

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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Source: *New and Selected Poems* (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2004)



Michael Ryan was born in St. Louis, Missouri in and was educated at the University of Notre Dame, Claremont Graduate School, and the University of Iowa. While at Iowa, Ryan was the poetry editor of *The Iowa Review*. Ryan has taught at colleges and universities across the country and is currently on the faculty at the University of California—Irvine.