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"The Mummies" by Maxine Kumin was previously published in House, Bridge, Fountain, Gate, The Viking Press, New York 1975, and is reprinted by permission of the author.
The Mummies

Two nights running I was out there
in orange moonlight with old bedsheets
and a stack of summered-over Sunday papers
tucking up the tomatoes while the peppers
whimpered and went under and the radishes
dug in with their dewclaws and all over
the field the goldenrod blackened
and fell down like Napoleon’s army.

This morning they’re still at it, my tomatoes
making marbles, making more of those little
green volunteers that you can rattle
all winter in a coat pocket, like fingers.
But today on the lip of the solstice
I will pull them, one hundred
big blind greenies. I will stand them
in white rows in the root cellar
wrapped one by one
in the terrible headlines.

Maxine Kumin
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On the Bridge
(Crossing the Mississippi River)

I am a steady man rolling over the wide water at night, all the windows rolled down. My cigarette glows better than the lights on the bridge turning that black water orange. They have a pyramid in Memphis.

I arrived as the sun busted. I saw stubble behind me, and a broken-down machine some men were working on. Then I saw buckwheats blowing their white flowers across a field. In the trunk I got a load of stolen bibles. They built a pyramid in Memphis, tilting toward the river in the Mississippi mud.

Oh-snap my fingers!—when I get to Memphis, I’ll be a steady man—strolling down some wide avenue at night, all that neon pricking at my skin, reflecting some razzmatazz circus where pretty girls in goldenrod dresses conjure love. They built a pyramid in Memphis. I see no reason to pray.

Mark Lewis
**High Pressure Prevails on the Coast**

What are these tigers doing here, so far from their bamboo forests and waterfalls? Why do they stalk the hills of our coastline, their too yellow stripes brusque against the rich stands of cedar and the beige rolling hills?

Why do they roam so close to the Zen Temple, skirting in and out the maze of ornamental foliage—some days, taking an enchanting afternoon rest beside the fragrant cayenne plant that grows aloof beside the rows of well-tended beans?

The treasured garden grows without the rain during the many moonless nights when fog strolls in, misting water on top the rich bean leaves. How many nights have the tigers wanted to drink, lapping the cool moisture from each leaf surface, but with so little water to spare the monks have made them promise to stay away from the garden.

The monks call each tiger by name: Helga, Hans, Sonia, Freida, Zanzibar... from the bare redwood porch overlooking the grounds, and here, the tigers detect floating out the solemn chambers, ancient teak finishes glazed with sweet nectar scents: orange, mango, frangipani, jasmine, patchouli, bay, and musk wood fragrances from days and years ago; a keen invitation luring them inside. Beneath the white candles, on the bare altar, each day, they ask the same question: Why has our god led us to the Temple?
But at night—
when the monks are sleeping, flat, on the bare,
mahogany floors—the tigers know where
to walk under familiar stars. With soft feet
they climb the rock cliffs overlooking
the sea, and sadly gaze out the ocean
conjuring up forty endless days and nights...
Where are the lost pools of fresh rain we dream?
With eyes dark and steady, they scan a cloudless sky
for every reason, or any clue.

Mark Lewis
A Song the Mountain Sings Us

Turn left just past the Hi-Way Garage.
Follow the rocky, bumpy, red dirt road
for two miles. When you see a worst road to the left,
one that's overgrown, has wheel-ruts,
is washed-out from the rain running down, turn.

Near the top, at the broken-down fence,
drive over it slow in that strange slant of summit
light. Pull away from the young stand of cedar.
You won't notice the main house is gone, lost
in the fire of '82. An old metal shed
stands here now.

It's snowing again.
Years ago, odd as it seems, cactus
crowded this side of the place, and on the other,
tall lilacs where we'd stand in spring in our best clothes
for pictures after church. Now the vines have come,
and the wind whistles stories through the tin,
as clear as the photographs before they burned,
when we guessed or imagined, which tune for freedom
or which tune from the habit of humming
would carry our lives to cities or towns
that would never escape the mountain.

