

THE KNIFE AND THE PUMPKIN

Poems by

Robert H. Deluty



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To

Barbara,

in celebration of our
thirty years of marriage



Other books by Robert H. Deluty

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*Only the knife knows what goes on in the heart
of a pumpkin.*

Simone Schwarz-Bart



biology class . . .
a fifth grader inquiring
can germs jump

Yom Kippur, lunchtime . . .
the one-eighth Jewish woman
abstaining from ham

high school track coach
dreaming of teaching P.E.
at Princeton

introducing
his daughter Alex
and son Ashley

Aunt Bev swearing
she saw Pope Benedict
at *Burger King*

belittling his son
for returning home with bronze
from the Olympics

the workaholic
boasting that he does not own
a pair of sneakers

Grandma noting why
she does not wear a seat belt:
Clothing creases

Gramps explaining why
he does not wear a seat belt:
Steering wheels protect

bureaucrat's wake . . .
a colleague noting he wrote
excellent memos

her two uncles
coming to blows over how
schlemiel is spelled

Pan Am games . . .
a rebellious Vermont teen
hopes Cuba wins all

her child inquiring
whether *Entenmann's* hires
taste-testers

the old woman
claiming she has seen it all:
I've thirty grandkids

the old man
claiming he has seen it all:
I raise Chihuahuas

her blind date
mentioning that his Mom thinks
he has character

December 7th . . .
a Pearl Harbor veteran
winning *Powerball*

too focused
on a second pizza slice
to enjoy the first

christening
their fraternal twins
Leslie and Lesley

wishing he could dine
with Confucius, Buddha, Freud,
and Lady Gaga

Summer Olympics . . .
his child rooting for countries
with pretty flags

Summer Olympics . . .
his wife rooting for countries
with touching anthems

Day of Atonement . . .
the six-year-old Jew eating
a *Mr. Goodbar*

their daughter buying
halter tops that complement
her new tattoo

their son changing
hair colors to highlight
his new piercings

When do you sleep?! . . .

prolific prof responding

Faculty meetings

observing her boss

taking a dime-sized mirror

out of his wallet

OCD mother

fretting that her ten month-old

is too messy

baseball slugger

wanting to change his name from

Harold to Homer

Intro Psych student

inquiring why Dr. Phil

isn't in the text

the priest describing
the reverend's behavior
as *not kosher*

Woodstock, Georgia . . .
a girl asking where in town
the concert took place

shocked to learn
his grown sons yearn for Facebook
more than sex

the batter hearing
his coach scream *Let it hit you . . .*
we got lots of ice

their six-month-old child
and Great Dane puppy sharing
the same chew toy

a scholar hoping
to learn new languages
in the afterlife

Halloween night . . .
nine Yeshiva boys dressed
as a menorah

in the SUV
making a right turn signal
with his beagle's head

their Granddad
removing ear wax before
stepping on the scale

a kindergartner
bringing in for show-and-tell
her Mom's diaphragm

Easter Sunday . . .
a senior wearing to Mass
her best nightgown

the new patient
asking his shrink if he talks
or just gives drugs

her son replying
to *Did you just fart?*
with *Why?*

her spouse replying
to *Did you just fart?*
with *Perhaps*

her Dad replying
to *Did you just fart?*
with *Who's to say?*

at the aquarium,
refusing to believe
seahorses are real

a Chinese tourist
wishing the *Denny's* waitress
A wellbeing life

the third grader
explaining why his lunchbox
contains ammo

in the hospice
a child cheering up Grandma
with a knock-knock joke

in the hospice
a child cheering up Grandpa
with a dirty joke

reference letter

noting the applicant is

surly impressive

informing the judge

her eyes closing mid-sneeze

caused the accident

Social Work program . . .

male applicants claiming

they're minorities

Voc Tech program . . .

