

Oriana Ivy

O'KEEFE: THE BLACK IRIS

Don't tell me that Orpheus failed.  
An artist understands  
about faith –

the hours, the years, the life,  
watching a blossom disclose  
its velvet throat, the secret

fur on the narrow tongue –  
a blood-tinged light  
crossing the perilous curve

of the corolla's horizon,  
the nun-like petals that hide  
a burgundy cleft in heart

cowled with a hood of blue –  
Look long enough at anything,  
and it will grow in you –

One breath from embracing  
black, in the center  
of the blossom of your life,

he won't turn:  
not the Orpheus who sang  
so much better after love, after death.



## MY FIRST LOVE WEARS DENTURES

He moves into my house. On the way  
to the bathroom to shave, he takes out  
his teeth. In the dream, we're as easy  
together as an old married couple.

At thirteen, I'd almost faint if he  
stood near – after such trembling  
passion, surely he should leave me  
more than just his dentures.

He closes the bathroom door. I knock,  
bringing him fresh towels.  
All those years it might as well  
have been him –

a woman's endless work of love:  
bringing clean towels, tenderness.  
I walk into the bathroom. He shrinks  
and travels backward, a web of cracks

at the border of childhood and youth.  
Like Penelope I unravel the navy-  
blue sweater he wore in high school.  
“Love, where are you going?”

I call. I can no longer see his face.  
I can no longer tell, is it him  
or is it me, who would prefer  
to keep on trembling.



ROSE O PURE CONTRADICTION  
(EURYDICE TO RILKE)

*Because staying is nowhere –*  
The unsayable world  
must be caught like the last train.  
Your face not yet

as real as in a photograph,  
your one good coat,  
your pockets full of ticket stubs.  
Drops hang on the railings of bridges.

Your train is leaving soon.  
The wheels groan and lurch.  
I wave. You wave back,  
your hand the grain of smoke.

You say the hand disappears,  
only the waving waves.  
When words begin to breathe,  
the mouth is erased.

Everyone has his lost bride,  
the beloved who never  
arrived – the sleeping girl  
who would not wake,

whose eyelids turned  
each into an infinite rose.  
Petal by petal your sleep unfolds.  
You arrive in me now.