Mark Lewis
Moon
on the hood of my car,
in the puddle by the fence, behind
the black-armed trees, in my hair
that is black
and pulled back
off my face,
in my face,
and my lips,
and your tongue,

until the clouds come—
or we close our eyes.

Julie Valin
Nine, in an Open Field

before you knew that my bones were French
you'd count the ribs under my blue-grey shirt
I'd try not to move—not to breathe
put my palms to the soil and fear the loss of gravity

before I knew to open my mouth
the way we would swallow rain
you'd bite soft on my lower lip
and spit in my hair when we ran home

before we knew that your father knew my mother
you'd pin me down in this hybrid grass
with your skin-shined knees and Napoleonic hands
until I swore my afternoon love for you

before you were a sister with Polish blood
we shared grass stains and cheekbones
before we were soldiers in this foreign war
we would lay our bodies down in an open field

Mark Sirard
what i want to be

in the second grade,
i wanted to be a cheetah
to run faster than the freeway traffic
to hide in the brush
to grow claws
to tear flesh.
my mother never served
enough beef.
i am older now.
i sit quiet on buses
and bite my nails,
not knowing
how i became a vegetarian.

these days, i wish to be a kitten
that in one hand
you carry into bed.

Mark Sirard
Adornment

“Adornment is never anything except a reflection of the heart.”
CoCo Channel

I would take off my golden lilies, mine-chains, and symbols of rank, my medals of honor;

put on saffron robes the colors of earth red and brown, with ribbons of yellow and gold,

seal-skin and mukluk, sari and silk, chaparejos, loin-cloth and suit,

bright glass beads and shoes of light wood, a ring through my nose, bells on my toes,

I would wear hats, derby and baseball, yarmulke, stetson and fez, sunbonnet, straw, coolie, and tea;

I would naked lie down in green grass, wearing blossoms, twigs, and leaves,

inviting the serpent to coil my arm.

Nancy Talley
Willard Willard

Willard Willard had lived in his house at 29 Peabody Lane for seventeen years; he had never married. He painted and repaired his house; he raked his leaves, mulched the beds, pruned the roses, and trimmed the hedges meticulously. Willard owned an electric hedge trimmer which he kept in the garage on the workshop side; it hung on a hook next to the WD40. After trimming the hedges he never failed to clean the blades with an old paint brush, spray them with lubricant, then hang the tool, blades down to drip, so it would be ready when the hedges next needed attention.

Willard Willard’s hedges ran along the grass on both property lines from the backyard fence to sidewalk. Willard kept his side of the hedges as smooth as an English maze; the easterly neighbor kept a fair hedge, but the new neighbor, a single woman, kept unsightly, leggy, disorganized hedges. Willard would reach as far as his long, skinny arms allowed, over his side of the hedge in an attempt to smooth, to organize the new growth, on the lady’s side of the hedge. If he really stretched he could reach across the flat top and down a bit on her side. He trimmed her hedge early on Saturday or Sunday morning hoping she would not see him.

Williard Willard was especially energetic about his garden in the spring. He tended each bed. With a beady eye, each morning he measured the growth of tulip and daffodil stems. He checked the temperature of his mulch, set out annuals as soon as the frost passed, and painted the front porch steps almost every year. He painted his wheel barrow with dark green Rustolium. A cedar swing hung from the rafters on the east side of the front porch in order that he might survey his accomplishments when the chores were complete and the tools put away. Willard would take a cup of mint tea; he would sit and sip, swing, and enjoy his front yard.

On Easter Sunday he rose before dawn; he wanted the yard to be pretty for the neighbors walking by on their way to and from services. Those tasks which could be done ahead of time, were done, the steps painted, new mulch laid down, the grass mowed, spiders washed away from the shutters, a clay bowl of paper whites set on the bottom
step; only the walk needed a last minute sweeping and one final swing with the clippers across the untidy hedge.