Jewish applicants claiming

they're minorities

told he has cancer,

leaving the doctor's office

to buy a *Harley*

white Brandeis prof
asserting Sammy Davis
wasn't black enough

white Berkeley prof
asserting Bill Cosby
isn't black enough

telling his grandsons
that '60s bell bottom pants
weren't worn for laughs

late October . . .
Yale students relieving stress
with *pumpkin baseball*

teaching the same class
for thirty years, terrified
of losing his notes

a Yankee hater
refusing to purchase
a pinstriped shirt

on the survey
next to *Person of Color?*
writing *Yes, I'm tan*

on Halloween . . .
two ex-hippies dressed as ghouls
wearing peace symbols

doctors christening
the hospital's coffee shop
Grand Grounds

Grandma insisting
her prized cookies be called
chocolate **chunk**

in shul, Uncle Max
sporting mauve shorts, white *Keds*,
a black fedora

high school left fielder
opting to switch to football:
I love flattening

second birthday . . .
learning she's twice as old
as yesterday

masquerade party . . .
dressing their two schnauzers
as wooly mammoths

Papa describing
teachers in the old country:
They had beards, sticks

teenaged defendant
yawning as the foreman
reads the verdict

mid-hurricane . . .
mistaking windblown sea foam
for snow drifts

a chemist noting
his favorite ballplayer
was Al Kaline

I'll retire next term . . .
seven faculty colleagues
thinking *Thank God*

I'll retire next term . . .
thirteen faculty colleagues
thinking *Why wait?*

Duke law student
wishing his last name
were not Clowney

at *Lifetime Fitness*
four twentyish women
playing mahjong

at the barber shop . . .
the balding man requesting
Spiker styling glue

bellowing
at her son *At least fake*
that you're listening

the bigot stating
why Moses and Jesus
weren't Semites

the salesman noting
his wife and daughter provide
balance, ballast

Gramps admitting
he was a bookmaker,
not a bookkeeper

at Disneyland . . .
crowds watching Darth Vader
ride in a teacup

Math Lab sign . . .
a freshman changing *Math's a*
to an *e*

at the gravesite
of her Dad who killed himself,
screaming *Coward!*

the optimist,
looking at *p* and *u*,
thinking *up*

the pessimist,
looking at *p* and *u*,
thinking *pee-yew*

first-time parents
worrying their three month-old
has uttered no words

as penance
a Goth teen going out
for cheerleading

post-Election Day . . .
writing on losers' placards
Ha Ha!

her twin boys
practicing *Bolero*
on their tubas

for his birthday
a Leavenworth con wishing
for a pony

fog rolling in . . .
watching the Eiffel Tower
disappear

winning candidate
bolting upright from a dream,
screaming *Recount?!*

first-term governor
bolting upright from a dream,
screaming *Recall?!*

English Department

During the orientation of
First-year graduate students,
After all of his colleagues have
Introduced themselves and
Described their current research,
The department's eldest professor,
A world-renowned Shakespearean scholar,
Takes the floor and declares,
I'm a joker, I'm a smoker,
I'm a midnight toker.

Mexican mailman
learning the expression
going postal

the teenaged rebel
boasting that he was born
in June '66

a physics student
asking Professor Slope
whether he curves

realizing
his wife and Rottweiler
whine identically

obese passengers
referring to themselves
as *seatmates of size*

recalling how
his Dad told him, at fifteen,
to move out

a Californian
calling her son's kids in Maine
my grand-Skypes

pre-med student
thinking of changing her name
from Payne to Gaines

their professor
coming to the reception
with *Tupperware*

Sikh busboy wishing
the aged Jewish waiter
a *Gut Yontif*

urging her grandsons
to use only sweet words:
They're easy to eat

discovering
five students plagiarized
their Ethics papers

learning
the Ethics teacher padded
his resume

emanating
from a vegan's backpack ~
scents of a *Big Mac*

expressing dismay
her six year-old prefers *Jaws*
to *Finding Nemo*

a piggy bank
in hand, asking the teller
for penny wrappers

post-Sandy, in Queens . . .
slugging her spouse for saying
It could've been worse

not-so-grand rounds . . .
a nurse thinking *Asperger's*,
saying *Alzheimer's*

touring Kenya,
asking how one says *homesick*
in Swahili

shot in the head,
a teen walking himself
to the ER

answering
her child's *Who's Uncle Walter*
with *He gives you cash*

giving their prof
lower ratings for dining
at *Chick-fil-A*

compulsive gambler
betting nine grand on a cur
to win *best in show*

Dallas Hill, Jr.
addressing his father
as Big D

Mimi Weiss
calling her baby daughter
Mini Mi



I spend a lot of my time trying to draw the attention of actors to the minute and subtle details of human behavior, which was the sort of thing I was looking at when I was a neurologist.

