

Target Greatland...

By Jennifer Thompson

When death's hair brushes my cheek
simple facts present themselves:

1. I am 32.

2. Men's gazes always will flow over me
like a clear, cold stream
over one of many pebbles, smoothing me.

3. This mind, consciousness
will never fall still.
It sings out, inanely
like a rubber fish at Target
twitching in a ghastly fashion
framed and mounted in a cardboard box
one of dozens piled
now on sale
only \$12.99.
My being is
an ill-chosen gift
that provokes a frozen grin.

4. Somehow I imagined
that my life would be --
no, that human life is --
a series of violent contractions
sending blood squirting
from core to extremity and back

or, better
the thrill of taking sweet, careless Avi
deep inside me
grasping at a certain friction and pressure
there
meeting his fervid blue eyes
our very different organs matched
in need and feeling.

But no. When death rests the floss of her pale hair
on the pillow next to mine
and runs a careless finger
down my thigh
I know:

5. Existence consists
of standing in line at Target Greatland.
The cashier's movements are painfully slow
I feel vaguely tempted by racks and pyramids
of last impulse buys
the plaque-fighting gum
which my dingy teeth need
espresso-flavored candy canes all
khaki green

"Target Greatland," continue stanza

scented cardboard trees -- surely
my seedy Firebird could use one?
I am in agonies over the
bruised sunset shades of
the bag-boy's acne.
The stiff collar of his company

polo shirt grazes
a cluster of pustules.
My pimples throb
in answering sympathy.
His eyes bleed with
the uncomprehending suffering
of a Dalmatian locked
in a behaviorist's laboratory.
This
This
This is existence.

6. Now, having felt the gentle probe
of death's curious fingers
I'm not looking for satisfaction, joy
balance, inner peace
season's greetings. No.
Like Charcot's hysterics I lie
docile and wracked by turns.

7. Perhaps for Avi
I am a just tortured prop
a moving figure
for banal and pointless suffering.

8. I must drive and live so hard so fast so wildly
with such a sure touch
that I outstrip
this twitching, dripping self.