It was just light enough to see his work. The path swept, he stepped up to the hedge for one final reach to the far side. As he reached for the switch on the trimmer someone grabbed him in a bear hug; his arms held down at his sides, he could not pull away. The attacker smelled of chocolate. Whoever-it-was gave Willard a big hug, let go, then wiggled backward through a thin spot in the hedge. Over the top of the greenery, Willard saw his lady neighbor disappear along the overgrown path at the side of her house. Two families hurrying along the sidewalk, late for early service, saw her too. Her naked body was smeared with chocolate; she wore bunny ears on some kind of clip attached to her head.

After the police left and the lady was taken in for observation, the neighborhood settled down. The kids finally went home, leaving Willard to escape from the endless questions and accusations. He did not take his tea on the front porch. For a few days he did not work in the yard at all. The neighbors to the east came with a casserole, but didn’t stay. After a while the kids stopped pausing on their bikes, stopped pointing at the house; after a while it all pretty much settled down.

Two weeks later the lady was released on her own recognizance. Some said she was medicated, but no one knew for sure. At first Willard was shy about working in his yard, afraid passers by would ask him embarrassing questions, but when it was evident the neighborhood had gone on to other subjects he returned to his routine. Actually he was feeling much better; and, he had already decided that next year he would find a way to glue that packaged, pastel-colored, cellophane grass all over his body so he could return the favor and give the lady next door a special Easter treat.

Nancy Talley
Chuck Pickins' Fantastic Ride

All I know about Chuck Pickins
is his name,
and that one October night
when the yellow half moon
made him crazy
he stole his best friend's 4 by 4
and drove straight across
the open country of California
toward Montana,
straight across ravines
and up mountains
past cows and through
unworthy fences
toward Montana,
until he rolled three times
down a canyon
landing upright with
a Budweiser still held
tight in his left hand.

He sat in the gathering dawn
with foam from the roof
dripping down his hair,
dripping on his face,
and licked the tip
of his nose,
yodeled his bountiful laugh,
gunned that worthy Bronco
and made the Montana border
before the sun.

That's all I know about Chuck Pickins
and more.
Hell, I just like his name.

Kate Hulbert
My bull-necked new neighbor hacks
out old rosebushes
wrestles heavenly bamboo
to the ground
yanks his Snapper
into action
swears at his ancient
spaniel—who limps off
in submission.

Then he pushes up his khaki
shirt-sleeves and hurls
the deadwood
into the pickup,
reps it up and roars off.

He returns later with a camera
around his neck
stomps up the sidewalk
to the blooming almond,
leaps into the air
and, pirouetting in his work boots,
catches a drifting limb;
then smiling like a gleeful child,
he snaps a picture
of the falling blossoms
which snow
on his curly hair
and float
to the crewcut lawn.

Kate Hulbert
Early on December 24th the haze was flapping
like ghosts of old osprey
away from the water.
In the distance a man sat
beneath a gauled, leafless oak
on a crumbling river-wall.

The waitress had said:
"If you’re going to walk the river,
put your money in your pocket.
Don’t take a bag. You never know."

It was his beaten posture,
cheap blue jacket with too short sleeves,
the shaved nape of his neck,
and the soft pink of his ears.

Black, high-top shoes flopped beside him.
He stared, not out at the misty water,
but instead, intently, at his grey-stockinged toes.
I passed quickly within three feet of him
glad he didn’t look up.

He was gone when I passed again.
Torn red wrapping fluttered,
and a card on the path said, "Merry Christmas."
And where his shoes had been—a label:
Thermo Sox with odor protection.

OH MY MAN HOW LONG HAS IT BEEN SINCE SOMEONE SAID
WHAT DO YOU THINK SINCE SOMEONE BREATHED SWEET
BREATH INTO YOUR MOUTH SINCE SOMEONE OPENED YOUR
SHIRT TO FONDLE THE SOFT BELLY HAIRS SINCE SOMEONE
LAUGHED WITH YOU SINCE SOMEONE SAID LOOK
AT THE FALLING STAR SINCE SOMEONE SAID HOW DO YOU
WANT YOUR EGGS SINCE SOMEONE SAID WEAR THE GOLD
SCARF IT BRINGS OUT YOUR EYES SINCE SOMEONE SAID OH
OH OH COME INSIDE
One afternoon they'll find him
fetal and stiff
not much changed:
a little more dead.

