

[Home](#)

[Spring 2010](#)

[Winter 2010](#)

[Autumn 2009](#)

[Summer 2009](#)

[Spring 2009](#)

[Autumn 2008](#)

[Summer 2008](#)

[Spring/Summer 2008](#)

[Winter/Spring 2008](#)

[Editor's Note](#)

[Guidelines](#)

[Contact](#)

Poetry

by Lyn Lifshin

But Instead Has Gone into Woods

A girl goes into the woods
and for what reason
disappears behind branches
and is never heard from again.
We don't really know why,
she could have gone shopping
or had lunch with her mother
but instead has gone into
woods, alone, without the lover,
and not for leaves or flowers.
It was a clear bright day
very much like today.
It was today. Now you might
imagine I'm that girl,
it seems there are reasons. But
first consider: I don't live
very near those trees and my
head is already wild with branches

I Was Four, in Dotted

Swiss summer pajamas,
my face a blotch of
measles in the small
dark room over blue
grapes and rhubarb,
hot stucco cracking.
17 North Seminary.
That July Friday
noon my mother was
rushed in the grey
blimp of a Chevy
north to where my
sister Joy would be
born two months
early. I wasn't
ready either and
missed my mother's
cool hands, her
bringing me frosty
glasses of pineapple
juice and cherries

with a glass straw
as Nanny lost her
false teeth, flushed
them down the toilet
then held me so tight
I could smell lavender
and garlic in her
braided her, held
me as so few ever
have since, as if
not to lose more

Some Afternoons When Nobody Was Fighting

my mother took out
walnuts and chocolate
chips. My sister and
I plunged our fingers
in flour and butter
smoother than clay.
Pale dough oozing
between our fingers
while the house filled
with blond bars rising.
Mother in her pink dress
with black ballerinas
circling its bottom
turned on the Victrola,
tucked her dress up into
pink nylon bloomer pants,
kicked her legs up in the
air and my sister and I
pranced thru the living
room, a bracelet around
her. She was our Pied
Piper and we were
the children of Hamlin,
circling her as close as the
dancers on her hem

Nights It Was Too Hot to Stay in the Apartment

We drove to the lake, then stopped
at my grandmother's. The grown ups
sat in the screened porch on wicker
or the glider whispering above the
clink of ice in wet glass. Spirea and
yellow roses circled the earth under
stars. A silver apple moon. Bor
wanted to sleep out on the lawn
and dragged out our uncle's army
blankets and chairs for a tent. We
wanted the stars on our skin, the
small green apples to hang over
the blanket to protect us from bats.

From the straw mats, peonies glowed
like planets and if there was a breeze,
it was roses and sweat. I wanted
our white cats under the olive green
with us, their tongues snapping up
moths and whatever buzzed thru the
clover. For an hour the porch
seemed miles away until itchy with
bug bites and feeling our shirts fill
with night air, my hair grow curlier,
our mother came to fold up the blankets
and chairs and I wished I was old
enough to stay alone until dawn or
small enough to be scooped up, asleep
in arms that would carry me up the
still hot apartment stairs and into
sheets I wouldn't know were still
warm until morning

Sitting in the Brown Chair with *Let's Pretend* on the Radio

I don't think how the
m and m's that soothe
only made my fat legs
worse. I'm not thinking
how my mother will
die, of fires that could
gulp a mother up, leave
me like Bambi. I'm not
going over the baby sitter's
stories of what they did to
young girls in tunnels, of
the ovens and gas or have
nightmares I'll wake up
screaming for one whole
year wanting someone to
lie near me, hold me as if
from then on no one can get
close enough. I don't hear
my mother and father yelling,
my mother howling that if
he loved us he'd want to buy
a house, not stay in the apart-
ment he doesn't even pay
her father rent for but get
a place we wouldn't be
ashamed to bring friends.
What I can drift and dream
in is more real. I don't want
to leave the world of golden
apples and silver geese. To
make sure, I close my eyes,
make a wish on the first hay
load of summer then wait

until it disappears

Being Jewish in a Small Town

someone writes kike on
the blackboard and the
“k’s” pull thru the
chalk, stick in my

plump pale thighs.
Even after the high
school burns down the
word is written in

the ashes. My under
pants’ elastic snaps
on Main St because
I can’t go to

Pilgrim Fellowship.
I’m the one Jewish girl
in town but the 4
Cohen brothers

want blond hair
blowing from their
car. They don’t know
my black braids

smell of almond.
I wear my clothes
loose so no one
dreams who I am,

will never know
Hebrew, keep a
Christmas tree in
my drawer. In

the dark, my fingers
could be the menorah
that pulls you toward
honey in the snow

Yellow Roses

pinned on stiff tulle,
glowed in the painted
high school moonlight.
Mario’ Lanza’s *Oh My
Love*. When Doug
dipped I smelled
Clearasil. Hours in
the tub dreaming of

Dick Wood's fingers
cutting in, sweeping
me close. I wouldn't
care if the stuck
pin on the roses
went thru me,
the yellow musk
would be a wreath
on the grave of that
awful dance where
Louise and I sat
pretending we didn't
care, our socks fat
with bells and fuzzy
ribbons, silly as we
felt. I wanted to be
home, wanted the
locked bathroom to
cry in, knew some
part of me would
never stop waiting
to be asked to dance

Dream of the Pink and Black Lace, Just Like the Evening Gown

my favorite in high school,
a dress I'd wanted to see
marked down and finally wrote
the store, even then, able
to get what I wanted

more easily on paper. I
told them how often I'd come
back, hoping it would be marked
down and dashed up with my
mother when they agreed
to lower the price.

I feel the swirl of those
gowns I ran my hand through,
terrified mine wouldn't
be there, then carrying it as
carefully as a baby of blown glass.

It was so full my waist
looked tiny inside it
with hoops and an eyelet bustier.
The dress took up half
my mother's closet,

less space than I did in her,
especially after she had me.
I don't think I wore it again, too
dressy, too much lace to pack.

But I can see it near the yellow

and the pink and white gauzy gowns,
swirling strapless, a part of 38
Main Street I expected to always
be as it was, like my mother
waiting for me to fill it

Lyn Lifshin's *Another Woman Who Looks Like Me* was published by Black Sparrow at David Godine October, 2006. It has been selected for the 2007 Paterson Award for Literary Excellence for previous finalists of the Paterson Poetry Prize. (Also out in 2006 is her prize winning book about the famous, short lived beautiful race horse, Ruffian: *The Licorice Daughter: My Year With Ruffian* from Texas Review Press. Lifshin's other recent books include *Before it's Light* published winter 1999-2000 by Black Sparrow press, following their publication of *Cold Comfort* in 1997. Just out are *Desire* from Word Parade and *92 Rapple* from Coatism.: *Lost in the Fog* and *Barbaro: Beyond Brokenness* and *Light at the End, the Jesus Poems* For other books, bio, photographs see her web site: www.lynlifshin.com *Persephone* was published by Red Hen and Texas Review just published *Barbaro: Beyond Brokenness*.

Copyright 2010, Lyn Lifshin. © This work is protected under the U.S. copyright laws. It may not be reproduced, reprinted, reused, or altered without the expressed written permission of the author.