Poetry Series

Sonny Rainshine

- poems -

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1 is Easy

One sex, one race, one religion, one face. One thought, one nation, one dream, one altercation—One is easy.

But gender, belief, and ethnicity, patriots and pariahs, authenticity, need not tender strife and bewilderment.

Two sexes and all between, a spectrum of creeds, not one, maybe fourteen, and dreams innumerable, left balancing right, one is not enough for any human heart.

One is easy but one is not enough.

100 Fireflies

He stayed up half the night collecting one hundred fireflies in a mason jar. Just before midnight he unscrewed the lid and released them inside the screen porch. Next door a man leaps high and says to his wife: Oh! Magic!

21st Century Rant

Growth! Progress! Expansion!
Then downsize it all when it gets too bloated, and if that doesn't work, lower the borrowing rates so that the downsized people can get become Better Consumers and get deeper in debt.

Encourage the poor to buy that home with the white picket fence, even though they can barely make ends meet, then who will be the one to tell them that the payments are too high and foreclosure is the only answer? Can we at least keep the white picket fence? they ask.

I suppose there was a time when people went shopping only when they needed to buy bread and things to live on; When did it become a citizen's duty to keep the economy afloat while filling our homes with worthless junk, all bought on credit?

The time has come to pause.....

3 Seconds Before the Shot

The brown doe for a moment mesmerizes the boys in camouflage, broadcasting a telepathic message: I stand before you here, majestic as Nature, graceful as a ballerina, my beauty is never-ending and will lodge in your heart, as the bullet will in mine long after this deed is done.

A Bow to Film Noir

Still warm on the scarlet chaise: a silver pistol, small enough to fit into a purse; lethal enough to send a man to his reward.

Sprawled on the thick-piled royal blue carpet: a man savoring his reward, handsome, immaculately suited, dead.

The woman at the window: relaxed, confidant, smiling, flicks the ashes from a Lucky Strike and watches the flickering neon sign outside the sleazy motel.

Vacancy; VACANCY; vacancy; VACANCY; vacancy; VACANCY; That's a laugh, she thought, eyes gazing vacantly.

A Homeopathy of the Heart

You sprinkle fresh ginger on your rice, and spearmint enhances your tea. Your hair is scented with plumeria leaves,

but your heart lies unseasoned and your mind is bland. No rich condiments can be found in your conversation.

Come out of your misty world of aromatherapy and esoteric alchemy and reveal to me the ordinary magic hidden in there.

A Leaf Refuses to Fall

The leaves don't let go that easily either. It takes a bluster, a filabuster of north wind, and the wasp-sting of the first chill of late September to tear them off the page of summer.

Persuasion doesn't do it. Sometimes in the middle of winter, (the DEAD of winter, as they say) you might see one shriveled oakleaf, dangling from a frozen filament of stem, defiant, victorious.

Nothing likes to end; the October wind invites the leaf to tango in the frosty air. A shy curtsey, a twirling turn, a pirouette, then the dance is over and only the bare fingers of the tree remain.

A Thousand Times Bitten

Bobby became a misanthrope after losing hope in the goodness of man. He found he could not cope with the everyday stings of human malice and he became callused, despondent.

Time after time he offered his heart to his fellow beings in part because, like all of us, he needed love and hoped to rise above the cynicism of antisocial attitude.

But people like Bobby collapse like the sensitive plant when touched, and repeated unkindnesses caused him to lose the hope he clutched in what it means to be human.

Now he lives among us all, separated by an invisible wall that protects but also banishes him from experiencing the warmth and joy of the common ground of being human; this man has become an island, severed and free from you and me.

A Wealth of Piety

He prayed to Christ; he prayed to Krishna; he even wished upon a star.

He said a novena; he chanted esoteric mantras; he bought a rabbit's foot.

He journeyed to Mecca; he knelt at the Wailing Wall; he crossed his fingers and hoped to die.

He studied Kabbala; he pored over astrological tables; he paid the palm reader generously.

After years of supplications; litanies, liturgies, and libations; after sacrifices and renunciation

of his sins and shortcomings, he at last became a wealthy man at 98 years old and died with his fingers still crossed.

A Wilderness without You

Particles of our last conversation fuse with the droplets of the mist, and the last word you said, goodbye, hovers below the lush hemlocks, then descends to the needled forest floor alighting like a toy parachute.

What remains is the primitive splendor any wilderness affords, of places shielded from "development" and man's fixation on building houses and office space from materials once round, now cubed and planed. Sand and wood transmogrified.

The quieting balm of running water and the whisper of wind through the conifers was always enough to salve my bruised soul, the chafed cicatrix of every day living. But now, the curative essence is diminished, the empty space right next to me that once held your form and your laughter seems colder than before, less real.

It was always you and nature, nature and you, for so many years. I see a long, long season ahead in which I must become acquainted with nature and loneliness, loneliness and nature and tender reminiscences.

After the Age of Innocence

At the age of 62, Jack asked himself the ageless questions: how should I live my life? What must I give, and what will I take?

For it seemed to him that the things people called most holy rested solely on a rejection of the world,

a vague longing for some perfect person, some perfect thing that would bring them peace, happiness.

Here, on this earth after 62 years, all his fears converged

and he wondered what was worthy, what was true, what matters at 62. Can we know?

After the Flowering Season

Can I love them for what they were, after the wind, once their friend, has incised their delicate necks, like an ethereal Nosferatu, famished for the taste of death.

By then, in early December, after the first snowfall, only emaciated stems, sapless, colorless fingers pointing to the elements as if to say: Assassin, my nemisis, I am betrayed.

Will it be enough to remember the violets, the crimsons, the subtle greens that not that long ago mirrored the sun back in colors that seemed to make love to my senses.

Looking there, to the place where life vibrated and now is stilled, will sadness rise, anger? Winter will tell me all these things; he will tell me soon enough, and most willingly; but summer is singing, and since it's a short song I have to stop and listen.

After the Rain

One Chinese lantern, forgotten when the lawn party was spoiled by a summer downpour, waves in the drizzly wind from a nylon string. Something sad in the air comingles with the fragrance of yellow jasmine, yes yellow jasmine.

After the Sonnet Ends

After the sonnet ends it begins.
The final word glistens suspended on a string like an industrious spider on strands slender as pins, like a trapeze artist's precarious swing.
The minstral invites you to take the gift of vases of words and decanters of wit and parse them in your mind and shift the meanings and the mores to fit the memories of music and rhyme in the repository of your mind and perhaps to recall some other time, and in the recollection find another starting point where the thought ends, still another meaning where the line bends.

After Words

Marlene, a famous grammarian, spent her final years if-ing and because-ing and whether-ing, neither-ing and nor-ing: trying to connect the intricate clauses of her past.

In her younger years she had to-d and before-d, of-d and until-d, making each preposition a loaded proposition dangling at the corner of her lips.

She smeared her middle years with nouns, like Love and Beauty, and her yearning for immortality was reflected in her use of infinitives: to live, to engage, to aspire, to create.

Now, at 94, she feels that language has betrayed her; she wonders if she has identified the mechanics of speech, the expression of living, but failed to see the underlying current behind the words.

In conquering speech so precisely, in defining so eloquently the meaning of being alive, she has neglected to live it.

Age of Degeneration

As to the fate of the universe, some who claim to know maintain that it is expanding, not contracting, and is simple to explain.

Two final phases, then eternity, the Age of Degeneration, then the Age of Photons, will thus ignite a continuum of illumination.

In the penultimate phase, things will disintegrate; the fabric of matter will rip apart, molecules will disseverate.

In the last phase,
In
the
last
phase, all that will remain,
are tiny flickers of light,
off and on, like fireflies,
electrifying the night.

If then all is to end in a twinkle, and you and I dissolve into a blink, then power up your neon sign and greet me with a wink.

Something magnificent it will be: twinkle, twinkle, near and far, tiny dots like fireflies captured in a boundless jar.

An Exchange with Change

Precipitously balanced on the crux of change, I sometimes long for flatter land away from the tumult and the flux, a niche where I can stand.

But the spinning wheel of passing time insouciantly lengthens its strand, and the bells of chapel belfries chime and the hourglass spills its sand.

This azure and emerald globe spins too fast; There's barely time to get our living done. Sometimes I see the mythology of my past, and how many miles further I have to run.

The clouds, they don't stay, even the sun sputters and spins; We hurry our lives and worry our deaths, but eventually impermanence wins.

An Oak's Progress

An acorn drops, piercing the leafy humus. Heavy rain in the night entrenches it in the soil.

Leaves conceal it from foraging squirrels, and wind-sifted sunlight stirs growth within and splinters its protective walls.

Probing, thirsty roots like drills burrow for water.

Frail, taut shoots thrust in the opposite direction succumbing to the upward pull toward light— in it for the long haul.

The trunk grows muscular, and calluses with bark; branches terminate in twigs. Spring buds foliate, flowers burgeon, and fructify. And then An acorn drops.

Anagram 4 U

I've been known to strip a horse of hide and hair and all; I take what I want with no remorse though I am weak and very small.

Maybe you know me by my scientific name Hymenoptera Formicidae Myrmicinae I'm called. But if you run into me I could make you lame and you'll be quite appalled.

I am a:

(Unscramble) : der rife tan.

Anatomy of a Rejected Lover

The scree and detritus of dislodged pain, an avalanche of emotions, splits the air like rain.

Waves of seismic rattlings, quiver through his nerve endings like an unstable weather trough.

And the Grass Said

Funny how things fall out of fashion, sad too.

There was a time, before mine, when a grass lawn was looked upon as a confirmation of its owner's indolence, or lassitude, or arrogance, or indifference.

Visitors would sit on the front porch, scanning the realm before them as they sipped their ice tea on the lookout for green. Is that a weed over there? No, it's the boys' yoyo, its string crawling, creeping out like young roots.

Nary a single fledgling dandelion would escape the glistening blade, the guillotine for grass, of my grandmother's religiously sharpened hoe.

Shag carpets, shaggy dogs, French poodles, German Sheperds, rhymed poems, postmodernism, all done now, well done like a good steak.

But the grass came back, all Darwinian and willing to live, and the grass said:
The earth is for the living and I am as perennial as the sun itself.

Another Light in the Window

This time will you ascend like Icarus, like a kite with no tail, without a string, with no-one on the ground to anchor you?

Or, will you, like last time, creep near the ground, like English ivy, or like kudzu out of control; or like a freight train roll, destination unknown, all aboard.

This time take me with you. Don't walk out on life, because when you flee, you flee from me and am I not your friend?

I worry.
Tomorrow night, or the one after, or the week after, or maybe two months, or five years later, my phone will ring and it will be you—.

We cannot, we must not, build our relationship around departures and promises.

Stay! Stand! Sit! Breathe.

I have more to say to you than goodbye.

Apology for Poetry

Some say that people who like poetry live in a rarefied world populated with pretty words and impractical thoughts and naivete.

Yet, who among us have to be told that a great deal of life is drudgery and routine, that there are bills to be paid, that there are people who do not wish us well.

People who love poems know that a simple arrangement of words will not re-arrange the world; that ideals are sometimes never achieved and that simply putting suffering into words will not abolish it.

We poetry-lovers do not need to be reminded that the world is not always turtle-doves and red roses, but we do submit that it can be.

Arguing with the Echo

I sat down on the rim of the canyon, and bawled then bellowed that that promise, that that compromise that I consented to at this very spot lay now at the bottom all broken up, deposited there by me.

By me, by me, by me, my echo mocked.

Yes, by you; by you, by you, my ears cocked to wait for the silence that hushed both the echo and its source.

It was then that that understanding, that that tender wisdom that resignation and acceptance bestow, enveloped me and the clean sensation of self-forgiveness and regeneration returned to me, resonating like an echo.

Arrow of Time

>t >>>t >>>>ti >>>>tim >>>>>time >>>>>time >>>>>time >>>>time >>>>time >>>time >>>time >>>time

Art Forgery

In what she referred to as Reverse Art, she decided to re-create Van Gogh's "Sunflowers" in an arrangement of real blooms on the kitchen table. Afterwards she would photograph and then paint what she saw.

She succeeded admirably in getting every stem in exactly the right angle, every blossom in the perfect pose, removing petals, bending stems, artificially wilting some of the buds with a heat gun.

She had a ceramics expert mold and paint a precise replica of the two-toned vase.

On completion, she stepped back and declared her "painting" authentic, but a failure.

What was absent was the startling sunlight of Provence and the flowers' response to it, which was the painter's response to it. These flowers droop and bow with the punishing weight but cannot wholly absorb the exquisite passion, the contorted brush-strokes of indescribable anguish.

Art Movies and Naked Love

That night, that night we watched Roshoman again on Sundance for the fouth time even, you told me you thought you loved me but you couldn't be sure.

Kurosawa, you said, was right. We can never be completely sure.

Not completely sure, I struggled, but sure enough.

The last time we watched Roshoman, I asked you to marry me and we did not consult Japanese directors, nor did we try to reconstruct the scene of the crime.

Yes.

Assisted Living

I remember a miasma of scented bath powder and the funereal fragrance of lilies. This fusion of odors clutched onto visitors in the vestibule and pursued them to the catacombs of the ill and dying.

My mother found herself among the ill and dying and became one of them.

Woodmeadow Assisted Living Facilities—the home, she called it. "Compartments of the damned," she dubbed it.

Our conversation always seemed to drift toward home and memories of houses. And my mother's reminiscences arose and coalesced with the floral emanations and bloomed in a way.

There was one house in which I had lived the bulk of my boyhood. "What happened to the house on Route 12?"

"I don't remember that house." she said, crinkling her forehead to squeeze out the data, dry.

"The house where I planted the red maple tree; where you planted candelabra bushes on the hill; The house I remember most. The house with the pomegranate tree. Remember the house?"

"It burned down." She said and looked out the solitary window, wondering. "It looks like rain."

Assumptions

Yes, we all know what comes from assuming: that it makes you and me morph into donkeys, (who may not be as irrational as their reputation, considering they are masters at avoiding work) but do we not habitually indulge in assumption?

When I start up my 1997 Chrysler Concord each morning, I assume it will transport me to my place of work, but will it? It might.

