



[Home](#)

[Summer 2014](#)

[Fall-Winter 2013-14](#)

[Summer-Fall 2013](#)

[Spring-Summer 2013](#)

[Winter-Spring 2013](#)

[Fall-Winter 2012-2013](#)

[Summer-Fall 2012](#)

[Spring-Summer 2012](#)

[Winter-Spring 2012](#)

[Autumn/Winter 2011-12](#)

[Summer 2011](#)

[Winter/Spring 2011](#)

[Autumn/Winter 2011](#)

[Summer 2010](#)

[Spring 2010](#)

[Winter 2010](#)

[Autumn 2009](#)

[Summer 2009](#)

[Spring 2009](#)

## Three Poems

by Len Krisak

### The Story of the Other Woman

We sat that night, there at her kitchen table,  
Listening. I watched my spell-bound wife,  
Who looked down, fiddling with her butter knife;  
Not showing, in so far as she was able,

Any sign that might expose the way  
The woman's calm recital made her feel.  
I had no doubt the tale told there was real:  
That not so many years ago, she lay

Wide open for a shy young man she let  
Play with her body "like some sand-box toy."  
She'd pitied him as if he were a boy;  
A pupil she felt sorry for; a pet.

That's when the silence came—the awkward pause  
Of third-rate-fiction fame . . . until she swept  
Her arm in sharing gesture, and a goblet leapt  
To trace an arc. By physics' iron laws,

It smashed to flindered shards—to little bits  
Of what had lent warm claret lees the shape  
A cratered pond might take. Her mouth agape,  
My wife stood up, and by brief starts and fits

We exited the story I am telling  
You. We failed to show much grace in going,  
But what would you expect? We left her knowing  
Only vaguely what she had been selling,

The other woman. If you read ahead  
Though, right between the lines, you will have guessed  
Which one of us soon bought . . . and all the rest,  
Including that it had been no cheap red

### Shits Passing in the Night

Who wouldn't want . . . I mean, who wouldn't *love*  
Some way to keep alive the memory of  
A seedy, soul-demeaning irony  
Like this (which needs some sordid imagery  
To drive it home): a country highway just  
As dusk comes on; a core of shabby lust;  
A husband driving from her house (and his)  
One day a month, as regular as is  
The other man (besotted) driving *toward*  
The self-same house whose master is not lord.

Autumn 2008

Summer 2008

Spring/Summer 2008

Winter/Spring 2008

Editor's Note

Guidelines

Contact

And down this rut-filled road, their Volvos pass.  
One races toward her for a piece of ass  
That makes him think of Plato, Petrarch, Dante;  
The other, though, is hardly Patrick Bronte.  
For in this wuthering town like Haworth, York,  
Where hubby has—once more—pulled out his cork,  
He is already always un-protective  
Of a wife whose troth has proved defective.

Which means it's safe to pass him on the road,  
Not one mile from that couple's quaint abode.  
And every month, they cut it ever-closer  
As the cuckoo's work grows ever-grosser—  
Ever more flagrant—till . . . Her appetite  
Grows cloyed—eight years, to get their numbers right—  
And all stove-in, like Usher's house of cards,  
The rank affair lies middened in its shards.

Who wouldn't savor irony like this,  
Though it's been thirty years since their last kiss?  
Yes, why not wallow in the memory, though  
The dupe and cunt—and prick—died long ago?

## “The More You Cross It Out, the More It's Here”

—“X,” from *Richard Wilbur's The Disappearing Alphabet*

Dream-shaken still;  
At 3 A.M., awakened  
Far too often.

Do what I will,  
Ice-blue irises will soften  
To grey, the ache in

How they melt.  
And then the thin lips part  
As if to speak.

What has she felt?  
Why do my knees go weak?  
Where is her carved-out heart?

Why, when I claw from sleep,  
Does every nerve feel stricken  
And the pulse die feebly as

The day begins—a prison-keep  
Where nothing dead can quicken  
Because it never has?

Again, again, again: the act  
Goes on. She will not quit;  
He can't defend.

Again, again, again: that fact,  
Alone and naked, argues it  
Will never end.

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**Len Krisak's** most recent books are *The Carmina of Catullus* (Carcanet Press), *Ovid's Erotic Poems* (University of Pennsylvania Press), and *Afterimage* (Measure Press). His work has appeared in such publications as *Antioch*, *Hudson*, *PN*, *Sewanee*, and *Southwest Reviews*. He is the recipient of the Robert Penn Warren, Richard Wilbur, and Robert Frost Prizes, and to top it off, he's a four-time champion on *Jeopardy!*

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