Jonathan Miller



the mohel
asking the infant's father
to stop wailing

Thanksgiving morning . . .
reading the church sign, *Come in ~*
God loves all turkeys

old haberdasher
claiming he sells all jackets
but straight and yellow

a Bronx socialist
hating himself for liking
the Yankees

marijuana joint
falling out of his pocket
during sentencing

Seoul-born nurse wishing
chorea were not pronounced
Korea

the elderly vet
confessing he loves cats,
but hates their owners

a new temp watching
the thirty-year employee
getting canned

school bus stop . . .
the kindergartner kissing
his three dogs goodbye

one day post-birth . . .
her four-year-old brother asks
Is she staying?

turning down the prize
fearing he would need to give
an acceptance speech

a child asking
the rabbi if her kitten
must keep kosher

at LaGuardia,
post-Sandy . . . staring slack-jawed
at the runways' waves

viewing the impact
of Sandy . . . New York haters
in Lubbock in tears

her son calming down
by repeating his mantra
waffle fries

cyclists wishing
they had not named their child
after Lance Armstrong

Dr. Seuss party . . .
the obese man going as
Thing 1 **and** Thing 2

alone on Christmas
the boxer feeling pummeled
by depression

Michael Williams
dining with his son Mikel
and grandson Mei-Kyl

old black Southerner
noting why he loathes the term
people of color

refusing to spend
Thanksgiving with relatives
who don't have cable

the new convict
asking if she can have
a cell phone

the coach with cancer
getting a standing O from
five bald cheerleaders

a New York rabbi
wishing the Hindu pandit
a Happy Kwanzaa

finals week . . .
an overwhelmed prof fearing
death by e-mail

in the eighth minute
with his in-laws, punching
both fists through a wall

on her deathbed
diabetic Aunt Georgette
demanding cream puffs

their neighbor Jen
spelling her full name with
2 n's, f's, r's

the CEO
regarding soup kitchens
as Communist

explosives expert
showing off to co-workers
his tulip garden

gravely ill comic
uttering his last words:
Take my wife . . .

young Jewish Texan
blanching upon learning what
Corpus Christi means

a man approaching
the red light camera
with a custard pie

out of the closet,
thinking of changing his name
from Earl to Elton

a child cringing
as her immigrant Dad says
The men what went

Returns Department . . .

the new employee praying
for grace, honesty

pre final exam . . .

hearing a freshman mention

Forgot to study

pre final exam . . .

hearing a senior inquire

It's today??

Thu Phan of Pittsburgh

choosing to name her baby

Roethlisberger

the old man sensing

the spirit of a Greyhound

in his dachshund

a Jewish boy
asking whether fast days
could be jollied up

Aunt Mae replying
to *What is love?* with
an obscenity

Organic Chem prof
proctoring a brutal test
as he clips his nails

Valentine's Day . . .
buying for his wife perfume
with a pizza scent

four-year-old brother
requesting that the baby
be named Spiderman

Mom punctuating
a vicious insult with
Bless her heart

the refugee
addressing the judge
as *Your Honest*

a teen dreaming
about an Amish woman
named Lola Lamour

two sixth graders
debating which feels worse:
sadness or guilt

two fourth graders
debating which feels worse:
shame or a sore throat

her mother
preferring the sound of
Mrs. to Dr.