When I put on a kettle for tea, I trust that obliging flames will get the water inside all excited, assuring me of gratification at hand.

When I retire at night, I take it for granted that Mr. Sandman will do his magic, but sometimes he never shows up; sometimes he overstays.

And what about the sun? Won't it shine tomorrow, or the next day? It should; but what if it explodes tomorrrow? Could.

I'm told that death and taxes are beyond assumption, fixed features. But there are tax-evaders, and some believe in after-life.

Assumptions, it seems to me, are not the fodder of fools, but essential aspects of me and you. We could not live without them.

Auntie Depressant

[Whenever she saw me feeling a bit under the weather or blue a long-dead aunt of mine used to offer the following remedy]:

Recollect the perfect moment in your life. [YOUR life, not someone else's, and not the IDEA of a perfect moment—you're not Plato, after all.]

Do it!

It has to be true and it has to be you.

Well.... I'm waiting....

Here's some music to help you think:

"I wish I wuz an apple, a hangin' on a tree; an' every time my sweetheart passed, she'd take a bite of me."

Thank you very much.

Got it yet? Good. Now, contemplate this event with no regrets and no nostalgia. Just the tenderest memory.

Now, don't you feel better? A little?

Autumn Haiku

The last delicate white butterfly, drunk with nectar, folds his wings and sleeps.

Backyard Peace Pact

They can get along:
Birds, squirrels, insects,
even dogs and cats
if given a bit of encouragement.
Outside my window, under the maple tree,
the secret of diplomacy
and tolerance is arrayed
each day.

Conversely, man sees some "other" beside him and ruffles his feathers, growls, and declares war.

Bad Weather for Pretty Words

```
``its r``ain`ing```
on``my`rhymes`
it's```ra`ining``
`on my``rondel`
```

It's * * snow *ing * on my ***son*net * it's sn * * owing* * * on my * song

o it's hail o ing ooo on my o o hai ooo ku it's o o o hailing o o on my oo hymn.

Bad weather, man, for writing poetry.

Balanced Equation

You used to say you wanted to be a like a river, but you were not like that.

A river has resolve; a river has a source, has a destination.

You used to say you wanted to be like snow, but could not be.

Snow seeks ground, collects itself, is malleable.

You used to say you wanted to be like music, but that was not true.

Music has cadence, has point and counterpoint, has meaning.

You used to say you wanted to be like me, and you are.

When we are together we are like the music of snow on the river.

Ballad of the Common Man

Just like ole Tom Joad in the Grapes of Wrath, he defends the down and out and seeks the higher path.

His hero is Woody Guthrie who said this land is ours; he longs to raze the strip malls and cover them with flowers.

He believes in New Deal values and good old charity. He salutes the common man and thinks he should be free.

He thinks money is fine but brotherhood is divine. Money means very little in the bread line.

Just like John Lennon, he imagines a different view: A better world, a sweeter life for me and for you.

Bamboo

| | One = | | bamboo stalk = | | stately = | | and strong. Sonny Rainshine

Bathing in Beauty

Cornflowers and asters in fragrant meadows, where a goat with a goatee poses and a dappled cow lows, please me more than English gardens and potted ferns and pink hibiscus in mock Grecian urns.

Wild violets and modest white daisies delight more than intricate hedge-mazes, while happy black-eyed Susans dispense their happy infusions

and incite me to plunge into the scen'ry and take a bath along the fringed and frayed path and wait for the fragrance and the salubrious air to divest me of all distress and care.

Beach Music Echo

These days, on soundless evenings, those August afternoons in Biloxi on the beachflimsy shrill transister radios screeching out a Motown hit—resurface and I don't care that love is not like that.

Beach Music Remix

These days, on understated evenings, those August afternoons in Biloxi on the beachflimsy shrill transister radios planted in the sand screeching out a Motown hit—resurface and I don't care that love is not like that.

Bean Seedling

What impetus, what push! The minute embryo, so fragile and yellow flings open the hemispheres of the bean as if they were brown shutters flung open on a sultry day.

Poking, propelling, drilling up through the musty earth, eluding earthworms and established roots of dandelions and vetch, the stem drives up, as saturated with energy as a live power cord, as brimming with fuel as a pipeline.

Toward something it cannot see, the sun, it strives. Once the process has ignited, there's no turning back toward the consoling dark earth, mother earth, yet scraggly roots drill a network down the opposite way, never to feel the warmth of the sun or to bask in the glory of the flamboyant flower and fruit, but vital still toward the birth and maturation of a bean.

Beds

So much is about beds. My father's sickbed became his deathbed.

When I had my appendix out, I heard the nurse's new name for me: Bed Number Two.

My roommate, Bed Number One, complained unceasingly about his assigned bed and wanted mine.

Until I was seven I wet my bed. My brother said I did in on purpose.

Even when we fall in love, what do we do? We go to bed.

My mother said: You made your bed, now lie in it.

Then she said: Life is no bed of roses, ole pal.

Beds, then, are nothing but trouble. When it gets warm maybe I'll sleep on the grass.

Bee's Eye View

And they call ME the busy one. Look at him there, thoughts buzzing around his brain like flies to carrion.

So superior, assured that his enterprises are more than mere gathering of nectar and making honey, which he calls money.

Perpetually biting his own kind with his barbed tongue and war-like nature.

Flitting, flirting, flouncing from one cup of calamity to another, his smugness smudging his chin like dusty curry, like pollen, stirring up the hive of language, words fluttering and cluttering up the air.

Oh, what a bother and a burden that I and my brethren are mandated with the duty of rescuing him from his folly now and then with a guided missile, a strategically aimed sting at a tender target.

Bias

In ancient sacrificial rites why did they slaughter the lamb and not the lion?
Too inconvenient.

In modern sacrificial rites why is bias often directed toward the weak, the meek, those who stray from the herd? So convenient.

Birds of America

So much has been said about the lark, about the thrilling trilling of the nightingale, about wrens, sparrows.

But I wouldn't know one if I saw one. Every day little brown and gray birds hold congress in my backyard, then scatter like October leaves with no warning, all in perfect unison, like precision dancers.

Someday, I say to myself, (careful that no-one else hears) I'll buy an Audubon Birds of America or a National Geographic Guide to Northamerican Birds. Yet, something tells me I may never.

Still, I know
that those plumed creatures
foraging through last summer's
marigold heads,
don't know my name either,
and will never buy
Audubon's Guide to Humans
of Northamerica,
but they'll nod to me
when I leave them
a scoop of sunflower seeds
mixed with a handful of good intentions
to get us all through the winter.

Birth of a Rebel

Near the terminus of the twentieth cent ury, he began to stut ter and became more ec centric. The centrifugal for ces of grav ity weighed on his abil ity to cope. He cata púlted toward a wayward flux and previously pedes trian processes seemed impenetrably insol uable. Mysterious. Arcane. True and beyond the polarity of conservvvvva tism or liberal ism or the impediments of speech. SUDDENLY, something smouldering in his soul rupted and a schism of Self and The Status Quo bloomed and fruited.

Henceforth, he cried,
I will no longer Settle,
as sediment settles
on the riverbed. I will not
accept the fourth best
or the fifth. I will not excuse
my fellow man for his iniquities
because he is a man
or because she is not.
I will speak
and I will not pause
for air.

Black Ice

Like an atom or a molecule, it is there, but you can't see it, or like the vibration suspended in the air after a chord has been played on a piano.

Obstacles that could not be circumvented because you did not see them ahead—slippery, dangerous—black ice lurking on a highway in the dead of night, disguised, camoflaged, waiting. If only you had seen this tribulation or that consequence, you might have swerved or braked.

Black Rainbow

It was as though she were writing her memoirs on black paper with black ink— all the words were there; all the details, but nothing was revealed; all was sealed in a penumbra of dark matter, the events were camoflaged like Elizabethan blackwork on black satin.

But by cloaking her identity in enigmatic conundrums and deliberate inscrutability, she paid a price. She became an insoluable riddle, like the locked-room mysteries of John Dickson Carr. The onion-peel layers of her profundity hardened into inpenetrable shields, entrapping her heart and all her emotions.

Inevitably, she became a phantom, a blackbird in the night, so perfectly absorbed in obscurity that not only can we not see her, she can no longer see herself.

Blue Flame

It always seemed incongruous to me that a flame could be blue, blue as a cold, hard sapphire is. Fire should be red or yellow or orange—warm colors, and blue reserved for the sea and the firmament.

But yet, even the sky at times turns to fire colors, purloining from the sun, and the ocean in certain light seems green as pine needles.

Is nothing then dependable? Prisms and spectrums and light are magicians who trick us, and sometimes surprise us. Who do they think they are? Picasso?

Blue Water on Cloudless Days

A little boy found a blue rock in the street. He showed it to his mother who believed it to be very valuable, perhaps a sapphire. Why, it is the color of the lake where your father used to take us before he died—the lake on a cloudless day. She placed the stone in her jewelbox to have examined later.

One day the little boy stole the sapphire, walked down to the jetty on the lake, let out a piercing wail and hurled the stone as far as he could. The echo from the splash punctured the peace as the jewel-like ripples dispersed and then sank.

Bored with the Keys

There's no ESC, he's lost CTRL, he needs to Shift gears and consider Alt resolutions. All his dreams have been Del and he can't get back to Home the gate is open but he cannot Enter. No matter how much he tries to Pause/Break the cycle the Scroll of life is in Lock status. He can no longer keep Tab on his emotions and worries it's the End and that he will no longer be able to Function in the key of daily living. He wonders if his being has descended to 0 or to a more rounded O. All he can do is take a backspace and attempt once again the solution to everything under the sun: Reboot.

Bouquet of Vengeance

She sent him a dozen withered roses with a note:

One for each year of our relationship. Smell it?

Breaking Things and Putting Them Back Together

Your thoughts are porous, like corkboard, like the prongs of a starfish or the crevices of a sea-sponge. Your heart is habitually ruptured, splintered into tiny portions of passion. You feel things.

But is not a broken heart a changed heart, stronger, a better heart?

Broken English

Because he was broken she spoke to him in broken English, in spoken anguish, in sighs.

She resolved to mend him, to exorcise all the trouble, trouble, trouble trouble, the heartbreak the broken heartbeat of his past.

He listened to the pulse of her empathy, the pah, pah, pah, pah of sympathy and something opened, something wept inside him, something kept secret and sacred.

She saw in his history a happy ending, or an ending that converged with her beginning; with him she would break through the inadequacies of language and make him understand the authenticity of her passion.

Broken Food Chain

The ragged coyote gazes up at the orbiting hawk, mesmerized, ravenous, impressed.

The golden-winged hawk gazes down at the pacing coyote, as if into a crystal ball. She is brave, but she is weary.

If you were not my sustenance, you might be my brother. Circling, pacing, waiting: prey upon prey.

Broom Sage

He called it broom sage, I guess because it was once used to make them.

Clumps of it were everywhere, blondish sheaves, heads up, looking as though a thousand determined homemakers had gone on strike and abandoned their sweeping chores.

It looked pretty there against the plain white daisies and edging the purpling fruits of dewberries kissing the ground.

It was our neighbor, Mr. Ladner, who named the flora and the fauna for me. I imagined him Adam cataloging the denizens of paradise.

It was he who showed me where to find the best wild grapes, where to see wild turkeys or to hear their haunting yap, yap, yap.

It was he who told me that man is good, but not all he's cracked up to be, not everything.

Mr. Ladner has long gone off for other edens or other dimensions. But I still own a sage-brush broom and on those days when life seems mostly memories, I take it from the closet and sweep, sweep. Shhhhh....

Brown Recluse

Oh, you spindley, ascetic misanthrope, why do you scuttle about dark recesses, lurking, waiting?

Why so withdrawn? What made you retire from the company of your fellow arachnids?

Some would call you antisocial, even a sociopath, creeping about, crawling about on tiptoes, dispensing your venom when approached, hiding in shoes.

Ouch!

Bullying the Bully

Though it may seem so, yielding is not a passive thing; to withdraw from strife is a massive thing, rife with intention.

Sometimes it takes more courage to refuse to fight, to allow the bully to misuse his might and fully reveal his inhumanity.

Valor is a shifting word, that presumes a point of view. What's right for me may not be true for you, so let's just let it be.

Candace Spells It Out

Talk to me not of infatuation and roses; fatuous poses are for the young and the hungry tongue of rhymster and harlequin.

Do not conjure up dervishing sensations to twirl in my mind, the dizzifying kind that ravish my senses and leave me wide-eyed like someone withdrawing from nicotine.

Refrain from "rescuing me." Leave me to float or miss the boat or gulp the water or the air, if you really care.

Sit next to me, here on this bench in the park, closer.

K-I-S-S M-E, dammit!

Can't See Utopia Because of the Myopia

It's hard. It's hard to see the hardship that arises when we neglect the signs. When we can read only what's before us and not between the lines.

It's easy. It's easy to procrastinate to ease the heaviness of our guilt, in knowing that those who come after us will live in the chaos we have built.

So many of our problems today are probably the result of the past generations' failure to connect, to understand that nothing can be left to chance and that all things intersect.

Can we flash lies into the eyes of children, claiming that their assigned time here on earth, is just as important as ours and full of meaning and worth.

Yes, it's hard to envision a future we will not be here to see. But each generation is beholden to the one before, and that would be you and me.

Caroline Puts a Damper on the Blues

Even the verbena, started in May from seed, seemed defeated, vanquished, resigned to the desiccating drought. Any condensation was doomed from the start, swallowed up by the thirsty wind.

Like the shrieking choirs of cicadas, and the harping crickets, Caroline sang also, deprived not of rain but of tenderness. Rain, rain, drain away the pain, she sang.

But echoing back, stoic, unmoved, aridity ran its course, both in the air and in her deepest self.

Moving like lightning, voice thundering, she dug up the verbena, resolute, transplanted it into a pot, watched it 'til nightfall, watered it and waited vigilent.

Carrie Contemplates the Curtains

Carrie Gray gazed at the gauzy curtains billowing ghostly in the summer's dwindling breeze.

