**The Toys**

My little Son, who looked from thoughtful eyes

And moved and spoke in quiet grown-up wise,

Having my law the seventh time disobeyed,

I struck him, and dismissed

With hard words and unkissed,

His Mother, who was patient, being dead.

Then, fearing lest his grief should hinder sleep,

I visited his bed,

But found him slumbering deep,

With darkened eyelids, and their lashes yet

From his late sobbing wet.

And I, with moan,

Kissing away his tears, left others of my own;

For, on a table drawn beside his head,

He had put, within his reach,

A box of counters and a red-veined stone,

A piece of glass abraded by the beach

And six or seven shells,

A bottle with bluebells

And two French copper coins, ranged there with careful art,

To comfort his sad heart.

So when that night I prayed

To God, I wept, and said:

Ah, when at last we lie with tranced breath,

Not vexing Thee in death,

And Thou rememberest of what toys

We made our joys,

How weakly understood

Thy great commanded good,

Then, fatherly not less

Than I whom Thou hast moulded from the clay,

Thou’lt leave Thy wrath, and say,

“I will be sorry for their childishness.”

—Coventry Patmore

**Children’s Games**

I

This is a schoolyard

crowded

with children

of all ages near a village

on a small stream

meandering by

where some boys

are swimming

bare-ass

or climbing a tree in leaf

everything

is motion

elder women are looking

after the small

fry

a play wedding a

christening

nearby one leans

hollering

into

an empty hogshead

II

Little girls

whirling their skirts about

until they stand out flat

tops pinwheels

to run in the wind with

or a toy in 3 tiers to spin

with a piece

of twine to make it go

blindman’s-buff follow the

leader stilts

high and low tipcat jacks

bowls hanging by the knees

standing on your head

run the gauntlet

a dozen on their backs

feet together kicking

through which a boy must pass

roll the hoop or a

construction

made of bricks

some mason has abandoned

III

The desperate toys

of children

their

imagination equilibrium

and rocks

which are to be

found

everywhere

and games to drag

the other down

blindfold

to make use of

a swinging

weight

with which

at random

to bash in the

heads about

them

Brueghel saw it all

and with his grim

humor faithfully

recorded

it

—William Carlos Williams

**The Dove in the Belly**

The whole of appearance is a toy. For this,  
The dove in the belly builds his nest and coos,

Selah, tempestuous bird. How is it that  
The rivers shine and hold their mirrors up,

Like excellence collecting excellence?  
How is it that the wooden trees stand up

And live and heap their panniers of green  
And hold them round the sultry day? Why should

These mountains being high be, also, bright,  
Fetched up with snow that never falls to earth?

And this great esplanade of corn, miles wide,  
Is something wished for made effectual

And something more. And the people in costumes,  
Though poor, though raggeder than ruin, have that

Within them right for terraces—oh, brave salut!  
Deep dove, placate you in your hiddenness.

—Wallace Stevens

**Cirque d’Hiver**

Across the floor flits the mechanical toy,  
fit for a king of several centuries back.  
A little circus horse with real white hair.  
His eyes are glossy black.  
He bears a little dancer on his back.  
  
She stands upon her toes and turns and turns.  
A slanting spray of artificial roses  
is stitched across her skirt and tinsel bodice.  
Above her head she poses  
another spray of artificial roses.  
  
His mane and tail are straight from Chirico.  
He has a formal, melancholy soul.  
He feels her pink toes dangle toward his back  
along the little pole  
that pierces both her body and her soul  
  
and goes through his, and reappears below,  
under his belly, as a big tin key.  
He canters three steps, then he makes a bow,  
canters again, bows on one knee,  
canters, then clicks and stops, and looks at me.  
  
The dancer, by this time, has turned her back.  
He is the more intelligent by far.  
Facing each other rather desperately—  
his eye is like a star—  
we stare and say, “Well, we have come this far.”

—Elizabeth Bishop

**Toyland**

Today the sunlight is the paint on lead soldiers   
Only they are people scattering out of the cool church   
  
And as they go across the gravel and among the spring streets   
They spread formality: they know, we know, what they have been doing,   
  
The old couples, the widowed, the staunch smilers,   
The deprived and the few nubile young lily-ladies,   
  
And we know what they will do when they have opened the doors of their

houses and walked in:   
Mostly they will make water, and wash their calm hands and eat.   
  
The organ’s flourishes finish; the verger closes the doors;   
The choirboys run home, and the rector goes off in his motor.   
  
Here a policeman stalks, the sun glinting on his helmet-crest;   
Then a man pushes a perambulator home; and somebody posts a letter.   
  
If I sit here long enough, loving it all, I shall see the District Nurse pedal past,   
The children going to Sunday School and the strollers strolling;   
  
The lights darting on in different rooms as night comes in;   
And I shall see washing hung out, and the postman delivering letters.   
  
I might by exception see an ambulance or the fire brigade   
Or even, if the chance came round, street musicians (singing and playing).   
  
For the people I’ve seen, this seems the operation of life:   
I need the paint of stillness and sunshine to see it that way.   
  
The secret laugh of the world picks them up and shakes them like peas boiling;   
They behave as if nothing happened; maybe they no longer notice.   
  
I notice. I laugh with the laugh, cultivate it, make much of it,   
But still I don't know what the joke is, to tell them.

—Roy Fisher