a girl trying
to persuade her parents
she's saintly

a boy trying
to persuade his teachers
he's humble

dichotomizing
her friends and relatives
as cats or dogs

You're driving me nuts! . . .
the teen's Dad responding
That's one short trip

a Muslim girl
suggesting a harpsichord
for her mosque

his child assuming
a comedy straight man
only dates women

the new prisoner,
in the mess hall, requesting
chamomile tea

the new prisoner
asking the burned-out guard
if they can be buds

teammates christening
their high-priced all-star pitcher

The Clubhouse Cancer

mother of two teens
seeking to purchase a dog
that can sniff for drugs

reminding
her vain, preening husband
that peacocks are males

recalling his youth,
the fullback notes *I was big*
when I was little

centenarian
handing her garbage man
a Christmas c-note

a cop mistaking
two teenaged Trekkies' phasers
for handguns

regretting
using his new pogo stick
on the staircase

regretting
carrying the good dishes
after eating ribs

regretting
attempting the pommel horse
while plastered

the prez refusing
to sit until he receives
a standing O

the bride replying
to the groom's *I love you*
with *Likewise*

homophobes fuming
that their daughter's fiancé
is named Marcel Gaye

an elderly man
trying to sell a cheese puff
resembling Nixon

Describe your mother . . .
the new patient responding
Prideful, spiteful

Describe your father . . .
the new patient answering
Mercifully absent

Describe your spouse. . .
the new patient replying
Best when drunk

Isaac Kahn
wanting to name his son
Genghis

Patrick Conn
wanting to name his son
Kublai

a child hoping
Santa Claus brings Congress
stinky cheese

in China . . . staring
at white dogs dyed partly black
to look like pandas

post-fight . . . the boxer
telling his screaming daughter
his face will be fine

staring in awe
as the sumo wrestler
prepares lunch

his niece requesting
a bowling ball with holes
for both hands

his nephew trying
to design a bowling ball
with holes for toes

eying the young prof
writing a letter to Mom
during commencement

eying the old prof
reading *Crime and Punishment*
during commencement

their mother placing
unwarranted Halloween treats
in Christmas stockings

their father placing
unwarranted Halloween treats
in Easter baskets

his son confusing
Hardy with Costello,
Laurel with Abbott

a pacifist
dreaming he's arm-wrestling
General Patton

asking Grandpa
whether village idiots
are elected

her husband loving
the concept of Brussels sprouts
but loathing their taste

Yuletide ER . . .
doctors study a rash shaped
like a Christmas tree

gibberish texts
leading his granddaughters
to suspect a stroke

gibberish texts
leading her grandparents
to suspect cocaine

their child insisting
John and Jon should not be
pronounced the same

once obese, giving
credit for his huge weight loss
to three terriers

informing his son
of the distinctions between
free spirit and *schmuck*

informing his wife
of the ways *look after* and
suffocate differ

three rabbis
on St. Patrick's Day
sharing slivovitz

the neurotic teen
winning the state spelling bee
with *Oedipal*

friendless man hoping
to survive the holidays
via opiates

five-year-old judge
using a *Tootsie Roll Pop*
as her gavel

six-year-old builder
using *Barbie* heads on sticks
as his hammers

a Met fan slugging
the Brave reaching in the stands
for a foul pop-up

overhearing
Great-Gramps mutter *Fiscal cliff*,
schmiscal cliff

a boy smiles, thinking
of the sharks' aquarium
shattering

first day of law school . . .
the new prof telling students
Work hard or fail

first day of law school . . .
the old prof telling students
Tickled to be here!

the teacher hoping
his lecture on Kierkegaard
goes viral

AIDS researcher
lighting one yahrzeit candle
for millions worldwide

celebrating
the end of his doctor's screed
by drinking bourbon

nine-year-old Martha
asking which sounds sexier:
Martie or Marthie

raging at her spouse
for referring to their dog
as *it*, not *she*

suicidal man
watching a YouTube clip
of giggling babies

at the wedding
Grandma looking away from
the cake with two grooms



*Think of what is stored in an 80- or a 90-year-old mind.
Just marvel at it. You've got to get out this information,
this knowledge, because you've got something to pass on.
There'll be nobody like you ever again.*