How like me you are, she thought: suspended there, anchored only by a nail or two, fluttering and flouncing so foolish.

Like loosely woven fabric, I too filter out the dust and dampness of existence, capturing the fine particles of tribulation and jubilation in the overlapping threads of thought and of destiny.

From a distance, I appear fresh-laundered and crisp; but look closely and you'll see the grime of hardship, flecks of disappointment and the remnants of youthful dreams lodged there in the wrinkles and the folds.

Chasing (and Catching) the Rainbow

Not too many people believe in Utopias any more. The last movement occurred in the youthful, idealistic 1960s when fresh-faced college kids became convinced that we as human beings could surely do better than this; that King's dream was more than a dream and the mountain top was attainable.

And yet, it seems that Utopias—call them El Dorados, Edens, Shangri-las, whatever—should never go the way of disillusionment and loss of innocence. As long as I can believe that a world where cooperation and brotherhood is at least a possibility, though an improbability, then maybe, just maybe, the morning star will seem a tiny bit brighter tomorrow.

Cheap Noir

Penny dreadfuls they used to call them. Dreadful but cheap like a \$3 bottle of wine.

Fine entertainment, though. Two hundred pages of passion,

fashion of the forties, feathered hats, and hat pins,

sins and shiny pistols, Veronica Lake hair, Alan Ladd intensity,

immensity of neon, everything was black and white then. Kill me; no, kiss me. Which will it be?

Got a light?

Chimera

An icy rain. A coyote stands shivering in my back yard. Lost.

Christmas Haiku

Once upon a time it was about peace, goodwill, not about shopping.

Circuitous Thoughts

In spring at the equinox things become more fluid.

I become contemplative as a druid, restless as a fox.

At summer solstice passion collects and pools.

Intensity
Dies down and cools
and becomes a soothing poultice.

A calendar I don't require to tell me it's the first day of fall.

I feel it in my being I sense its call I know its fire.

But winter takes me by surprise; I'm never quite ready.

When the first snow is falling deep and steady I only have to realize

that another year has passed and that this icy interval will not last.

City Vignette

He mixes a pitcher of gin martinis.

She weeps when he tells her the ice cubes have bruised the liquor, because it makes her remember her past.

Her tears turn the concoction saline, and a Stan Getz bossa nova pours passion and jazz into the glasses and mingles with the Mediterranean taste of green olives.

The gauzy curtains at the open window filter the murmur of the nocturnal street sounds of the city— laughter, footsteps the howl of a madman.

All the night, and all its sounds, are funneled into two glasses, half-empty on a kitchen table in a walk-up apartment in America.

Cloud Burst

How many tints can a cloud contain; And does it steal them from the sun? What uncharted shades of gray undulate amid this collision of vapors and spray?

Stay here today with me and witness the cloud burst that races over the hills first and then shrouds our little house on the hill with curtains of opaque fluidity.

Let our jubilation burst and flow through us both and into the air around us. To the elements we will betroth ourselves; thus after the rain has passed our gratitude will last and all that color, all that drama will warm our ordinary days like the sun.

Coming of Age

He looked straight ahead and saw a man walking in front of him. He looked to his right to see him walking next to him. He looked over his shoulder to see him receding behind, fading, faster, farther: His youth.

Coming to Terms with a Cherry Tree

Next spring find yourself a blossoming cherry tree; free yourself to tarry and focus; find the locus of the essence of the matter before you: new and old; gray and black; white, deep pink; think of juxtapositions, of contrasts, of how beauty lasts only a season or two and how it relies on its ties to opposites to manifest itself: ancient branches new-born blooms; gnarly wood, fragile petals; peace settles into the interdependency of all living things and brings to us a gift of harmony-an acquiescence, gratitude, a giving-in.

Concentrated Bliss

Bail out, bail out of the centrifuge of regret, the maelstrom of resentment; shirk the phantom star of self-destruction.

Accept the polarity of experience, but do not submit to emptiness and anguish; turn toward the beam of every smile and laugh without restraint.

Joy runs and joy streams on like alpine brooks and April rain. Let it flow over you and then let it go.

Conch Shell

Conch shells in pyramids are stacked impeccably in the voluptuous heat, enormous severed ears. Flushed and pinkish as a newly bathed infant's face. The outer lobe seems supple and frail. Hollow, deserted, dislocated, and vacant, they ressemble ornate abandoned houses.

Inside corridors meander and circle inward, like a loosely wound scroll, coiling, curling.

Physicists say that all the universe is a spiral. Galaxies are merry-go-rounds, giddy with motion, and the double helix will tell us who we are. Roses unfurl in swirls.

We spin and piroutte from birth, splicing our energy with the great pulse of the planet, envisioning it eddying toward something as benign and beautiful as a perfect conch shell.

Constance's Tree

You're always dropping things friends, lovers, world view just as in November deciduous trees reduce their sap and strew

their cloaks of leaves and fruits and nuts merciless to the ground below. And like the unremorseful tree, you never weep or know

feelings of regret or discouragement, only a sense of lightness and content.

Look then down at last year's leaves, we whom you have done with. There will come a time when those you've had fun with

and cast aside will remember your rejections and phoniness and you'll live the rest of your life in isolation and loneliness.

Conversation with My Pillow

I resent my pillow.

How you lie there fluffed (or waiting for a fluff from me), smug, full of yourself, puffed up.

You little shape-shifter, dream weaver, soul-devouring lozenge, sharing my bed as though we're wed.

Full of air and synthetic feathers from synthetic birds of prey: Release my troubled thoughts, my tormented dreams, and yes, my hopes for better days and lovely things from your repository of soporific curios.

Oh, that's right, you profess to be deaf and dumb, inanimate. How convenient.

Oh, well, tonight I'll have more fodder for your insatiable absorbancy. Safeguard them well, my dreams. You know me better than anyone else in the world.

Cool Down: A Lover's Lament

Just like bindweed and the dandelion, you keep coming back, perplexed that everyone fails to see your obvious prettiness and stalwart petitions for love and admiration.

Like kudzu run amok you twine and writhe around other living things until they choke, broken and surrendering.

A friend cuts you down here and you spring up down there, the roots of your ego subterranean and expansive.

Cool down. You don't have to kill the garden to take your place among the flowers there.

Corazon, Coeur, Herz

If you break it: hear deep within your ear the art.

Corazon, coeur, Herz: only the Spanish can impart

the sound of the region where both blood and love start.

How to settle on a word that represents the profundity of the heart?

Counting Cathedrals

Is there anything as beautiful as an old Amish man at prayer? Yes, is there anything as beautiful as Nepalese monks dreaming of golden lotus petals at sunrise? Yes, is there anything as beautiful as a five-year-old astonished by the slow jetes of grasshoppers in the dewy grass of a September morning? Yes, is there anything as beautiful as a simple prayer meeting in the basement of a cinderbrick chapel? Yes, is there anything as beautiful as high mass at St. Patrick's in the city? Yes, is there anything as beautiful as the quiet watch and wait of a Quaker meeting house? Yes, is there anything as beautiful as good people who have no specific belief or faith but who know that Goodness and Peace are real? Yes, there are countless ways to say yes.

Crayola Crayons-Super Pack

White roses, white linens, kitchen appliances, automobiles. Color disturbs you, wrinkles your equilibrium, violates your sense of decorum.

Magenta! Scarlet! Chartreuse! Emerald Green! Shocking Pink! Black! Take that!

Creativity, Imagination

Placing a battery powered light inside a white balloon, the little girl set it sail one night and called it the moon.

Cri de Coeur

An Amazonian rainforest.
Sounds of chainsaws
and the grunts of bulldozers.
Mingled with the shrieks
of fleeing parrots and macaws,
and orchid-laden trees toppling:
A still, sad plaint:
"Goodbye."

Crowing Hens

A crowing hen, some rustic philosophers claim, signals some cataclysm, some calamity, an upheaval, such as financial ruin or even a death in the family.

Surely something ominous is rattling the bird to make her mimic the male, to make her so androgynous, so perplexed, to step out of her sex as though stepping off her nocturnal roost before dawn comes.

Perhaps any sudden departure from the ordinary, any unanticipated variance, is enough to make us reluctantly heedful of the natural Oracles and Cassandras whose duty is to warn us that something is about to change.

Crows in Rain

Can it be that there are a hundred gradients of gray? that water and residue of the sun transform the red of brick storefronts to gray-red, the green of the ash trees to the color of ash?

Into the distorting mist come the crows, enraged by the sudden weight of the wind, sodden shuddering in the earthbound cloud, waiting on the wires, black notes on a suspended staff.

Two cardinals and a blue jay, equally angry at the elements, perch near the black-gowned divas and dons, Their intense tints muted by mist, for once cannot upstage the crows.

Today the other birds seem like shadows of shadows. But the birds that wear black have no concern with ostentation and showy apparel: They sit and wait like consecrated gods.

Current Currency

Dollars, euros, yen: they're all just pretty pieces of rags, cotton, linen, and silk, a bit of Crane paper, so we're told.

Those currencies that no longer predicate their value on precious metals, gold or silver, for example, have no more intrinsic worth than fancy rags made of shirt fabrics.

Paper money is then much like a wedding song "O, Promise Me" performed over and over and over until becoming superfluous. Then the wedding guests long for something more enduring like Bach, Chopin, or Mendelssohn (gold, silver, or real estate) with no promises attached.

Then the mints are inked-up the engraving plates polished to a sparkle, and the fat lady is ready to sing her swan song, "All of Me."

At least if the current currency breaks its promise and leaves me destitute, with no purchasing power at all, I can gather up all those little rectangles and make a quilt or a pair of trousers, if I can learn to sew.

Cycles of World History

Squabble, squabble, squabble, squabble, squabble, conquest, for this and that bauble, gobble, gobble, gobble it all up.

Then another millenium:

Squabble, squabble, conquer, conquest, bomb and blast, build it, blow it up, build it, blow it up.

Then another millenium.

Dancing in the Wind with Aunt Ana

'Lectrical storm, prophesied my aunt Ana, All fire and precious little water.

Drum-rolls of thunder bounced about on the western horizon like pin-balls. Ribbony fingers of lightning pointed toward town.

The wind has caught fire, shrilled my aunt. Reach up and douse the wind.

I reached up.
I squeezed the wind.
The wind warmed my hand.

My being is all birdsongs, wind chimes, a clarinet in the dark. Dance with me.

I danced.

Dandelions Are Rare

Dandelions are rare. It is rare to find a living thing with so much tenacity, so much joie de vivre.

Like Susan Hayward in the movie of the same name, they want to live.

Dandelions grow root systems that are as complex and as sprawling as a New Jersey suburb. You can poison them, chop their heads off, put a curse on them, call them naughty names, and exhume their mangled bodies, but next morning they're grinning at you like smiley faces.

Can you do that?

Ambassadors of sunshine, all they ever wanted to do, I hear, is to properly accessorize our front yards—
(hosta has its limits) and to carpet our front lawns with joy LOTS of joy.

Dark Song of the Black Bird

For days the black bird, whose features purloined purple and shimmering greens from the sunlight, homesteaded on the iron railing of the terrace on the hillside.

For days I spied on him, impressed with the range of his voice, the juxtapositioning of notes; what was he trying to communicate?

Well, I'd like to think he was sending signals of assurance to the nestlings on the roof, or warning them of impending peril. Perhaps at times he was simply happy to have been born with wings and the gift of flight.

It was some weeks later that the roofers came to repair the damage from the unrelenting north wind of the winter past. In the midst of their work, they had discovered a nest full of feathers and tiny bones.

It was black songs the black bird sang those days, monodies of mourning. Strange how we so readily misinterpret things.

Daylight Moon

In the blue cereal bowl of the 8: 00 AM sky: a crescent moon floats

ghostly, watered down milk, an omen or mere astonomy.

Something to take along to work, with my granola bars

and my confections of worries and other wonders.

Days of Plenty

Plant-life becomes more efficient in deserts, on cliffsides, and on the beach—more frugal, more resilient to stress.

Those arid, precipitous, stormy periods in my life teach me to draw from the silos of past days of plenty, days of calm winds when hills seemed rounder on top.

Dazzling Marble Dust

After the war (it is immaterial which one) painters who work in oils would often search the bombed-out rubble for chunks of marble, which they would surreptitiously transport back to their studios.

Painstakingly, they would chip away the edges of the remnants and pound the smaller pieces into a fine residue, a silvery, shimmery dust that sparkled in the direct sunlight of the levered windows in their garrets.

Next they would mix a defined portion of the marble dust with the white gesso that they used to prime their canvases. The final effect was to give the undercoat of the painting they were working on an ethereal luminosity that flickered underneath the thinner coats of paint much as flecks of quartz cause a city sidewalk to gleam in the sunlight.

It seems likely that artists who used this tedious, time consuming method must have understood the hidden significance of this almost ritualistic process, reminiscent of the Japanese tea ceremony. Not only did they honor the tradition of their craft, but also captured a memorial of annihilation and the horror and disruption of war and incorporated it into their art for it there to shine as long as the painting survives.

Declaration of Deceleration

It's the quotidian actions, the everyday things, like taking the extra time to buy fresh beans from the local market, wash them in crystal-clear spring water, shell them, slow-cook them with with herbs that smell of paradise and green meadows in summer, that halt the breakneck struggle to finish first before the race has even begun.

Demarcations of Time

We are creatures who like to number things, name things.

We measure our lives in days, months, years; we measure our marriages in anniversaries; our years on earth in birthdays.

From conception our lives are parceled out in seconds, hours, days, years.

Sometimes it feels as though all this segmentation of time, this need to compartmentalize existence diminishes our experience—as though we ourselves are mere clocks and calendars.

Demystifying the Rose

As he peered at the vase of red roses, momentarily ignoring the cliché, he found himself drawn to the vase, upon which were painted red roses.

And when he looked beyond the table where the roses sat and out the window, he noticed the bushes against the wall were heavy with red roses.

He had never looked at roses in so many different angles and attitudes and suddenly found it unbearably sad that artists and poets had reduced them to mere symbols and images.

