The Beach Stairs

Judith Minty
Grand Valley State University

Follow this and additional works at: http://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/gvr

Recommended Citation
Available at: http://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/gvr/vol23/iss1/14

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by ScholarWorks@GVSU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Grand Valley Review by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks@GVSU. For more information, please contact scholarworks@gvsu.edu.
The Beach Stairs

1.
Last week, on the cliff, the air
hung humid, but sun
beamed through the cedars.
As I descended,
the beach disappeared.
—fog blending sky and earth, folding itself
over the lake's secrets.

2.
Once, I spied on a walking stick,
ancient teacher picking his way
along the underside of this railing.
Another time, I startled
a fawn sunning on the landing.
I am always the intruder
when I enter their world.

3.
That hawk ahead of me keeps leaving its perch.
As I walk the water's edge
it bustles the air
—pine tree to snag to leafy limb.
My footsteps steady,
shadow following.
I had no intention of heading south today.

4.
The school of fish traveling north
out past the second sandbar
resembles porpoises leaping,
but they don't disturb those gulls
floating above them.

5.
The water so clear today
I can see hundreds of minnows close to shore.
Years ago, when we camped at Ludington,
I learned to seine them with a towel.
The few my brother and I captured
we saved in sand pails, but our mother
never let us bring them back to the trailer.

by Judith Minty
6. Here is the small spit
that joins shore to first sandbar.
Here is the pool between them.
Here is the old black dog,
death three years now,
leaping off the bar
into the sun-warmed pool.
Here I am, leaping too.
Laughing and grinning, again and again,
the two of us
leaping and swimming back, leaping again.
—A game between us,
pure and simple.

7. The mistress of that big poodle
held him until I passed.
“He would give you a wet, joyful
greeting,” she solemnly told me.
I didn’t say how much I’d been hoping
for exactly that. The dog
pretended sobriety, but I noticed his hilarious tail.

8. Last month, this Canada goose
led her seven goslings
out of brush along the cliff to the surf.
Tails wagging, little balls of fluff,
the dutiful line tumbled into the water.
Now here they are, full-grown.
Stiff-necked, heads high,
they face the waves and sail off.
serenely and unruffled as Victorians on a Sunday stroll.

9. At the slide, where the spring keeps on
running down its muddy path,
two cardinals take turns
taking their shower in the waterfall.
Just their size, it must have been made for them.
10.
Diane, her first time in Lake Michigan,
first time in ten years in shorts, standing in
knee-deep water at the first sandbar,
laughing and waving her arms like a child,
like she must have done before her brother
killed himself for justice in the Pacific Ocean.

11.
The surf is rough.
but this turtle, its eggs laid, won't quit
trying to return to water.
Westward it crawls, but waves keep tossing it back.
Now on its hard shell, legs swimming the air,
it can't get free. Soon sand will bury it
—so I carry it out past the breakers and let it go.

—The Claybanks/Lake Michigan

Judith Minty's most recent book is Walking with the Bear from Michigan State University Press. She taught at GVSU in years past and wrote an article about the Grand Valley poetry festivals of the 1970s in a previous issue of the Grand Valley Review.