**The Gift**

As the wise men of old brought gifts

 guided by a star

 to the humble birthplace

of the god of love,

 the devils

 as an old print shows

retreated in confusion.

 What could a baby know

 of gold ornaments

or frankincense and myrrh,

 of priestly robes

 and devout genuflections?

But the imagination

 knows all stories

 before they are told

and knows the truth of this one

 past all defection

The rich gifts

 so unsuitable for a child

 though devoutly proffered,

stood for all that love can bring.

 The men were old

 how could they know

of a mother’s needs

 or a child’s

 appetite?

But as they kneeled

 the child was fed.

 They saw it

and

 gave praise!

 A miracle

had taken place,

 hard gold to love,

a mother’s milk!

 before

 their wondering eyes.

The ass brayed

 the cattle lowed.

 It was their nature.

All men by their nature give praise.

 It is all

 they can do.

The very devils

 by their flight give praise.

 What is death,

beside this?

 Nothing. The wise men

 came with gifts

and bowed down

 to worship

 this perfection.

 —William Carlos Williams

**A Stone Knife**

*December 26, 1969*

Dear Kenward,

                             What a pearl

of a letter knife. It’s just

the thing I needed, something

to rest my eyes on, and always

wanted, which is to say

it’s that of which I

felt the lack but

didn’t know of, of no

real use and yet

essential as a button

box, or maps, green

morning skies, islands and

canals in oatmeal, the steam

off oyster stew. Brown

agate, veined as a woods

by smoke that has to it

the watery twist of eel grass

in a quick, rust-discolored

cove. Undulating lines of

northern evening—a Munch

without the angst—a

hint of almost amber:

to the nose, a resinous

thought, to the eye, a

lacquered needle green

where no green is, a

present after-image.

Sleek as an ax, bare

and elegant as a tarn,

manly as a lingam,

November weather petrified,

it is just the thing

to do what with? To

open letters? No, it

is just the thing, an

object, dark, fierce

and beautiful in which

the surprise is that

the surprise, once

past, is always there:

which to enjoy is

not to consume. The un-

recapturable returns

in a brown world

made out of wood,

snow streaked, storm epi-

center still in stone.

 —James Schuyler

**The Gift**

Lord, You may not recognize me

speaking for someone else.

I have a son. He is

so little, so ignorant.

He likes to stand

at the screen door, calling

*oggie, oggie*, entering

language, and sometimes

a dog will stop and come up

the walk, perhaps

accidentally. May he believe

this is not an accident?

At the screen

welcoming each beast

in love’s name, Your emissary.

 —Louise Glück

**A Gift**

That night she called his name, not mine
xxxx and could not call it back
I shamed myself, and thought of that blind
xxxx girl in Kodiak

who sat out on the stoop each night
xxxx to watch the daylight fade
and lift her child down to the gate cut
xxxx in the palisade

and what old caution love resigned
xxxx when through the misty stare
she passed the boy to not her bearskinned
xxxx husband but the bear

 —Don Paterson

**The Gift**

To pull the metal splinter from my palm

my father recited a story in a low voice.

I watched his lovely face and not the blade.

Before the story ended, he’d removed

the iron sliver I thought I’d die from.

I can’t remember the tale,

but hear his voice still, a well

of dark water, a prayer.

And I recall his hands,

two measures of tenderness

he laid against my face,

the flames of discipline

he raised above my head.

Had you entered that afternoon

you would have thought you saw a man

planting something in a boy’s palm,

a silver tear, a tiny flame.

Had you followed that boy

you would have arrived here,

where I bend over my wife’s right hand.

Look how I shave her thumbnail down

so carefully she feels no pain.

Watch as I lift the splinter out.

I was seven when my father

took my hand like this,

and I did not hold that shard

between my fingers and think,

*Metal that will bury me,*

christen it Little Assassin,

Ore Going Deep for My Heart.

And I did not lift up my wound and cry,

*Death visited here!*

I did what a child does

when he’s given something to keep.

I kissed my father.

 —Li-Young Lee