Departure

Like a ripe pear she fell, but before she dropped she felt the mellowing wear of weariness: the time has come to let go. The stem, the stalk of life was weakening, the hospitable earth below seem to beckon, seemed to pull her toward its wholeness. For ripening, for departure from one destination to another, an ending is involved, a life disolved from newborn bud to flower to fruit and back to seed.

Discount Prima Donna

She was known for speaking in Victorian housewife earnestness: "He sweetened his tea that day with my tears" or "His lips flattened against mine like a jack-in-the-pulpit pressed in the pages of my diary."

No-one questioned her sincerity, even though she hadn't cried in ten years, had never been kissed, wouldn't know a jack-in-the-pulpit from an oleander, and found diaries frivolous.

Yet, there beneath her suburban accoutrements, behind her calm facade, lurked a bit of a ham.

Domestic Rituals

She always washes the linens on Mondays. Glancing out the back door she regards the billowing sheets and hears the distinct Snap! they make when the wind fulfills its duty. Like enormous white flags they wave to her as if to say: We surrender.

She knows the ritual by heart:
Locating the wicker basket she wove herself,
cutting stems of lavender from the kitchen garden
to place between the layers of the sun sweetened sheets,
acquiescing to the hot fragrant fabric
that caresses her face as she plucks
the clothespins, one by one.

Invariably the wind will claim one as his own, as compensation, and send her on a mission after it, toward the lilac bushes.

She wishes she might prolong this cleansing, this baptism in ordinary things, to feel always as clean, as yielding, as free as these white banners flustered by the wind, released from hesitation and reticence. She yearns to say: I surrender.

Don't Drive into Sedona

Don't drive into Sedona just before sunset. Carmine canyons and russet monoliths all converge at that hour to bewitch wayfarers, and wizardry pulsates like static in the stillness.

Don't lower the windows. Shrill whoops and the incantations of long-dead shamans might worm into your cochlea and make you mad.

They say an old Sinagua indian chief guards the cliffs and keeps the gods from stealing the red.

Don't drive into Sedona just before sunset— unless you are a good soul, or want to become one.

Double Acrostic: Emotion

Every stimulus sparks a response. Memory, pain, and even a dream often conjures up deep feelings too. To experience the rush of sentiment inherent in the mind, all men, even I, often find themselves enslaved to nuances of red, raw, ruthless emotion.

Double Rainbow

He made a vow that he would gaze upon a double rainbow before his last days; that he would listen to the opuses of Paganini and Satie, and discover the fount of paradise, if not of youth. That he would grieve on the grave of Pasolini and rebuke the lassitude and the lies.

He promised to himself and loved ones, his friends, his wife, and his sons, that he would climb Mt. Kilimanjaro and voyage in a raft around the Earth to right all wrongs most quixotically, to celebrate life with exuberance and mirth, to treat all people with pity and polity.

He thrust himself toward life, and therefore toward death and strife, but assignations with Paganini and Pasolini receded in face of the work-a-day world—Mt. Kilimanjaro had just as well be the moon and his ambition just a genie in an antique bottle or an indecipherable rune.

Now old, a grandfather, gray and arthritic, pensive, nostalgic and an armchair critic, he wonders if what he has accomplished is enough; if ordinary rainbows and pop music on the radio Saturday nights and all the rivers he'd fished had transported him to heights

far higher than Mt. Kilimanjaro.

Double-Dare

The needle of the compass points to you, as does the shadow of the sundial. The drum roll quivers in the air like thunder; the aura around you crackles like chain lightening.

You are infused with life and walk among the living and the anticipatory desires of all mankind. You can make a difference. Will you?

Dragonflies

Dragonflies patrol the stagnant pond, orbiting, slaying mosquitoes.

Dreaming of Insomnia

His dream is to dream. At 3 AM his REM sleep remains elusive, fluttering under his eyelids like caged moths, not conducive to slumber.

The number of hours spent changing positions over and under like tidal waves coming and going, like a snake coiling and crawling, comprises the shank of the night.

Like invading goths, inconsequential thoughts battle the armies of Morpheus relentlessly until Apollo arises and the alarm goes off. Then sleep ascends, just as it's time to dress for work.

Duel at Sunrise

Two human beings, both sure they are right, standing there, with guns aimed at the other's heart. Where has brotherhood gone? One of them will depart, one remain. Their disagreement also will remain and linger in the aftermath, and seep into the earth like blood.

Birds go on about their bird-things, insects buzz, as they shop for the day's rations and live on.

Dusting Off Trouble

It happened on a rare day in September, a day shimmering with white-hot static in the air, the pavement glimmering in the late autumn glare.

A timid squirrel squirreling, an irridescent crow squandering the day, a dragonfly whirling, a confused bumble bee wandering sparrows quarreling:

All must have observed if they cared, Caroline on the curved front porch: her soul bared, unnerved.

As if in a trance, or so it would seem, she began to prance, as in a dream, and then to dance.

Then without thinking, she began to squirrel and squander; listening and linking. she ceased to ponder, eyes blinking.

Like her shaggy sheepdog Drake, when he came in from the rain all wet, she began to shake and drops of shame, rivulets of regret, flew from her body to make

A puddle of burdens and cares on the floor, at which she stares, renewed to the core, as she continued dusting the chairs.

Early Departure

Blood red is the color of the leaves on the sycamore in the cemetary where gardenia beds and peace lilies permeate the air with the aroma of grief.

You were born on the Day of the Dead, and by night you would lie here in this bed, a cradle of unfulfilled dreams, a repository of silent laughter and youthful tears.

For those who mourn you, every day is November first, a calendar full of ones, a year-ful of autumns. Their days are still-born, their nights starless.

Tomorrow they will plant tulips and narcissus bulbs on your grave and dare to imagine spring and the renewal of hope under the blood red leaves of the towering sycamore.

Economics of the Red Squirrel

I observe the red squirrel from the kitchen window, paused on a branch, acorn in mouth, looking like a knick-knack on a shelf.

I know what he's thinking, because I am thinking it too. Surely life must be more than accumulating, and stashing away, more than mere industrialization.

But maybe not, thinks the red squirrel; but maybe so, think I.

Eleven Epitaphs

I.
I did not die alone:
with me went my joy, my love,
my sadness, my pain.

II.
Come lie with me;
the chill here is hungry-no voraciousfor your living warmth.

III. Unbury this mirror.

IV.
Here among roots and earth death is enshrined by living things.

V.
Do not seek here my remains; ransack your memories of me; unearth any kindness I left back there among you.

VI. Behold me and live your life!

VII. Like a rose in autumn, I close my petals and repose.

VIII.
Death:
merely a spoke in the wheel.

IX.
They told me life was not a bed of rose, but now I'm deposited under one.

You ask me if I envy you: Envy and such is for the living.

XI.
Dark journey,
black veil;
the dead sleep,
the living wail.

Emily Vents

You're so run-of-the-mill, Your art lacks originality, lacks authenticity. You're a hack, a jackof-all trades; master of the prosaic.

Why do you have to be so lah-di-dah? so whoop-di-do, so cliche, so 18th century, for chrissake!

I'll bet you still read Milton.
Aren't you done with Donne
yet? What did you do with the Leaves of Grass
I sent you? The shipping cost me
a bundle.

Do not expect further criticism or correspondence from me; I have flies and corpses to address and Whitman and I can't be bothered with mediocrity.

Regards, Emily Dickinson

Emotion in Black Vinyl

His favorite song was You've Lost That Loving Feeling, yet he had not a clue what the song was about. What is this feeling and why was the singer accusing him of having lost it? he wondered. He himself had never felt loveor had he? Still, he found himself humming it at impromptu times, and he owned the vinyl single and the vinyl album, which he had discovered at a garage sale.

Sometimes, when he sang the song, he was the singer, with his voice deep as the Pacific, warm as the Caribbean; other times he was the person the song was meant for. Each way it made him cry and want to die since he could not lose a feeling he had never had.

Enclosures

It...
(an unfathomable wrong, an unforgettable song, a friend's betrayal, a grievous tale, a withholding of care, shame laid bare, growing old, love grown cold, your leaving, my grieving) ...hurts.

English Leather and Hai Karate

They were the masculine scents of choice in the 1960s, when the regulation white shirts and diagonal stripe ties that proliferated in the office began to blossom into paisleys, plaids, and those miniature daisy patterns.

I preferred the exotic aroma of English Leather Lime, picturing myself in jodphers, leaping over hedges in hot pursuit of a fox or some other beleaguered creature, confused by the odor of musk and citrus.

Hai Karate conjured up white robes, black belts and a whole lot of shrieking. What if I get asked to chop up some planks with my bare hands!

Curiously, I often look among the rows and rows of men's toiletries at the drugstore to see if these products are still available. I miss them and their provocative labels. Haiiiiiiii! Umph!

Enlighten Me Later

She argued constantly with Lao about the Tao; and Chairman Mao threw the Book at her. She bowed to Hindu's sacred cow, and pored over the Zofar. The Gnostic gospels rocked her boat and to Yahweh she sacrificed a goatevery day. On the bus to the office she read the Koran and knew everything about the Greek god Pan. A lapsed Catholic, a former nun, she could recite her beads in 5 minutes flat and found it fun. One auspicious day, Mary, Buddha, and Mohammed appeared in her kitchen as apparitions. 'Sorry, to leave you in the lurch, ' she said as she gathered her beads and books, 'but I'm late for church.'

Enormity of the Small

The smallest reveals itself quickest; there exist more grains of sand than sequoia trees. If I were to say: Find the smallest word in this sentence, and then magnify the smallest character in that word to the smallest reduction technology allows, you could do it.

But what if I were to say: Find the largest word in this sentence; then regard the sentence itself; then note the screen it appears upon; then the desk your computer rests upon; then the wall behind the desk; then the room; then your house, your neighborhood, your city, your state, your country; then the continent, Planet Earth itself; then the canopy of the sky; the solar system; the galaxy; the universe and what's after that.

What a mystery; what a mandala. What a beauteous beatification is the large and the small of things.

Escape Route

He fantasized about hiring a sailboat and heading out to sea in a straight line and never coming back.

He dreamed of walking into the Amazon jungle, hiking deeper and deeper, never stopping to rest and never coming back.

He imagined getting into his car and driving until he ran out of gas and checking into a motel until he ran out of money, never coming back.

He visualized sailing and walking and driving toward better days, happier dreams.

Essential Mystique

Which question? That is the question—which to ask, to whom, how and why.

Those which have ready answers are immaterial, dry;

those that we can't know before we ask transcend the question mark

and ascend to the exclamation mark, magnificent and stark. Cry,

for weeping is the expulsion of confusion, a profusion

of prayers made liquid and of fear made viscous,

melted queries gliding down like beeswax on candle.

It is the not knowing that we have to know.

Every Day We Say Goodbye

Every day we say goodbye, until we say goodbye to every day, yet even in our dreams people are lost; things recede.

Observe the boy waving at the station to his father on the way to the city. This boy gets smaller and smaller, but the father fails to see,

that every goodbye is a sacred thing, that in so many ways it is the last word, the final amen.

Hellos and goodbyes, our comings and our goings, departures and arrivals all end with someone we left behind, waving.

Extreme Unction

She gave up smoking and took up heavy drinking—targeting the liver this time, not the lungs.

She swore to all her friends that from this day she would throw caution and her cell phone to the wind—no more Ms. Nice Gal.

She painted her nails black-cherry and her toes chartreuse. Her lips were the color of her hair: ink-black.

To her friends who accused her of reckless indulgence, she replied: Screw you.

After three years of debauchery and promiscuity, she sat down for one last martini and a Marlboro Light, before admission as a postulant to the Sisters of Perpetual Devotion Abbey in Burbank, California where she is now known as Sister Mary Snow.

Fable of the Confounded Consumer

He began to notice that the commercials were getting longer. A half-hour program that previously had 4 commercial interruptions now had 5, and those breaks lasted as long as 5 minutes each.

And they were getting louder. The volume was not automatically going up, but the actors in the ads were speaking with more intensity and more rapidly and were shouting: "Buy this. Buy that."

The next day, it was up to 7 commercial breaks per half-hour show, but the duration of each ad was reduced to 4 minutes. The actors were now screaming: "Buy this. Buy that."

This continued for several weeks, with the number of commercials and the length of each ad fluctuating wildly, until one day there was only one ad per half-hour show that lasted one half-hour.

One actor faced the camera head-on and shouted all day long:
"Buy!!!! Buy!!!!"

It was about that time that he dug a ten-foot hole in the back yard and buried the TV set, waving and shouting: "Bye-bye."

The neighbors were perplexed and scratched their heads.

Falling Star

Your friends marvel at your dexterity, envy your mercurial mobility—yes, you have wings on your heels, a combustion engine for a heart.

You speak of your "meteoric rise to the top, " but aren't meteors burning stars? falling suns?

No, darling, you respond in your ever-patient drawl, a meteor does not "fall," it arcs. It bullets across the firmament, as though ejected by heavenly catapults, lighting up the sky, possessing the sky, and titillating the masses. Shooting stars, some call them.

*

*

*

Two days later
I receive a telegram
from her sister:
Caroline dead stop
Cardiac arrest stop
Cremation arrangments to follow stop.

Fashion Tips for the Egoist

Around your neck, you wear the burden of self-aggrandizement and your pockets are stuffed with platitudes and lies. Your two personalities overlap like a double-breasted suit.

Aren't you a bit over-dressed?

Fatalism is Fatal

You gotta hand it to 'em. They are the masters of persuasion. They've convinced us all, yes, even me, that war, like death and taxes is inevitable, a fact of life.

Odd, too that war encompasses the other two inevitabilities: death and taxes: three for one!

They've even convinced us that nobody gets killed in war; bombs dropp like hailstones, mines go pow! but life goes on.

Life goes on.

Innocent bystanders, you'd think, are still standing by, not lying in eternal repose below a plastic flower arrangement.

No blood is spilled. We can't see it, so it didn't happen, right?

Those quadraplegics and amputees lying in Bagdad clinics are ghosts, right? They're not really there, merely, ghosts—nothing to fear.

And every time: this is the war to end all wars. But how can this be if war is inevitable? Must be one of them zen koans.

Death, taxes, war. Forget about life, plenty, and peace.