Studs Terkel



the elderly man
wishing to be called once
before dying *Hunk*

Timothy Slaughter,
a pre-vet, contemplating
a surname change

his child asking why
football players are using
pacifiers

job interview . . .
the applicant resting his feet
on the boss's desk

mocking the Mayans,
three mall retailers having
World Not Ending Sales

third grader guessing
Isaac Newton invented
cookies with fruit

Macy's men's room . . .
the baby changing station
annoying Granddad

Orthodox rabbi
feeling unease while eating
porcini mushrooms

TV weatherman
predicting no snow or ice . . .
a teacher screaming

mother of triplets
bragging to a Marine
she's seen combat

the anti-Semite
blaming Jewish immigrants
for Puerto Ricans

Cornell athlete
wishing *Big Red* didn't spark
thoughts of chewing gum

Southern Cal athlete
wishing *Trojans* didn't spark
thoughts of condoms

a gay couple
hoping to be the first on
The Newlywed Game

an overweight teen
vowing to switch from light
to dark chocolate

Define elf . . .

the grammarian replies,

Subordinate Claus

1/1, 2:00 a.m. . . .

the designated driver

hitting a skunk

the actor ruing

he makes his living saying

other people's words

Intro Psych, first class . . .

a freshman hoping to learn

ESP

Social Psych, first class . . .

a sophomore hoping to learn

how to attract guys

the one year-old
elating her Russian aunts
by enjoying borscht

placing a doo-rag
on the Richmond statue
of General Lee

educating
her husband that dryer lint
isn't dirt

meat-averse teen
regarding buckwheat groats
as close enough

veggie-averse child
wanting credit for eating
relish on hot dogs

100th birthday . . .

the Pol Pot survivor

feeling unworthy

family elder

not recognizing her grandson

out of sweats

therapy session . . .

the new patient presenting

his neighbor's nightmare

in court, Sol Goldman

defending the skinhead

who wishes him dead

four-year-old chef

placing slices of cheddar

in the toaster

irking his son
by pronouncing *croissant*
as the French do

her teen putting first
on his Resolutions List
Make triceps huge

his wife putting first
on her Resolutions List
Lose one chin

young Packer fan
choosing not to bother God
with touchdown requests

Polish man in Vail
claiming, for him, it's always
ski season

lifelong New Yorker
boasting he's never been
south of Brooklyn

college applicant
popping *Skittles* in her mouth
mid-interview

ER, Christmas day . . .
a three month-old presenting
with a bullet wound

firing her shrink
for eating in their session
a banana

a teen startling
the old judge by pleading
Guilty as hell

Jewish French chef
preparing a crepe du jour
filled with kasha

in church
their Dad promising the priest
not to snore again

the NRA veep
admitting his grandparents
were Eugene hippies

Ravens fan Ruth Cohn
introducing her newborn
Anquan

dedicating
the new book to his ex-wives,
misspelling their names

Great-Gramps trying
to recall whether he ever
killed someone

informing both sons
that his current mistress
is too old for him

drunk professor
bellowing at a freshman
It's ask, not ax!

devout Muslim
smelling bacon frying
in his sleep

a vegan telling
her baby the third piggy
had steamed rice

on Kol Nidrei
a Jewish girl vows to stop
being like Mom

patient of six years
asking his psychiatrist
if she's married

reading *writ large*,
the sophomore assuming
it's a typo

clinical psych prof
fuming that his grad students
don't read Joyce, Chekhov

her twelve year-old
asserting he's seeking
infamy

Aunt Faye asserting
her *Three Musketeers* bar
is medicinal

the cantor
trying to convince his son
shrimp tastes like tuna

their Dad revealing
that his youth was filled with
Good, wholesome trouble

Boston Celtics
in church . . . seeing halos,
thinking *dunk shots*

impoverished man
dreaming of using a knife
at dinnertime

the roofer,
battling severe depression,
guzzling malt liquor

top cheerleader
dreaming of marrying
the chess team star

Zhang Xun smiling
hearing Mandarin spoken
with a Bronx accent

the physicist
believing his Mom's cheesecake
has magnetic pull

ex SDS head
seething that his grandsons joined
the ROTC

her child pondering
how much more work he'd get done
if he didn't blink

two Warsaw natives -
one rightist, one leftist - noting
they're Poles apart

Manhattanite
calling the Chicagoan
semi-rural

down an icy street
their eight year-old lugging
on a snow shovel

with a labored breath
Gramps utters his last words:
Keep it real, homies

the Mafia don
trying hard to determine
who gave him the flu

evincing concern
her spouse finds pork products
so arousing

Pop wanting a job
for which he need not
shower after work

Aunt Fatima
refusing a *Hershey's Kiss*:
Looks like a nipple!

