

*Sydney Lea*

## Conspiracy

I've given up having opinions  
on who wrecked the Kennedys'  
"Camelot," the realm that never was  
(for God's sake imagine

tapping Dr. King's phone!),  
whether in Dallas it was just one loonie  
or a gang, a gun or guns.  
But I have a friend who's crazy,

and you ought to see how excited  
he gets when that dead horse trots by!  
For 20 years he has leapt right on and whipped it.  
You'd think he'd seen a demon

by the look in his eyes.  
He'll recite an unbroken record  
committed to perfect recall:  
Oswald's comings and goings

in the early months of that fall;  
what Jack Ruby ate, and where,  
what kind of car he had, or traded,  
what he said about the governor . . .

on and on.  
Once he gets started,  
just let him run down  
or you'll be there for hours —

links between New Orleans  
and the Russian widow;  
something about JFK's supposed girlfriend  
and the Mafia and Fidel Castro . . .

There's a place I know called Dead Horse Canyon,  
over near Pawlet.

I used to like to hike it,  
but the real estate crowd bought up the mountain

and now it looks like Fort Worth  
on skis. How did I get here?

Oh yes:  
that figure I used

for my friend's wacky encompassing theories —  
"Dead horse."

He'd approve:  
they named it that way, way back, because

they lost a lot of teams  
when they skidded out logs,  
the trail was so icy and slippery,  
come autumn, along the ravine.

That's how he's crazy,  
addicted to the idea of humans  
as animals that claw  
their way across a mined polar landscape,

of the world as malign armada  
with every one of its cannons  
trained on every one of us.  
Especially on him.

That idea picks him up.  
It gives him a purpose:  
*Keep Your Eye Out. Survive.*  
You think that way, and things come true.

Wouldn't you know?  
Some warped ex-con happens by  
and rapes his daughter.  
I knew he was crazy

because he mixed that awful crime  
with the famous film-clip in his mind:

the spectators flattened in terror  
on the grassy mound;

the new young pretty widow,  
her mouth flung open in incredulity;  
sagged in the back seat of the limo,  
Connally, who turned out to be

an enemy to us all. We couldn't quite see  
what was going on with Jack,  
the Secret Service coming out of the ground,  
under their trenchcoats, holsters,

earphones dropping out of cowboy hats.  
How did they show up?  
When my friend carries on  
about his daughter and the President's murder,

the agents are also part of the gang-up.  
CIA, FBI, SS . . .  
Why else, he'll ask,  
can't the Law get at the heart of either?

I don't mean just to laugh at him.  
His life's a misery;  
but that's because he imagines  
somehow it might be nothing but beauty,

fairness and justice,  
while I believe in ups and downs.  
Right now I'm happy because my daughter's happy:  
it's November, and at last she has

a pony, a spavined dirty red roan,  
but she thinks it's just as pretty  
as I think *she* is.  
Trouble, no doubt,

will come to us all someday.  
That much we know.  
So why sit around now,  
why look back or forward, why rant or mope?

Even 20 years ago,  
 when it's said my generation  
 was full of ideal hopes,  
 I was more than a little bit uncertain:

I mean for God's sake I had eyes!  
 Bay of Pigs . . . That faint little rumble in Asia . . .  
 All those bombed-out hovels  
 as the train slid south toward Grand Central . . .

It's not as if I recall that procession unmoved,  
 the streets of the capital  
 lined with weeping  
 people in autumn cold.

But to this day I save  
 from that grim spectacle  
 the sense of being  
 for the moment alive

as I watched that dark old stallion jiggling  
 his way through the crowd,  
 as if a ghost had mounted to ride  
 in backward review of all

— from the earliest time imaginable —  
 that led unbroken to this very minute,  
 boots reversed in the stirrups,  
 hung from the empty saddle.