You gotta hand it to 'em.

Fertile Hearts

His heart feels hollow, like a red bell pepper, its chambers housing clusters of seeds. Feelings are like seeds; feelings engender thoughts.

Among the rows of moods and melodies in the garden of his grief, intrusive nettles and wild garlic battle with the new growth of tender sprouts, fragile tendrils of hope, of a way out of hopelessness.

Still the vacant spaces of his unattended heart wait to be filled, fallow now, and choked with weeds and bitter herbs, but as all things respond to nourishment and a sympathetic gesture, a broken spirit carries within it a seed.

Film Noir II

He was perspiring like the greasy spoon's plate glass windows on a subzero afternoon, the drizzle of convection a reaction to the heat within; the heat was on.

The confectioner's sugar, dusting the day-old donuts on the diner's formica counter, reminded him of colder climates, powdery snow on the curvaceous mountains back East.

The splattered globs of Heine's ketchup oozing on a platter of oily french fries, made him think not of snowmen and sleighs, but of things less benign, like the messy corpse lying prostrate on the carpet back home.

Home. The idea seemed quaint, nostalgic, even. Just as his home had seemed a prison, now a prison would be his home, once the coppers caught the scent. Just like the contents of the cheap ashtray brimming with the detritus of countless men before him, strapped for cash, desparate, starved for love, his future was gray and crumbled.

In the mammoth oval mirror behind the counter, he thought he saw a sudden movement: a little boy, about 5 or 6, seemed to stare back at him from some far away place and time. He imagined he heard the phantom say: Why did you do this to me?

Finding What We Lost

Where do you keep your joy? Did you install it in a strongbox or tuck it in your wallet?

Have you given all your zest away— Get it back! It's not something to sell or to toss in a sack.

You say the travails of life have snatched it away. Relocate it. Take it back; redeem it today.

First Crush

It's like the whirlybird, the giddy rush, the pulse, pulse, pulse of white-hot blood, volcanoes, seismic dislocations, unrelenting, unbearable joy, unrepeatable, irrevocable, so tender it hurts,

and it happens only once in a lifetime and we never forget it.

Fish Tale

Every day we fish. We cast our lures and our flies into the rippling reservoir of life and wish for a nibble.

Maybe we fish for a compliment, for a single kind word, for a nod of approval. For a lover's assent, or for a day without rain.

Like any good fisherman, we cast out and we wait. We sit on the riverbank and anticipate

the bounty of our catch, the catch-of-the-day. And we dream of stories to tell of the one that got away.

Five Day Affair

Thursday:
They sit
on a single bed.
Purloined kisses.
Awkward misses
in the shadows. Chaste
fumblings,
one candle lit.

Friday:
They lie
on a single bed.
Bolder now.
A trickle of sweat from a brow
stains the pillow
in the shadows. Tentative
tumblings,
a bedsite lamp lit.

Saturday:
They rest.
They sleep all night
on the single bed.
nothing much said,
the rain falling,
thunder and its rumblings,
no lights.

Sunday:
The tiger
awakes. The lioness is stirred.
Sleep eludes them
there on a single bed.
From soft pulse to code red
passion's stumblings,
a strobe-light blinked.

Monday:
Back to work.
The sunlight glistens
on the pavement
and ricochets off the car bumper ahead.

Fleeting Flames; Flickering Light

What about those turbulent years when lust and love tyranted over us like Idi Amin.

Appointments canceled, careers postponed, friendships withdrawn, adversaries disregarded, stellar and planetary matter deified, practicality defied, the moon was our counselor.

The quckening pulse that fired the raw wires of the brain; the dementia of love, its dimensions unchartered and therefore alarming, captured us like a channeled spirit, like meth, like opiates, like all consuming addiction.

Today you sleepwalk off to your sterling cube, you never notice the moon, waiting up there, still wise.

We've settled, yes settled, into a quieter dream, less fiery, more furious, but more likely to last another day.

Focus

Why does everything have to be subscripted for you? Taken to the nth power, multiplied, then divided among your admirers—your coefficients?

You have no grasp of the concept of one.

Having redefined chaos as multitasking and "functional freedom," you have rejected domesticity as bourgeois; your studio reminds me of Chernobyl.

Miraculous, though, when you are separated from life, from all of us, your friends, by the lens, firmly anchored behind all your photographer's tools, when you open the shutters and a flash goes off and you lovingly zoom in on life, framed, unified, everything comes into focus for you with a singular click.

Foresight; Hindsight

On her deathbed, Caroline was asked by her daughter if there was anything she regretted not having done in her lifetime.

After hesitating, Caroline said: "I wish that I had looked at the rain."

"Why mom, you've looked at the rain countless times; we live in Seattle."

"But I never saw it.
Artists try to suggest it
with those little slanted lines
or by reflecting puddles,
but that is not quite right.

"I was always trying to get out of it, so I never looked at it properly. I regret the beautiful things that I looked at, but never saw. I regret getting out of it."

Fortunata Saves the Day

That year you were airborne. Like a sheet of loose-leaf paper you ascended, tumbled, dipped—intricate as an origami dove, but also made of paper.

Yes, it was a good climate for you; I was in the doldrums that year, but the Fates were writing masterpieces on your pages, on your fragile wings.

But the Fates are not famous for fidelity. Your fortunes shifted course that December. as sudden downpours and wet snow, saturated the pith of your soul, turned your paper wings to pulp and all the bright hopes written there bled gray on white to become indecipherable.

It was about that time that we met. I was riding high and the sun radiated hope. My pages were crisp and perfect and a tabula rasa. I picked you up and began to read. I read about your dazzling year and how it ended.

As we walked home in the lingering rain, I wondered: how many pages does it take to make a book: one, two?

Fragment from a History of Space Station Earth

That year everything was in reverse. Instead of expelling their foliage, trees retracted, folding in on themselves, as if in retreat from the sun, leaves gradually drew in and were reborn as buds, then as cells of pure energy.

The sun itself grew shy and reticent, expending its radiation profligately, having lost its ability to recharge and renew itself.

Men and women and their progeny gazed up at the night sky and cursed and wailed that fate had at last betrayed them.

Long revered human feelings such as love and empathy vanished, quashed by fear and uncertainty and from all quarters of the earth a creeping wall of silence was closing in.

French Quarter Funeral

The crimson red sash draped 'round the saxophone player's black velveteen vest could have been a slash of murderous blood and the clash of the cymbals a gunshot.

The man in the box would never bleed or hear the reports of instruments of violent altercation again, nor would he read sad obituaries in the Times Picayune and sigh.

In choreographed synchronization, the widow and family, marched-and-stopped-to-moan, and marched-and-stopped-to-wail, and marched, and stopped.

Was that the trumpet? Was that the trumpet of Jericho I heard just now? the veiled lady asked. Was that the trumpet? Was that the sweet voice of my darling husband?

In choreographed synchronization, the widow and family, marched-and-stopped-to-moan, and marched-and-stopped-to-wail, and marched, and stopped.

Front Porch Light

You would not know that anyone was there, on the edge of the porch, were it not for the tip of the lit cigarette, its sweet-sour odor of tobacco fusing with the fragrant nicotinia blooms and the early summer honeysuckle.

She sits there every evening, weather permitting, mood permitting, the adirondak rocking chair singing a soothing rocking chair lullaby, ointment for her wounds.

The moon rises tonight, a shadowed quarter-moon, end tapering toward end but not quite meeting.

But her days of rhapsodizing about moonlight and romance have long set with the sun, and bad luck, a hard life and the betrayal of age have accummulated like the ashes on the tip of her cigarette.

Let's step back now, and leave her be, if you look over your shoulder before we turn at Poplar Street, you'll see only a tiny red dot.

Garden Variety Poem

My mother always said (or was it my aunt Ida Rae?) that there are two kinds of people (both women were beautiful but not especially original): Gardeners and Mean People.

Both of these sage philosophers have long stashed away their rakes and hoes, but I think maybe there is some truth there; don't you?

It seems to me that you can be a gardener without working the soil or raising prize roses.

It's all about tending to something, or someone. Gardeners, when they go on vacation, worry about their flowers and vegetables and make sure they get enough water in their absence.

A mother does the same with her children. Children do the same with their pets. Fathers care for their tools and fishing rods, as if they were blue-ribbon peonies.

It would seem that human beings must have something to see to, something to oil every month, something to feed, something to clean, something that matters.

Geography of Regret

Into the geography of regret, the region of how it might have been, or should. Like Atlantis, the continent lost, it floats in legend, in myth, it swirls inside a snifter of Remy Martin or in sweaty dreams at 3 AM.

Faces, faces, faces, music, laughter, a moment, one moment when in that one moment your future happiness lies, and you walk away or you don't call back.

The Geography of regret is an Arctic climate, Antarctic, Polar.
In this city, this state of mind, missed opportunities, bad choices, misunderstandings, and that One True Love, reside and shuffle about like phantoms of an opera; this drama is about you.

Global Hardening

A single particle of misunderstanding, One degree of uncharitable accusation, a discharge of corruption, an emission of malice an icing-over of the globe, a conflagration of ill-will, all merge and meld into a hardening of the globe.

As the earth heats up, humanity chills.

Suspended inside this ice age of antipathy, this bleak tundra of rancor, lies a proposal:
If eons-old glaciers can melt into placid lakes, cannot the hearts of men?

Goldfinch Devouring a Sunflower

The goldfinch clinched the pendulous sunflower head, yellow on yellow, beauty contrasted to beauty, more than a bird on a flower but an essay on art.

My thoughts scattered into the air much like the unripe seeds from the flower as the bird's beak dispersed them, some dropping like hailstones, some disappearing into his gullet.

The the beauty of the bird, according to a sunflower, lies not in its colors and shape but in its seed distribution system; a sunflower, to a goldfinch is a recepticle of delicacies and a conveyer of sustenance.

Beauty then must be more than meets my eye, must be as dense and populous as a million-seeded bloom.

Gothic Romance: The Horrors of Wolf Creek

Down in the murky black waters of Wolf Creek, my no-count buddies used to say when we snuck away from Miss Waverly's ninth grade English class (Poor soul, she fantasized about teaching us boys about Byron and Shelley; she died disillusioned) there dwells a murderous water-monster, with not two heads but three, and fangs that could frazzle you like battery cables.

Every time a tree branch fell into the water, rich black like semi-sweet chocolate, two or three of us would jump out on the sandbank, shivering in our skins like caught fish.

But that's not to say that Wolf Creek was devoid of monsters and watery wickedness. More times than not a sinister, swirly rope, a water mocassin, wiggled way too near my knees and once Martin saw a wildcat with vampire eyes watching us.

Many years later after Byron and Shelley finally got through to me (much to the chagrin of Martin and the boys), it occurred to me that the only wolves on that creek were us.

But there's something thrilling about a wolf, isn't there? Something not confined to a river or a swimming hole. Someday, I'd like to see a wolf.

Grandfather's Face

You had to look a second or third time to find the beauty in his face, but it lay there etched into the lines like crumpled paper, priceless parchment.

Just as his life had its wrinkles, meandering rivulets of time and trial, so his face memorialized them. It is the roughness that makes the smooth seem sweet.

It is more than skin deep, beauty. It radiates into the wise eyes that gazed upon history and survived it. It lodges in the warm chambers of the heart and the kindness of the mind after it has absorbed all the joy and the pain of everyday life. It is a face well earned and well worn.

Grave Robber

She buries her worries in the obituaries; she mingles her fears in other people's tears.

The mock grass of new graves saves her from madness. She basks in the sadness of other people's grief.

So consumed by morbidity and the frigidity of death, she is presumed to be sympathetic,

and wise in matters of grief, but she is a thief of other people's feelings. Her blood runs cold as the grave; her emotions wreaths of plastic roses.

Green Desire

He paused on the rim of the lake among the willows and reflected on things of love.

There was one point where the lithe terminus of a branch dangled only molecules from the surface of the lake,

as though the green water thirsted for the willow or the willow craved to grow aqueous.

Greeting Card Sentiment

The birthday card, dated 6/99, had traveled and had aged, a bit like its intended addressee.

Its borders had begun to fray and the white background had turned to a tentative ecru, one of the many colors of the effluvia of time.

On the front a Native American drawing of a ceremonial toy, a top, lay there suspended, as if hurlting through space, but having forgotten how to spin all of a sudden.

The insignia on the back tell us that the card was manufactured in San Francisco. Having been mailed from Lake Tahoe, the little gift had come a long way, eastward, over mountains and across the Mississippi.

I found the card, its two flaps folded like praying hands, inside a library book, its intimacy both thrilling and disturbing to me.

In my hands
was an expression
of someone's love,
in this case, a daughter's
for her father.
What would either of them
think right now,
to imagine a stranger
reading their lives
in such a way?

Gutted Rooms

The room stood exposed in the afternoon sun, all that was left of its furnishings were imprints on the floor and against the peeling wallpaper—shadows with no source. Gutted like a fish, the space no longer breathed, but lay disemboweled and naked in the light.

Was it a mistake to come back here, a grown man in a little boy's room, gutted like a fish? Is there anything sadder than an empty room saturated with remembrance, inundated with recollections? People, like abandoned houses, can also feel empty and hollow.

Our childhoods don't lie frozen in gutted rooms, but are housed securely in our hearts and minds. Closing the door with resolution, I knew I would never go back there again.

GWTW Redux

Tara O'hara ignored tomorrow and lived alone with the wind.

Haiku

Rouged jewel casket, compartments filled with rubies: ripe pomegranates.

(Note: the optional pronunciation of four syllables instead of three for pomegranate is used here)

Haiku Proverb: Chiaroscuro

To truly see bright things, focus on the darkness encompassing them.

Haiku: Red Sheet and a Yellow Dot

One narcissus in a field of red tulips: which is prettier?

Haiku: Self-Appraisal

I ache for meaning, like vines cascading down crags seek the soil below.

Haiku: Sudden Chill

Not yet November. I swear I hear the swish of February sleet.

Haiku: Sunrise (or Sunset)

Some altercation at the horizon: Night is wrestling with the sun.

