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East Tenth Street

Five floors up, a brass Buddha sits
in front of four brass bowls on a table
beneath the open window. There's a single bed,
covers drawn back, rolling hospital table
next to it, blonde wood shining amid notebooks,
papers, books. Where's the magic powder to breathe
and dust the cells, to make us so much more?
Oh, Allen, don't we all love you? Show us how
to leave the invisible bugs
swarming out of the night, and get to the next day.
It was going to be heaven, your voice
saying my name; I'd've eaten anything, ecstatic
with hunger. You stripped naked for L.A. crowd,
ate mushrooms in Mexican jungle, got kicked out
of Cuba, Czechoslovakia, watched by F.B.I., ommed
Chicago courtroom while I swung blindfolded
at sixth grade piñata and batted Fred Heller's head.
I'm trying to talk like you. We all are.
Mother's always crazy, cruising the Mediterranean
this moment, every hair in place, sorry to miss
the football games she bets on every week.
Surely that's why I'm here. You made each
physical pinch alive on the page: car accident,
right eye drooping from stroke, diabetes,
kidney stones, cock that stopped working after
uncountable assholes. You're bald, pot bellied,
you quit smoking years ago. Tell me

about burgers with Ferlinghetti, Mike's pool hall
next to his bookstore, though you never played.
You wanted to talk poetry with Duncan
when he came to your room, but he only stared
at your crotch. "Did that make sense?" you asked.
Then I must belong, the applause begun. Didn't I
smoke dope red lit nights to "Light My Fire," drive
thirty-six hours straight to California, all of us
bound to be famous? Walk all night down Broadway,
watch Grand Central cops kick out the homeless,
sit in Port Authority daybreak phone booth
listening to old man talk Plato and Pollock?
He bought me breakfast, said, "I want you."
When I said no, he dissolved in traffic. I can still
see his face, hook nose, blue eyes. Nights and
nights I sat up with friends, walked naked in

mountains, skied frozen swamps, chopped
wood for winter heat. No corner store,
deli, law office high school friends sure I'd work in.
A plane ride, cab to midtown lunch cafe, and this.
So what if mice invade the kitchen, babies wake
at dawn, smash toys and glasses, and it's my turn
to feed them? If it's not the mortgage,
rent's past due, the front stairs are rotting.

I'll get an earring, tattoo, turn half my hair
green, keep the pipe full, die in a cave on the island
with no name. Will I remember the right question,
will he say what I need, send up my name?
Send up my name. It's always the last second,
train roaring by, late for the job in the suburbs.
The book to tell us umbrellas go home, plant
the beans here doesn't exist. He leafed old
notebooks, eyes gone back, snapped at a pause:
"You don't understand, I've got more work than I can do!"
He talked. Phones rang. Cars mumbled and honked.
Across the country, tornadoes ravage another town.
My children are hungry for supper. The secretary
shows me out. Around the corner, there's the building
where he was mugged, and I walk by, three blocks
to the Ukranian Village restaurant, a friend
who meets me says is one of his favorites. Three doors
to get in, street shut out, beer and a half later,
it's anyone's white table cloths, silver,
meat & potatoes. He's gone. My children

are having supper, and I'm home to the garbage pickers
rattling down the alley, El trains groaning commuters
to work, traffic honking by loud as 10th St. My son
chips siding off the house next door. Loses another
jacket. Throws his ball into the street. Holds my hand.

Barry Silesky

"This poem came from meeting w/ Ginsberg at his apt in NYC when I was doing
Ferlinghetti's biography, back in '89. *My Greatest Hits* (a chapbook) came out from
Pudding House Press (2003), along w/ a book of "short-short fiction" (more accurately,
prose poems) from Coffee House Press (1992), and biographies of Ferlinghetti (Warner
Books 1990) and John Gardner (Algonquin Books 2004). Meantime, I live across the
street from Wrigley Field in Chicago, pining after the dream that comes with it." B.
Silesky