Kate Hulbert
Christian boy, I found your suitcase.
Cheap grey plastic over cardboard.
I gather from what’s left of your
mouse-chewed itinerary that someone
snatched it at the Greyhound bus station.

Your life’s effects have been strewn
near an abandoned power plant.
At the entrance three plaster he-men,
bent and straining,
still hold up the world.

Here I found your soggy yearbook,
ink-smeared letters, a handbook
from the camp you counseled.
The autographs in the Tulare Tattler said
people like you,
that you are a good Adventist
though rigid.

Do you forgive those who strew
your mother’s letters?
Who took the precious artifacts
of your young zealot’s life and flung them
to the banks of a wild harlot of a river?

Beware, child.
You expect the world to change.
I’ll bet you miss your new,
red-checkered shirt.

Kate Hulbert
Pacific Madrone

I am this old madrone
in this I do, I will, I will
at 50.

This 75 foot, moss-covered
*arbutus menziesii* clings
with aged roots
to the rock bank
of the Feather River.
This most beautiful broadleaf
flowering evergreen with
cinnamon bark peeling
in sheets from older trees.
And its flowers are a source
of honey.

The soft moss fell
at our feet
early on. Fluffy green piles
of it, and we lay
in it, lifted
it to our white foreheads, pressed
it to our breasts, twined
it around our fingers, sank our toes
in its soft wool
in this yes,
we said yes at 50.

The coarse grey bark chips
away slowly, scales rip
in the wind, chunks tear
in storms, hunks crash from great
heights into the river
of this marriage
at mid life.
Red parchment scroll-skin
shines raw, curling slowly
away from pink flesh
as tough new crust
pushes up, pushes out.

Kate Hulbert
falling green

trees turning slightly,  
around halfway  
and leaning to the ground  
as finally they lie down.  
green trees fall differently,  
somehow animated and relaxing,  
they hold on  
until the gentle rushing of  
leaves and branch,  
is silent.  
others break halfway  
leaving ends  
lightning struck and charred.  
and some trees die all their lives.  
i hope that i fall green  
living to the last  
turning,  
and with great sigh  
lie crumbling down.

Mike Waltz
Broken

Take me.
The river current rushes,
and slows.
Do the red and yellow leaves
falling in the dark,
ever touch ground?
Say anything you want,
the sound that nothing makes
is getting louder,
now that we are sleeping.
Do you carry regrets,
like grocery bags
that tear and tumble away?
As the white water spreads
across the linoleum,
at broken things,
do you cry?

Mike Waltz
An Ending

On the mountain trail all afternoon
we argued the world's end
while pines rose up disinterested
as perfect scholars who listen bound
by no opinions.
The glacier scarved Uintahs—oldest
range west of the Mississippi,
worn down and rebuilt ten thousand times—
keeping their ancient stillness
in Mirror Lake seemed proof enough to me
that whatever was in danger of soon ending
wasn't the earth.

You were infected with apocalypse
the way the goldenrod was fevered
with brief summer sun and my laughter
only marked me one of the lost.
It was as if our words were ponies
that took separate forks at some point
we could never get back to.
All greening spring they had grazed
the same glad pasture, frolicking companions
with manes full of wind,
and then without our knowing
or wishing it, one day while we were out
hiking someone unlatched the gate.