Haiku: a Pair of Blue Eyes

Fire, water, snow and sky coexist in the blue eyes of my beloved.

Haiku: Asian Sunset

Pollen from saffron blossoms and pink silktree blooms tinge the western sky.

Haiku: Birds Are Christmas Tree Ornaments

The spot in the woods where the tree had been cut down: the birds are confused.

Haiku: Chrysalis

Pale green-swirled cradle, rock-a-bye in the cool breeze. Dream of butterflies.

Haiku: Compression

You fold your feelings like a jack-in-the-box. Pop! goes the pent-up stress.

Haiku: Concentric Circles On Water

How many ripples does one raindropp make in the trout pond? Let's count them.

Haiku: Dangerous Moon

It was the color of curry and saffron mixed with a dropp of blood.

Haiku: Dangerous People

Dangerous people see a pebble or a stone and think: weapon.

Haiku: Death on the Savannah

The gazelle looked back into the lion's hard eyes seeking mercy there.

Haiku: Deserting the Hive

Some days I dream of leaving and not coming back, like the honey bees.

Haiku: Emotional Walls

The closer you get to her, the more she recedes, like the horizon.

Haiku: Evergreens on the Lake

Fragrant conifers, fringe the lake, lacy like intricate fern leaves.

Haiku: Fixation

Jade caterpillar, same color as his food, is consumed with eating.

Haiku: Fog

Fog on the river. A soft blanket for the fish, chilly as they swim.

Haiku: Hail Storm

Pearls from a necklace slipping off a severed string: a sudden hail storm

Haiku: Iced Tea and Geraniums

Bittersweet thoughts of iced tea and geraniums. First chill of winter.

Haiku: Message in a Bowl

Peace and harmony in our time: fragrant as a bowl of jasmine rice.

Haiku: Night Disturbance

A shriek in the night. An owl or a cat, you say. What if it wasn't?

Haiku: Old Nun

The bent old sister, questions her cloistered life. Children play beyond the gate.

Haiku: Points of Departure

Airports, bus depots, train stations. A friend arrives; a lover departs.

Haiku: Possible, but Not Probable

Cold snap in August; frost in June, March heat wave: Peace among nations.

Haiku: Pristine Weather

A desert shower, a cooling breeze in August: forgiveness, mercy.

Haiku: Pyrotechnics

Yellow zinnias, gold cannas, crimson poppies. There! Razzle-dazzle!

Haiku: Revenge

Black wasps, dark fairies, swarm into the night and kiss my adversaries.

Haiku: Seaside Rhapsody

Dry, swaying seagrass. The tide hums a lullaby; the wind is a flute.

Haiku: Shangri-la

War, prejudice, hate: find a paring knife and cut them out like an apple core.

Haiku: Sheet Lightning

Blink! like a flash bulb— Thor taking pictures of cloud formations. Blink! Blink!

Haiku: Slip

Irresistible in a red Freudian slip, she said: I hate you.

Haiku: Solemn Forest Sounds

An orphaned fawn thinks he hears his mother, but it's the hunters' boot heels.

Haiku: Spirit Trees

Listen! Wind still sighs in the redwoods after the trees are felled.

Haiku: Still Water

Wind on a still pond, a blue heron wading, watching me watch him.

Haiku: Sweet Breakfast

Aroma of fresh ground coffee and apple pie: Honey-sweet morning.

Haiku: Troubled Journey by Train

Out the window of the train quick, stray thoughts fly by like power line poles.

Haiku: Vulnerability

She felt defenseless sans cigarette and a snarl, like a thornless rose.

Haiku: War Games

So, it's just a game. Toy soldiers, toy guns; no-one dies. Children, let's play.

Haiku: Wildfire

Wildfire uncontained, stripping the hillside, raging poker-hot: anger.

Haiku: Winter Sleep

Chilly in the night, the moon filched a downy cloud then slept warm and snug.

Haiku: Writer's Block

Haikus are oh so hard to write. Now I can exhale.

Haiku-Storm

Gray and black dragon, engorged, belching fire and smoke—Thunderheads due West.

Hawk's Reprieve

A young hawk surveys the mise-en-scene from a fence post. Post-prandial, quarry and killing elude his mind for a moment.

He crouches and considers sparrows building nests and meadow mice at play. Red poppies are rocked by the breeze to sleep in their grassy cradle.

Head bowed, acquiescent, he seems contemplative, monkish. Perhaps even birds of prey pray.

Headline: Cleopatra's Loveboat Capsizes

Having taken on one too many dimpled rent-boys and ladies-in-waiting, the over-decorated vessel collided with a dozing croc this morning and punctured its portside.

Marc Antony, the Roman superstar, heroically tried and failed to seal the leak, so the stately barge finally gave up the ghost.

The stunning celebrity, fondly called the Queen of the Nile, reportedly sank like a stone under the weight of all the eye-shadow and gold baubles; however, Antony did manage to save her asp.

Cleo, articulate and regal to the end, purportedly bid her final adieu thus: blub, blub, blub
Aiiiii, blub, blub, blub.

Headline: Poet Arrested for Killing his Muse

He knew something had to be done when he was fired for submitting the financial report to his boss in rhyming couplets.

It has to be that damned Erato, or her tawdry side-kick, Thalia. He never liked that name Erato: it made him think of errors.

Well, rat poison won't work, they don't eat. A shotgun will miss the mark; how about a cannon or a dirty bomb?

Finally he thought he had found the perfect weapon: a deluxe, industrial-sized fly-swatter.

When She flutters annoyingly around his PC while he's composing resumes, he makes his move: Splat!

But muses are eternal.
She rises up like the Phoenix
and begins to quote Sylvia Plath's
'Lady Lazurus':
Dying is an art
I do it exceptionally well....'**

Curses!

**From 'Lady Lazarus, ' Sylvia Plath, Vintage Book of Contemporary Poetry.

Headline: Poet OD's on Rhyme

A man and a woman are playing dominos. The tiles look pretty, all in rows.

The woman wears second-hand clothes, but the man has pigeon toes.

"Why don't you write a novel like Joe's? "
"You know I don't write prose."

"Hey, before the stores close should we buy beer? My thirst grows."

"No, you and everyone knows Beer makes me sick. I can't tolerate those."

"Ah, so it goes...; I was reading this poem of Poe's

last night about crows, or was it a raven he chose? "

"I never read the pros, Though I once read a book of Defoe's.

And some lyrics of Don Ho's. "Your erudition shows."

"Let's go catch some shows; I'm weary of Dominos."

Hiatus

Fearless marathonists of the savanna: impalas, a gazelle, sleek she-lions, all convened under the dappled hood of an acacia tree one radiant day at noon to absolve one another as predator and prey.

Holy Basil

Bai gkaprow.
Its Thai name is difficult to pronounce, the way something sacred should be. Like most herbs, we're told, it grows better in poor soil; blessed are the poor.

I sprinkle some, like holy-water, on a strawberry-rhubarb pie a saintly neighbor has left for me and place it in the oven,

Instantly inebriated with the abrupt fragrance of divinity, thick with incense and heat, my kitchen has become a cathedral, an ashram.

After dinner, I walk around satiated, elevated, knowing something holy is inside me.

Holy Exile

The pain around his shoulder blades, bursitis, his physician had declared, was rather the strain of maturing wings pushing against the dermal wall forcing an outlet with contractions and inflammation.

Vibrating auras and piercing spasms around the top of his head were not symptoms of migraine, but an intermittent nimbus in manifestation; the kaleidoscopic patterns before his eyes were apparitions, transfigurations, sanctified visions.

Festering lesions on his palms and feet were not the self-inflicted bruises of a neurotic masochist, but surely holy wounds, the stigmata of beatification.

Trembling in his misery, self-exiled from the small pleasures of ordinary time and place, he awaited his ascension and imagined a universe free from wickedness and suffering. An involuntary sigh escapes his thirsty mouth, as the black curtain between reality and the human mind began to descend and he felt lonelier than he ever imagined it was possible to feel.

Holy Mischief

In endless suspended animation the sacred statues in Maria Immaculata Cathedral, Vieux Carre, New Orleans, pose, dressed in the wimples and habits of their time.

Pendulous rosaries of polished mahogany like berried vines rattle in the quietude as wind penetrates the sides of the carved oaken door. The faces of virgins and saints are ghostly with fleshy paint; the eyes are glassy and stare out but do not see, never shut, always questioning.

No question: they seem human, as if about to speak, or dance a jig. You have a disturbing feeling that when you look away, they have moved, that the sanctuary resounds with their laughter after you've left.

Home Improvement Can Be Criminal

He was arrested for hitting the nail on the head. The plaintiff, a 2 and 1/4 inch (7d) blunt diamond point with a counter-sink, was said to have had a history of litigious behavior. As samples from the nail were found on both the hammer and on the defendant's fingernails, he was forced to plead guilty and forfeit his Home Depot credit card. When interviewed by the press, he responded: 'I shoulda used a staple gun.' The reporter backed away upon hearing the word 'gun.'

Homesteader

Somehow he had taken tarpaper and tin from an abandoned lean-to and rearranged them into the prettiest cottage you would ever see.

A rowdy bougainvillea vine clutched the black walls like a clinging lover, the dark background a chiaroscuro, watercolors on charcoal.

The windows were draped in clean burlap, dyed indigo, tied back with foxgrape vines. Polished pebbles formed mosaics around each doorsill.

Nobody really knew where he came from. Days before there was nothing there but pulverized cow patties and bitterweed.

At first I resented this interloper—the pasture belonged to me. One day I sauntered over with the intentions of serving an eviction notice.

But when he showed me his garden patch and picked a hamper of the freshest bibb lettuce and the ripest tomatoes for me, I hesitated.

Then he made up a batch of sassafras tea with honey from a tree-hive in the forest. Served in a mason-jar glass stuffed completely with spearmint and spring water, it tasted like nectar from paradise.

The next day, with thoughts of private ownership far from my mind and a new appreciation for good neighbors, I unhinged the No Tresspassing sign

from the gate by the road. Sonny Rainshine
www. De arellunter age. The World's Deater Aughing

Homme Fatale

She knew he was filth the minute she laid eyes on him.

What did she expect to find here in this brooding whiskey joint in the bowels of the Bowery?

"Buy me a drink?"
he had said after she told him
the barstool next to her
was taken.

"You disgust me, you narcissistic bum, " she said.

"But, babe, you gotta admit, "
he said as he got comfortable
on the stool and lit a panatella,
"I've got baby-blues
you'd like to drown
your sorrows in."

"Like you've drowned your liver in, I suppose?" she laughed, sinking into his heartbreak-blue eyes.

"Come on beautiful. Buy us a drink. I just got laid off. Sales exec."

"Oh, God, a traveling salesman. You're knocking on the wrong door, handsome. I've had plenty of what you've got for sale."

Pulling out his wallet and motioning the bartender: "Now don't get vulgar. It doesn't suit a fine lady like you."

"You make me sick, "
she insisted as
she clinked her
freshly poured bourbon
and water with his.

"Sick with luv, baby. Sick with luv." He said as their hands

abandoned the bourbons and sought warmth elsewhere. Sonny Rainshine www.PoemHunter.com - The World's Poetry Archive 205

Hotel Amenities

Someone had detached every crystal from the largest chandelier in the hotel, suspending each of them from the branches of the winter-bare maple tree next to the west wall of the house.

At 3: 00 someone flung open all 12 windows on the west wing.

At 3: 15 a thousand rainbows began to paint the walls of every room, new colors emerging every minute, illuminated murals.

At 3: 16 guests appeared at all 12 windows and applauded. Someone down below curtsied and went to get a ladder.

Housewife, Reading

You settle into your chaise lounge, absorbed in a Silhouette romance.

The heroine is chaste, but ravishing, reckless. She is on a rampage for Love.

The hero is chaste, but wears his hair long so that it flutters in the wind on the moor.

You look up from the page and into the aqua ripples of the swimming pool. You peer deeply into the depths. You ask:

Is Love a lie?

How To Be Gorgeous

"The latest statement in beauty is Warts!" the female celebrity asserted, as the camera panned in on her face to showcase two strategically placed lumps, one on her chin and another on her left cheek near the nose.

"You too can be a part of this exciting new fashion trend. And wait! It's not just for gals."
A smiling young man appears on the screen sporting a wart precisely in the middle of his forehead.

"Yes, call Dr. Blemish today and make an appointment for the latest advance in cosmetic surgery: wart transplants.

"This is a relatively painless procedure that can be performed in your own home.

"Just think:
no more sitting at home
waiting for the phone to ring.
No more singles bars.
No more speed-dating.
After your wart
transplant, romance,
sexual invitations
and even marriage proposals
will pour in like Oil of Olay.

"Act now to take advantage of our two warts for the price of one sale. And wait! Act now and we'll throw in absolutely free a king-sized tube of our pimple-propagator balm. All this for \$9.99.

"If you wish to be a donor please send a sample in a self-addressed stamped envelope.

"Operators are standing by."

How To Become an American Idol

She drives 100 miles in sleet and ice to the hospice where she works because she knows that Mrs. Greene is in the last stages of lung cancer. She is an American Idol.

He gives up his only free day to take his son camping so that they can watch the wildlife and name the trees. He is an American Idol.

She never says a bad word about what people are wearing, or how they speak, or what they do in the bedroom, or what they believe to be true. She is an American Idol.

He spends every other evening offering free legal advice to disadvantaged families; he gives them vegetables from his garden. He is an American Idol.

She does not believe that most poor people are that way because of something they did or failed to do. She helps when she can. She is an American Idol.

You don't have to sing and dance, to be an American Idol.

Hyphenated Happiness

I like those languages that combine words with a hyphen, like joy-luck. How I yearn to be in that club, if the dues are not too high.

I've had joy, but not much luck; maybe joy comes with luck, or maybe we get lucky when we are joyful.

Life is complicated-simple.

I Am a House

I am a roof:
Like layered shingles
my emotions and thoughts overlap,
and the layers below buoy up
the ones above, but bow
to the weight on top.
I weather with age
and change in character
and symmetry.

I am a chimney:
Warmth exudes from my innermost places when cordial fuel abounds and happiness burns in my being.
When the weather turns bad, though, my thoughts become smoky and dry.

