

# Larkinesque

By Michael Ryan

Reading in the paper a summary  
of a five-year psychological study  
that shows those perceived as most beautiful  
are treated differently,

I think *they could have just asked me*,  
remembering a kind of pudgy kid  
and late puberty, the bloody noses  
and wisecracks because I wore glasses,

though we all know by now how awful it is  
for the busty starlet no one takes seriously,  
the loveliest women I've lunched with  
lamenting the opacity of the body,

they can never trust a man's interest  
even when he seems not just out for sex  
(eyes focus on me above rim of wineglass),  
and who *would* want to live like this?

And what does beauty do to a man?—  
Don Juan, Casanova, Lord Byron—  
those fiery eyes and steel jawlines  
can front a furnace of self-loathing,

all those breathless women rushing to him  
while hubby's at the office or ball game,  
primed to be consumed by his beauty  
while he stands next to it, watching.

So maybe the looks we're dealt are best.  
It's only common sense that happiness  
depends on some bearable deprivation  
or defect, and who knows what conflicts

great beauty could have caused,  
what cruelties one might have suffered  
from those now friends, what unmanageable  
possibilities smiling at every small turn?

So if I get up to draw a tumbler  
of ordinary tap water and think *what if this were*  
*nectar dripping from delicious burning fingers,*  
will all I've missed knock me senseless?

No. Of course not. It won't.

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