Joanne Allred
Wine

Dawn spread a pale linen over the sky.  
The chipped plate of moon sets  
as bird songs begin to flutter  
in the silver cage of a new day.  
Why does the heart’s wing tremble  
against its bars of bone?  
Where does it hunger to soar?  
From my window I follow  
a paired flight of woodducks,  
a great blue heron alone,  
and later, two snowy egrets  
braid the creek with sun like strands  
of honeymead.  Dew sparks foxtail tips  
like a thousand lit candles.  
Nearby in lavender dress redbud appears  
at spring’s masquerade of the infinite  
guises for love.  I think of your eyes  
raised like a goblet.  If they hold not wine  
but a question, mine say yes, the whole  
world is an invitation to a feast.

Joanne Allred
Five men sitting half-circled in front of the fireplace.

I am the one under 60.
Four old men.
Comparing knees, surgeons, pain.

They look at me.
I still have knees to crawl.

*Albert Pierce*
In the deepest of the night he was tall, dark and handsome, the strong, silent type. Desperately in love, he gave himself, heart and soul, carried her away, and was like no one she had ever met before.

Outside, blue skies were happy good weather. Tenderly, they kissed, full of passion and sweet. Sweet and cuddly puppies played at their feet, a handful of trouble.

At that very same moment, nobody cared about street people or pollution. Or racism either. Engines roared, engines hummed in the industrial city. Black was the night, blue was the day. She felt so happy, like it was a new day, like she never had before, higher than a kite, and at the same time, like a motherless child, proud as a peacock, bluer than blue, and like a peeled grape.

A flag waved colorfully, proudly, patriotically, billowing in the wind. And a part of her began to think: “This is my cup of tea, the way God made me, the way the cookie crumbles. It’s nothing more than feelings, a matter of life and death, no laughing matter.”

He spoke her thoughts; “Money doesn’t really matter, and can’t buy love. It causes problems, it’s a crime, as a matter of fact it’s the root of all evil, it ruins people. It could solve all my problems...it can’t solve all my problems.”

She said, “Problems are important. They should be talked about. We should not be phony, like bums, except they’re a little bit crazy.” Outside, gruff men with hearts of gold did business. In the restaurants, vegetarians were self-righteous flakes and the meat-eaters were callous and stupid. Fat people were gross and stupid, and deserved their punishment.

She hoped that it was not true what people said, that she was not really happy with him, that she was just leading him on.

He thought, she’s hot, she isn’t fat, she just has large bones. But what if she’s a feminist and hates men, or just wants to get married and have babies, or just wants to see how many guys she can get.

And she wondered, what if he just wants to see what he can get, what if he kisses and tells. He may look great, but he knows it, and what if it’s true what they say about how he thinks he’s smarter than he is, will never go anywhere, secretly hates women, and is just
the strive-for-success type, will use anyone to get there, is not really very intuitive and doesn’t know diddly?

And even though she is really very intuitive, is it true that she is really so cold, asked for it, is really a plastic phony and destroys men?

She could be insane. Insane people are more sensitive than everyone else. Like this school; it’s awful, but better than most. Like the food, delicious, awful, and a substitute for love. A clear example that power corrupts, and is ugly.

Later that day, as her long hair flows in the wind, caresses her face, and streams out behind her as she casually drives her convertible, suddenly she realizes:

Truth hurts. Love hurts. Love is a beautiful thing. Life hurts, it is a beautiful thing. Life is a dream. It’s your life, the first day of the rest of your life, easy as pie, no sweat.
She fear
back up
"oh...you scared me"
he say "sorry, you need a hand?"
he got big warm puppy smile
she push out tiny grin
he advance slow and steady
she say "so...what's up?"
he walk on voice soothing sincerity pure
"hey, it's alright let me help you with those bags"
"no really I'm fine"
he walk more hand out palm up
"it's okay, I don't bite" other hand on zipper freeing cock
"those bags look heavy" she scream he lay heavy fist on her
jaw bags fall apples spill all over the ground side of
face smashed to pavement she smell the beer sweat blood
asphalt and she pound his back and he talk nice words sweet
things and he jackal-rut her
vicious
she slam her steel door eyes
and dream of sunflowers
sunflowers.