I am a wall:
When I'm afraid,
when I'm confused and adrift,
I partition and compartmentalize
my feelings and new walls rise up
like shoji screens,
sequestering me from my self
and others, but providing no more
protection than paper walls.

I am a room:
This aspect of me
is distinct from that.
The chambers of Me
may intersect and doors
from one state of mind to another
may be open, or they may be closed.
Some are wings long shut off,
no doors, no access or exits.

I am a ceiling:
On friendly days
I seem to be above it all,
suspended in peace
and a space that is benign
and airy.

I am a floor:
On days when life seems
merely one day followed by another,
like the pattern in a parquet surface,
I am low and downtrodden,
with no view but the ceiling
where I dwelled not that long ago.

I am a house:
I abide through
the sunniest, most pristine days
and the darkest, coldest nights
and rely upon the foundations
of my past and the durability
of my future
to keep me standing
until I can stand no more.

If Verses Were Taxis

He liked the rimy verses of Robert Frost, and the vers libre bit him quick on his simmering ears.

He indulged in Tennyson and his bells and Poe's and Donne's which tolled as tintinitus in his simmering ears.

He himself was a poet whose pages were blank verse, whose rhymes were half-rhymes, whose meter was running,

running for his life.

Imagining Home

Into the open window, the perfume of ripening pears meanders through the room like softly whispered prayers.

On the cherry sideboard cooling is a rhubarb pie covered with a linen cloth the colors of the sky.

Cinnamon, allspice, and nutmeg sprinkled on piping toast, and in the oven sizzling waits a plump and juicy roast.

This is home, whether in Massachusetts, Maine, or in the mind. Home is where good things wait—the delicious, domestic kind.

Imprints

As her life became simpler, skeletal, like a stripped-down car, she began to crave minutiae— the pollen on the flower, not the bloom, the count of the cotton threads, not the patterns and color of the fabric.

She became immersed in the handwriting of long-forgotten historians, oblivious to the upheavals and cataclysms of the passage of time unraveling on the page like Rapunzel's hair.

She imagined she could hear the quiet squeak of the fountain pen or the quill as if the paper were resisting the scratching-on of letters, words, phrases, that mimic the grunts and breaths of speech.

One day, weary from her daily dissections of detail, she set out on a walk to a nearby forest. It was there that the gnawing of caterpillars and beetles on leaves began to suggest the gnawing of the pen on the paper, the beat of her pulse the rhythm of human speech.

Perhaps the closest we'll get to immortality is found in the scratches we've left on the things we touch: the chewed-on leaves of forest insects, the hesitant black strokes on a blank leaf of paper.

Impulse

That day the pine forest a quarter-mile down the road caught fire. Ponderosas, loblollies, stalwart Southern titans: all charred pillars, jagged wooden stalagmites now.

That was the day Louise left home for good. The pungent smell of burning timber, the black buttress of smoke above the cedar trees near the house, seemed to speak to her, like smoke signals.

Heart on fire, she backed up the rusted Chevy pickup, pointed it toward Memphis and drove like mad, the wildfire behind her, smouldering expectations before her.

Inaction in Action

A sinewy copperhead contracted like a bedspring has hypnotised a fledgling on the riverbank. I shrivel up. I strain to say: Watch out!

Indiscriminate

Wild violets grow in pasture and battlefield, they care not who graze.

Inhospitable Places

Just as you to inhospitable places are drawn, so am I.

Just as some je ne sais quoi has taken you from me

and set you down among sage and saguaros

and starlit desert skies like dotted swiss, like

symphonies both sweet and bone-chilling,

so have I been seduced by the very thing that repels me:

long winters, blankets, quilts of snow, that provide no warmth.

Why does someone so hungry for green, for green that lasts,

for warmth that pushes into winter with grace, not force,

find solace and sense in the white chill of the North?

Inhospitable places, where scalding sand and white snow

spread their welcome mats to accept us even as reluctant guests.

Innoculation for Loneliness

A gypsy fortune-teller, for a nominal fee, once said to me:

It is your separation that will salvage you. Until you put away your arrogance and admit that you are not immune to the need for human affection, you will continue to sit there alone with your HBO and your latest Amazon purchases.

There is no innoculation for loneliness.

Inquistion

I asked her:

Do you still still pause in the summer rain to absorb its cooling moisture, delight in the way its tickles your scalp and trickles into your eyes like reverse tears?

And do you still stand motionless, in awe when a sudden breeze turns the undersides of the silver maple leaves upward to reveal their glimmering undersides?

Do you still break for wild animals and swerve to give the curious squirrel another day of life?

Do Bette Davis movies make you cry; are you still thinking of joining the Peace Corps? Do you still believe that people are intrinsically good and that the wounds of the world will heal in time?

And her answer to my questions:
'No. I'm all grown up now, '
filled me with remorse
and a sense of loss, as I wished her well
and we went our separate ways.

Inside and Back Out

A forest encircles the lawn, the lawn encircles sheets of English ivy, the ivy encircles the walls of a house, the house encircles its furnishings, the furniture encircles a family the family sits on the furniture, the furniture completes the house, the house is cuddled by walls, the walls are warmed by English ivy, the ivy loathes the horizontal lawn, the lawn pines to be a forest.

Intergalactic E-mail

(Translation from Cassandrian by unknown source)

To: Space Station Cassandra II From: Classified Code 042806

Re: Space Station Earth

Greetings to all.
The expedition continues to go well.
I'm lying here on a hillside
on Project Earth and
though it cannot compare with
our beloved Cassandra II,
I must say it is lovely
and peaceful here.
I am surrounded by yellow plant life
that an Earthling poet once danced among
and referred to as daffodils.

The breeze is from the southwest and tickles my beard. A quiet peace embraces me as I sit here writing.

You will hear more in my official report, but I can say that the quiet respite I describe right now is not the norm for this lovely but fragile land.

Though I have (incognito of course) interviewed hundreds of earthlings who were as kind and gentle as any Cassandrian, many are war-like and confrontational.

Nations across oceans have weapons capable of obliterating all or part of the population. All it takes is a push of a button.

The citizens of Space Station Earth Engage in societal exclusion of their own kind.
Citizens are penalized and isolated for the color of their skin, their religious beliefs, their gender, or even for habits of love and affection.
Some have suffered and died

And yet, I see hope for this land, as I lie here gazing up into an azure sky toward my Homeland up there. You'll recall that we too once went through sad times, dark ages. But we endured and we learned from our mistakes.

I miss my home and look forward to my return. A flying insect that my guidebook calls a monarch butterfly has perched upon my knee, brilliant wings spread wide.

Yours, 042806

Interview with a Dubious Lunatic

What day were you born?

I was not born.

What do you mean?

I have a photographic memory. Had I been born, I would remember it.

What is your father's name?

I have no father.

I am your father.

I was not born. Perhaps I am YOUR father.

Perhaps. You are suffering from a severe psychological condition.

So are you.

What do you mean?

You think I am sick; therefore you think you will cure me. I am incurable.

What makes you say that?

You cannot cure someone who is not ill.

That's absurd.

Don't argue with your father.

Intruders

Arriving home from work, I noticed that on the table lay a bowl of wisteria, purple irises, violets, and a single crimson tulip.

I live alone.

?

Invisible People

There are people who love too much, and who thrive on the human touch, who luxuriate in the sweet confection of friendship and warm affection.

There are men who'd die for it, and women who'd cry if there lives weren't lit by the lamp of their children's smile even for awhile.

There are household pets from whom the owner gets strokes of happy gratitude and the joy of an ascending mood.

But there are also people who live lonely, sad, and captive without the flow of the common thread of love and instead

Go through their days in ordinary ways loveless, never missed. Yes, they do exist.

Iris Flores, in Retrospect

Iris Flores still believed.
She had danced naked at Woodstock to Jimi Hendrix's Star-spangled chords and the spasms of Joe Cocker's electrified body.
The geraniums on her front porch still cascaded from hand-made macrame webbing.
A purple VW bug rusted in the back yard, the painted-on daisies only silhouettes now.

She still wore floor-length shifts and granny-dresses to work and drank Constant Comment on her break.

She was used to people calling her eccentric, anachronistic, but she still believed everything she believed when she was 21.

She still felt that something was in the air, something flowery, something sweet, something warm and hopeful, like Constant Comment tea.

The state of things today, the status quo was for Iris not an option. For her the summer of love was more than just a season, it was the beginning of a life-long belief in the potential of mankind.

It Always Rains at Funerals

It rained all morning, and mourning reigned behind the lowered shades, the closed blinds, the drawn drapes.

Even the expectant clothes poised in the faux-cherry armoire seemed sagging, wet, disappointed, weary, wearer-less.

Do the elements notice a human death? Does a house contract and sigh when its occupants give up the ghost?

Or is death a lonely passing, memorialized by a relative, a friend or two?

Probably, but the drumtap of somber rain and the banishment of the light of day seem to punctuate for the living a passing from flesh to earthy things and to the sky.

It Takes a Lifetime

It is only after all the pages have been turned, that we understand the story; only after the lessons have been learned that we revel in the glory.

We cannot judge our lives until we have lived them out and withstood the pain, and sought out every joy and embraced the doubt, waiting in the cool, gentle rain.

Jewel in the Ashes

His spirit lay cracked, fissured like the branched webwork on an antique vase, still viable, but flawed.

His being hacked, as if by a machete; his will severed like canes of bamboo, fallen akimbo, no longer striving for the sun.

His mercy wracked and as withered as vines in November, still embracing the trellis though drained of sap and sinew.

Yet shimmering amid his misery, a tuft of green in sterile earth, the residue of his youth, the dreams he's packed for a lifetime waits in the rubble, patient.

Judy, Joni, and Joan

Judy, Joni, and Joan, the balladeers of sixties folk, the minstrels of protest: where are you; where did you go?

Aren't you a little old to be sneaking joints in smoky cellars in Greenwich Village now?

Come out, come out; there's work to do. Sing us out of the funk.

Tell us about magic dragons and tragic heroes; Inscribe our anguish in clefs and notes and, most of all...

sing something pretty.

Juggernaut

Like a juggernaut, propelled by an unseen forces, love vanquishes all.

Kite Dreams

Think of a kite.

It is a handsome kite, a pretty one. Imagine the kite is you.

You're closer to the sun and the wind seems wild, new.

Though you're made of paper, you are strong, you bend,

you caper, you spin.

Above you azure, after that indigo, below is green, after that black.

You wonder when to let go—only a string holds you back.

The kite is on one end of the cord; you are on the other.

Who's leading who, brother?

Imagine you've let go of the string and it's let go of you.

Now will you soar and sing or just admire the view?

Or will you plop to the ground Weighed down by fear and the sound of your own voice?

Knowing That I Don't Know

Everything is circuitous, coiled or coiling like a snake, spiraling, spinning, whirling in my mind.

Just when I think
I've figured it all out,
and have achieved enlightenment,
or gumption, or at least
some horse-sense,
doubt uncoils and spirals
and spins and whirls
in my mind, smartly announcing:
You don't know squat!

Krazy Karma

Inside the nested Chinese box a spinning spider spun. Beside the spider lay a nest of serpents and another nested Chinese box. Next to the nest of serpents, the spider ceased to spin.

Fearing the spider-eating serpents nesting near, he hid inside the nesting Chinese box, inside which housed another nesting Chinese box, and a spider-eating serpent.

...and so it goes.

Lady in a Green Chemise

Not unlike a lounging caterpillar, arrayed in her green chemise she nibbled cold sprays of fresh parsley spilled upon her knees.

Her thoughts were pungent and bitter, like the herbs she ate, and she chewed them gingerly and she swallowed them whole with no regrets and with all her energy.

If I were a blade of grass, or if I were a worm, I'd have no worries to rile me or problems to resolve, and if I were a leaf nothing would beguile me.

Yet the leaf is consumed by the worm, and the caterpillar fears the poisonous leaf; there is no sure haven from danger for all beings and therefore no relief.

Lady of Sorrows

She gazed upon her past in a box of last year's Christmas tree ornaments: inextricable, a tangle of tinsel, a broken angel.

Lake Scene with Ducks

For a moment let's not consider the beauty of the mallard paddling, paddling on the lake. Overlook her irridescent shawl shimmering green like a silk kimono; ignore her resplendent composure as she drifts in spendor like Cleopatra's barge. Disregard her breast, chestnut hued, a mahogony bib, and think nothing of her hind-feathers like soft gray cummulus clouds. Concentrate instead on the wake, the silver trail left behind as she's paddling, paddling on the lake. Take note of reflections, the expanse of water, the trees, bordering the water. The sky and its reflection.

Now, close your eyes and consider the beauty of the bird itself

Last One Finishing First

It is the lion we lionize, not the lamb. He who cries or tries to compromise isn't worth a damn, or so it's said.

He who roars and rattles sabers and bayonets, breaks in line, and abuses his pets calls himself a gentleman, but despises gentle men.

Yet, nice guys do finish first, more times than you would admit, and bullies are the worst by taking umbrage in their grit and brute strength.

But even the fearless lion is tender with his cubs and kills for food not fun or to vanquish anyone who rubs him the wrong way.

Brute, you may finish first, but your victories are curst in hell; the man who finishes first may not finish well.

Last Summer Leaf on a Maple Tree

A paraquette prominent in a gathering of cardinals. One jade in a casket of garnets: Last Summer Leaf on a red maple tree.

Late-Night Phone Call

Maybe old emotions are not like ashes, but more like embers, still pulsating with fire and energy.

Once they were towering, like loblolly pine trees or 100 year-old oaks, too high to scale.

Now they lie smouldering in the hearth of my heart cooling, dying, but still emanating heat.

They self-ignite on cold, rainy nights, when in the chill and loneliness, I dial your number and talk and laugh with you until midnight.

Lazyboy

Goldfinches congregate in the mimosa trees.

The sun is rising, topaz and cerise.

The first roses radiate their signature scent

and industrious honeybees report to their stations.

The shadow on the sundial lengthens ominously

as I bathe in the pulsations of my garden and

I think up excuses to miss work.

