

## Shopping for Toys

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“I was very hard on toys,” she says.  
“Especially dolls and teddy bears.”  
We pass a row of stuffed animals in the crowded store,  
and I think I see them cringe.  
With their rolling eyes  
and soft paws they point towards  
the robots, the guns, the changling toys that  
alter their shapes to suit their owner’s whims:  
tough toys all, able to handle tough love.  
“The things that matter,” she tells me,  
seem so uncertain that I’ve never trusted they would last.”

She takes her purchase, and we stroll out the door.  
Over my shoulder I see the bears sigh with relief  
and smile at a new wave of customers  
whose pasts, they hope, are happier.

We sit for a while on a stony bench  
at the edge of a pool in the mall.  
Shoppers swirl around us like the carp  
carving the waters beside us.

She says, “I abused the toys I loved.  
It’s the only sure test I know.  
I pulled the arms and legs,  
tore at the buttons,  
chewed on their eyes and ears.  
I treated them like shit,” she admits to herself.  
And then to me: “The ones that lasted, I treasure.  
I’ll love them forever.”

I think of the animals I have seen in her bedroom—  
her bear and her lion, scarred survivors of her uncertainty:  
one-armed, blind, unstuffed and deeply loved.

She gives her newly acquired penguin  
an appraising once-over.  
As for me,  
my nose and eyes intact, I remain untested.