come up with me,
on top of the world, what do you see?

we'll stand and sway, at dizzying heights,
you breathe fresh air, you see the sights,
up on my shoulders you stand so tall,
the world below sits very small,
where things look just the way they are,
sometimes close and sometimes far,
below bright blocks, of yellow cars,
above our heads, beam yellow stars,
and holding firm, a lady stands,
tablet and torch held in her hands,
dressed in robe and golden crown,
her beacon shines on solid ground,
that sweeps so far, that you can be,
as far away as you can see,
but turn around most anywhere
just look straight up, you'll find me there.

come up, come up, come up with me,
on top of the world, what do you see?

come up, come up, come up with me,
on top of the world - - just you and me.