Brady Coon
Overkill

always
we come to this
where conversation
ends

with information
    like a wedge of geese
calling winter
down

Bob Garner
First Sunday of War

I pause.

Iced tea
takes cold to my throat,
to my stomach,
to my veins, and I
am castled

for twelve seconds. Then a bad sense
fleshes out. I see
revving her engine, screeching her tires, circling the block,
a woman singing martial songs that no one joins.
Or notes. Breakdowns

were avant-garde. Estrangement
has been seen. While at the next table

a man tears bread, showing no hunger,
no pleasure.

I was an altar boy once
assigned to ring the bells when the priest
raised the Eucharist above
his head, made it flesh
and ate it.

I imagined

Mayans as casual with hearts. I remember
kneeling and standing and sitting and kneeling.
The woman opens her purse to a pedestrian, offering:
"Is it money?" she mouths. "Is it money you want?" No notice.

Our belief
dies on television. I drink again.

And pause.

And feel
(was there a well
uncovered in a field, gaping like the earth’s throat,
in which words fell so far they returned
as sound?)

Michael Odom
There were acacia trees in Portugal, everywhere full and fresh and at the height of their yellow glow. We were 24 years old, hiking up the mountain de Monchique with friends found in Salamanca. They were days of brilliant sun, and my first nude bathing in red, rocky coves. I would sit as waves caught me, and play with rainbow clear bubbles.

I threw wildflowers off the coast of Sagres to my far off family. I sang, “There’s a time to laugh, a time to cry, a time to live, and a time to die.”
But I
didn't mean it.
After all, I
was on top of
a mountain.
On that bus,
on a gorgeous afternoon
with Diana,
heading safely back to
our VW home
in Lagos,
while our mad husbands
marched on through
unmarked
back country,
I thought,
Jesus, this
all has been glorious, and if
I had to die
this week,
it would be ok.
But I didn't
mean anything by it.

In my acacia filled week,
on the same day
as I rode on
that bus,
my sister,
one month married,
had car trouble,
took a bus
to Sac. State,
stood up in sewing class
and said,
"I don't feel well,"
and dropped dead.
How could
those buses
take us
to such
different places?

I tossed
my passport
on the counter.
The Spanish
border patrolman
waved at me,
frightened and ghostly,
“Go to Seville
consulate, message
important,”
he stammered.
I knew
someone was dead.
But who?
Hostel roomates
picked out bikinis,
while in the dark
“The Firebird” finale
pulsed down
through the ceiling,
questioning me.

I sent my Dad
a dried
pink wildflower
from that Sagres cliff.
It was all I had
and I cried
in a Seville
department store
looking for
underwear
and finding unused
baby clothes instead.

Spring smiled
at my tears
for months
as we moved
north
over Europe.
But always
in early February,
I place
a huge bush
of golden, smelly
acacia branches
in an azure vase
on my kitchen table,
as one arranges sacred flowers
for an altar.

Diane Imhoff
Walking in New Snow

When I walk in new snow
I am deliberate. I am saying
with each solemn step Look.
I have been here. I
am the first.
I take pride in looking back,
seeing the lines I have created
out of rhythm, out of the slow
heavy-soft-heavy-heavy waltz
that I alone am responsible for.

But while I am contented
at night to lie in bed, she works.
Winter erases my footprints,
bringing the world back to whiteness.
She is reminding me
that my creation is a gift, that
history is a gift,
that if I am ungrateful enough
to sleep, it will all
be taken away.

Paul Michael Steven
Willow

for Brenda

I cannot approach you. I cannot tell you we share a similar soul.

Soul. I was afraid to say that. The word itself is so close to falling into ordinary. But I learned the soul will resist, will cut through language like the willow through wind which resists upwardness—the soul is also this-delicate: a willow, a word, a what?

Along a barren backroad, I stop to buy a single red rose from a small Oriental woman—for what? I'm not even sure where I am going. But a small Oriental smile reveals.

I am offering my soul like a willow. I am offering you something to tend.

Paul Michael Steven
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