

Gym Nights

Each giddy drop induced the trampoline
To launch me that much higher from its bed;
I feared I'd arc off to the side and land,
Like a defective rocket, on my head.
My brother would perform, as a routine,
A hundred sit-ups; then, with arms flung wide,
He'd fall back to the mat, as if he planned,
By way of encore, to be crucified.

Those Fridays, which the Y called "Family Nights,"
Drew a wide range of adepts to the gym.
A young man rocked above the pommel horse
Hands lifting as his legs swung under him;
A girl traversed, in leotard and tights,
The balance beam, despite slight teeterings;
Another rose, arms trembling, by main force
Into a midair handstand on the rings.

Amid it all, we were aware of sounds—
The twang that, when released, the high bar made,
Post-spring vibrations from a vaulting board,
And sneaker squeaks where basketball was played.
We'd join the basketball for shoot-arounds:
Sometimes a pair of shots in midflight met;
Sometimes they'd find the mark with one accord
And get hung up together in the net.

The kidding had an air of friendly doubt;
Nobody wished to touch a tender nerve.
Our folks' divorce, the trials of junior high,
Were treated with benevolent reserve.
If we occasionally curled about
And hauled up to the ceiling on a rope,
Was this escapist yearning? Even I
Knew not to get suspended on that trope.

Exertion let the fragile body glow:
The chest throbbed surely with its little sun.
In due course the custodian who controlled
The lights switched off their four banks, one by one.
We'd shower and we'd crunch home through the snow,
Lungs aching with the keenly frigid air.
I'd lift a hand to feel the way the cold
Created icicles in my damp hair.