six year-olds using
the creases in Grandpa's face
to play tic-tac-toe

not realizing
the excellent listener
is hard of hearing

family picnic . . .
six cousins bringing melons,
mallets and goggles

Detroit hoops coach
teaching his pupils the art
of talking trash

Memphis hoops coach
teaching his pupils the art
of fouling subtly

Caroline Seaver,
a history buff, naming
her first child Julius

on their heads
eight-year-old soldiers wearing
unmatched pots

nursery school girl
placing one orange *Froot Loop*
on the bathroom scale

his wife chiding him
for not saying *God bless you*
when their dog sneezed

whispering
to her comatose daughter
to trust in the Lord

maternity ward . . .
Dachau survivor welcomes
his sixth great-grandson

Gramps expressing thanks
his child and teen memories
are blank or blurry

young Mel Schwartz
opting for the nickname
Rampage

first day at Princeton . . .
a freshman learning her Dad
in Beijing has passed

an Italian
touring Kansas, noting how
Florence, Lawrence differ

watching Uncle Ed
bring *The Sound and the Fury*
into the men's room

in the dugout
third-string catcher Walter Rice
sitting, steaming

after fumbling
benched halfback Curtis White
knowing he's toast

the high school athlete
distinguishing for Aunt Maude
hard, cut, ripped, shredded

old world scholar
perplexed people care about
football games' outcomes

the new graduate
writing to his professor
I make more than you

in her eulogy
the nine year-old noting Gramps
was a great speller

mother, wife, sons
of the Nobel laureate
keeping him humble

the hooker's daughter
wishing that her surname
were not Slutkin

doubles tennis match
in Shanghai . . . Wang and Wang
playing Wang and Wang

thoughts of Auschwitz
piercing the ninety year-old
in the smoky room

the alum showing
his sons the library nooks
where he slept

the alum showing
his sons the campus game room
where he studied

their teen promising
to change her car's oil every
fifty thousand miles

women's high hurdles . . .
Great-Granddad focusing
on the low-cut shorts

first evening in Rome . . .
an art student from Duluth
fracturing both wrists

the fourth grader
receiving a suspension
for shouting *Bang*

the eighth grader
receiving a suspension
for a vicious glare

retired one day,
Dad bringing to the attic
his leather wingtips

overly modest,
the baseball pitcher balking
at a compliment

asking the psychic
which marriage counselor
she'd recommend

the metallurgist
distinguishing *brazier*
from *brassiere*

less popular twin
referring to herself
as *the other*

How was Everest? . . .
their mountain-climbing son
responding *Fine*

Vassar Marxists
naming their firstborn child
Fidel Feinberg

Oberlin Marxists
naming their firstborn child
Ho Chi Minsky

Author's Note

Dr. Robert H. Deluty is the Associate Dean of the Graduate School at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County. He has been a psychology professor at UMBC since 1980, and was named Presidential Teaching Professor in 2002. He and his wife, Barbara (a clinical psychologist), live in Ellicott City, Maryland and have two children, Laura and David, and a granddaughter, Ava. Dr. Deluty's poems and essays have been published in *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Baltimore Sun*, *The Pegasus Review*, *Modern Haiku*, *Voices: The Art and Science of Psychotherapy*, *Psychiatric Times*, *Jewish Currents*, the *Journal of Poetry Therapy*, *Welcome Home*, *Muse of Fire*, *Maryland Family Magazine*, *Gastronomica: The Journal of Food and Culture*, and many other newspapers, journals, and anthologies. *The Knife and the Pumpkin* is his fortieth book.