Learning How To Samba

In Rio de Janeiro one night you taught me to samba while you mixed blue moons at midnight and tequilas sunrises at 6 AM.

You never missed a beat.

The shadows of hibiscus and the musky emblems of the sun, marigolds and fiery zinnias, danced with us on the sepia flagstones, all terra cotta and terrible in their earthiness.

Where did Rio go?
Where did that sultry
lilt in your voice,
that breath of life
mingled with marigolds
zinnias and ripe limes,
go?

I imagined that night that night that there would be other nights, maybe not on a moonlit Brazilian courtyard, but in a room after the children are put to bed, a gentle fire singing at the hearth, when you teach me all over how to samba.

Learning Patience from a Pomegranate

You cannot appreciate pomegranates without patience. First wait for the red crepe-papery blooms to announce the coming of the fruit by signaling and then shimmying out of the star-like hands that cupped them, then let them go.

It will be months before the fleshy buttons begin to plump and inflate, green balloons tinged with the same crimson of the blossoms now decaying on the ground below.

You'll know when the time has come at last to pluck them from their stems, conduits to the earth that fed them so that they can now feed you.

You'll know because they begin to crack open, breaking apart like fissures in the rocks after an earthquake. Through the thin cleft an entirely different shade of red, pomegranate-red is revealed.

You'll place the appleish ball on your cutting board and glare at it at first, perplexed, worried, wondering if it's worth the consternation. "Perhaps I'll just write about it." you say, unconvinced.

In a quick moment of decisiveness you snatch the angry red sphere, looking like a miniature of planet Mars, and pull each side with passion.

A few roseate seeds escape and clatter on the board like liquefied rubies; hundreds more of these edible jewels cling to the pieces of hull eliciting still more apprehension.

You gingerly peel off a single seed, place it into your mouth, chew and expel the inedible pit, repeating the ritual until in a panic, you tear off a dozen at once and chew and expel, expel and chew.

Changed forever, now, from a being who had never grown a pomegranate and never had the tenacity

to eat one all the way through, you fumble to the wooden bowl on the dining room table, reach in, and peel a banana.

Leda and the Swan

Leda wanted something beautiful in her house, so she went to City Park to the lake and wrestled a swan, lugging it home to her living room.

But all the squawking and flapping began to get on her nerves, so she transported it to the bathtub.

The bird bit her, and that night she couldn't take a bath.

The next morning she evicted the swan.

Still desiring something beautiful in her house, she scoured the local yard sales and purchased a striking portrait of Elvis on black velvet.

Leda sighed contentedly as she cracked open a book she had also gotten for a steal at the sale; by somebody named Yeats.

Lemons on Apple Trees

No tree bears all varieties of fruits: not apple trees or peaches, and not the tree of knowledge, and all the things it teaches.

There are cultivars unknown to man, awaiting to be brought to light; there are many now extinct, or ravaged by the blight.

Some species are alien to the earth, but perhaps inhabit other universes; others may never see the light of day anywhere but in verses.

Can we but permit a mystery to remain mysterious, to leave The Question unanswered? Is it really that serious?

Beware the arrogant tree that claims to bear all fruit, it's probably just an pretender, deceptive to the root.

Let Go of the Day

Hey! Remember that weary old English teacher, yes, the one with the sad eyes that seemed to focus in on you expectantly as you sat in the back row, trying not to attract attention? You, know, the one who mumbled something about Carpe Diem. Seize the Day! she shrieked, or he.

And remember that time you did indeed reach out and lasso in the moment. That time you saved the day by catching the touch-down pass or were elected homecoming queen? The day you found your love and lost it the next day?

The hard part, isn't it, is the letting go of the day. If we cling to the day and never let it go, how can we seize and savor the next, and the next?

Letter from a Restless Friend

I'm bequeathing the old Dodge Dart to you; Guess that's not the right word since it implies that I'm dead, and I'm not.

The Dodge is though. Its demise was heralded with much fanfare, hissing steam and incense:

She overheated and gave up the ghost. If you can get her running, I can think of nobody else I'd rather pass her down to. You and me solved the problems of the world in that front seat; I can still see you sitting over there in the passenger's seat telling me what's wrong with the world and how we could fix it.

Don't ask me why I ended up out in the middle of nowhere, broke down. I know you know why.

I was out on one of my "excavations" looking for spider lilies in the bayou, when I saw this little tractor trail marked "Horizon Road."

Now you know I can't resist poetry and I took the bait, riding off into that irresistible horizon.

When the car died I had to spend the night pulled over in a cotton field. The next morning a local farmer in a pickup came by and gave me a lift back to the nearest town.

From there I hitched west and just kept going. and I'm still going. I'd tell you where I am but it don't matter I won't be here tomorrow.

I followed his instructions on the map insert in his letter and found the old jalopy

on the side of Horizon Road. I did not have it towed but left it there as a monument to my friend who I knew I'd never see again. I ride out there looking for indigenous flowers every month or so. The old Dodge is all covered up with honeysuckle vine now, a sweet-scented sculpture pointed toward the horizon.

Letting Go of the Leaves

Last year's growth, and remnants of the year's before, has scattered a plush rug underneath the budding maples, as though preparing a wide cushion for the first winged seeds of May, then autumn's sloughing off.

Up there, though, everything is birth; branch tips have advanced a quarter of an inch, and every leaf is a neonate.

This is birth, but not rebirth, these look nothing like the shriveled leaves which lie shrunken on the forest floor, victims of the diaspora of autumn. These buds, no green Lazaruses, but fugitive prophets, will abide their season, fufill their reason, hide and house the birds, then move on, forced migrants, toward the rich, dark, promised land below. The performance over, they will not be back for an encore.

First they leaf, then they leave.
Even the rising sap of the tree
ascends like the phoenix from
old growth.
The sap, transparent blood of life,
ressembles the circuitous flow of a table fountain
that recyles the water like a prayer wheel's
revolutions.
Young cells have
mingled with the old
and spring erupts again,
and will again.

Life Span

The professor quietly enters the lecture hall and begins to wind the timer.

This will be a timed examination consisting of equal parts oral, essay, multiple choice, and true and false activities.

When your time is up the buzzer will go off, but pre-knowledge of that time is not permitted for this examination.

You may begin.

Life Studies

He paints a landscape, a still life, a seascape, countless nudes, an abstract, a study, a watercolor, a gouache, his mother.

He loads his palette like a shotgun: ceruleans, carmines, ochres, cadmium reds, burnt umber, viridians, chinese white, and raw sienna.

He paints boldly, sometimes with knives-full of pigment, or with a single sable-hair, shyly, brazenly, tenderly, brush heavy with paint, or only a nectar-drop.

Since finished paintings need a name; he calls each one "Self Portrait."

Life without a Glossary

The paradox of people who write and paint and compose symphonies is that the world around them sometimes can't compete within the world inside them.

"I'll go for a walk, " she says or "I'll climb a tree to see the view, " he proclaims.

But she has already recorded each step and he has captured the distant mist and the orchres and greens of the aspens in the sun, first on the canvas of his mind, then on the medium.

Are there persons, they wonder, who do not experience this yearning to capture, to elaborate, to elucidate, to captivate?

Once she left her notebook at home. and he his sketchpad, and saw the world for once without filters, without commentary.

"Too scary, " she said.
"The colors are all wrong, " he proclaimed, and they hurried home to transform it all into art.

Like Hot, Arid Santa Ana Winds

Like hot, arid Santa Ana winds, his fury pushed into the atmosphere, searching out stray flames of outrage, and unfolding them like a red and blue Japanese fan

Lines Trickling Down

How many times will you go to the well? How many rhymes will it take to tell your story?

The cool water of the well of the soul is deep and poems are promises to keep for you and me.

How many waves can we count in the sea? How many leaves are blown from the tree in the fall?

The billowing waves of the sea churn and the leaves on the tree will return after all.

Here poems start, Cloistered in every heart. Pour, drink.

Little Thoughts Like Gnats

At first he thought they were gnats, miniscule specks orbiting around each other, like neutrons and protons, you can't see them but you know they're there because they leave signs.

But when he really looked, he saw that they were tiny butterflies, brilliantly tinted, with intricate patterns on their wings, like fine crewel and that they had something to say.

Locked Rooms

The mind has many chambers, nothing is lost, everything that happens to us resides there.

The doors to some of these rooms are padlocked— it takes a jolt to jar them open.

Maybe these sealed compartments are bolted for a reason. Is it advisable to live in the past?

Lonely, but Not Like Garbo

But I like being alone, the woman was saying. I have no need for human interaction. I am independent and am beholden to nobody.

The following day
I saw the woman
sitting on a bench
in the park,
oblivious to the mist
that was gradually soaking
her to a chill.
Nobody,
she whispered.
But the rain sighed
gathered momentum,
and did not seem
to hear her.

Looking Back at Destiny

Some people can sense the proximity of tribulation; be it from a sustained acquaintance with illness or incertitude, whether from some prescience or a fined-tuned sensitivity to change, any kind of change, they are barometers of bathos, reluctant Cassandras reading the signs and bracing for the worst.

Or maybe we are all clairvoyant, with pictures of our destinies tucked away in some pleat in our brain matter, like family photos in a shirt pocket. Maybe it takes enormous courage to open the gate when what lies on the other side seems unfamiliar and menacing. And yet sometimes it seems that looking back at what has already passed the gate and has taken up residence in our memory is just as forbidding as getting a glimpse of tomorrow.

Losing Blue

Pinpoint the very moment that the blueness of the sky became for you an everyday thing.

Let's say it was a cloudless day, when your mother and father, brought you home from the hospital, like a birthday present: all wrapped, all brand new, you must have seen at least a sliver of another larger blanket, azure, soft.

You would see it and marvel at it many times after. You would wonder how something could be so all-encompassing, yet so gentle and light.

And did you even suspect that a day would come when you would look at something so utterly extraordinary, but not quite see it?

Lost (and Found) in Space

Something was missing, like the slender space left when a book is removed from its shelf.

The adjacent parts of his life remained upright, but unstable, exposed.

Did someone steal these pages from his life or did they self-implode?

Did they disintegrate from lack of use, or maybe they were never there at all.

If nature abhors a vacuum, this void in his life is only temporary.

Fill it with love, with happiness, with good books, with good friends, with reams of poetry, with music, with compassion, with tenderness, with...

Ah, I've run out of space.

Lot's Pillar

This was to be her lot in life: Gazing over boundless desert, a sentinel of salt, punished, motionless, arid as the wind, still looking homeward, but no angel.

And does she stand there still? headless now, so we can no longer see the longing, the dismay in her granulated countenance. What mother, what being, should be deprived of one last glance of home?

Frozen in the radiating heat, she she sits guard like the Sphinx, forever looking back, eyeless, heartless, a crumbling memorial to the sacred bond of home.

Louise Plants Tropical Flowers Outside in Winter

Well, she's done it now, said the neighbors.

Looking out their wndows as the blizzard intensified, they witnessed a troubling sight: Red hibiscus in the dead of winter—like bleeding patches on the snow.

I understand she likes the color red. Why doesn't she plant, then poinsettias or nandinas or even holly?

But Louise (the woman who had "done it now") carried pot after pot of the tropical shrub outside until she had formed a perfect circle of crimson—a ring of floral fire. Next she took a lawn chair and sat down right in the middle of her handiwork and appeared to be praying, or weeping.

As the Nor'easter accelerated, the beach umbrella she had erected toppled and the garish plants gradually began to sink into the snow as did Louise.

The silent witnesses stood frozen against the window panes. Framed against the picture windows, they looked to Louise like family photographs.

Love Is Like Dandelions

Love is like dandelions, profligate and common. But have you ever picked up a dandelion and looked beyond its reputation?

Worn-out words, pretty yellow weeds. Love is boundless; Language is limited.

Love Smoke

You've dissevered my soul like an atom smasher, and my being, my very nucleus lies in particles, like snow flakes made of slivers of glass, like steel sleet.

That was my sanity, splayed out there now streaming, now evaporating into the thin vapor of love-thoughts of a billion other lovers—this passion-mist hovering like a mushroom cloud after hearts collide.

Magnificat

My life magnifies all life. All the shortcomings, all the victories, all the vices, all the vanities of this one man mirror and multiply all those of my brothers, my sisters.

Your life magnifies my life.
What is poetry and music anyway
if not a conversation, a convocation,
a striving for common ground?
If I listen with all my heart,
I just might hear
the very music that you hear.

Malleability

A shrouding haze congregates in the south, glissading down Palomino Ridge. It could be rain, a late spring snow—maybe it's my cloudy thoughts.

The hills, like us, change all through the day, day by day.
Just last week they were all amethysts and emeralds—all evergreens and the first redbuds of the season.
Now they rise smoky, stone gray, all neutral tones.

I wish to be more like the hills, which change their moods as we change our clothes. Natural things surrender to flux and to the passage of time. Natural things ebb and flow with a supple grace.

Man in Phone Booth on a Rainy Day

A cold November drizzle had dampened the pages of the phone directory as it dangled from a wire, flaccid, like a yellow and white tongue, a thousand numbers whispering: Call me.

The phone booth was enclosed in glass, unusual these days when people carry phone booths on their backs and in their cars. An accordian door shut out the damp wind.

From outside the booth the condensation on the glass walls of the enclosure made the man inside look pixelated and fluid. Tears on the glass obscured tears in his eyes.

Bad news can come through the mail, e- or snail. It can be overhead on the bus, packaged up and shipped overnight. It can be faxed, it can be fillibustered, it can be forwarded.

But love affairs always seem to terminate at the end of a wire.

Map of the Moon

I would say that Luna is the lonliest place, reeling out there in the confines of space, barren, barreling toward the place it started from, buoyed 'round the planet as a bubble in pursuit of a bubble, troubled, a compendium of dogs chasing tails. A tale whose beginning is also its end.

The map of the moon is cold geography. Seas of Cold and Rain, Oceans of Storms, dust, dust, dust, dust, just dust.

Funny, from here where we stand, she always looks so warm, so grand. Like a porch light, a street light and things that guide us home, she seems situated there in the night, as fundamental as a pocket comb.

There are moonish places here on earth, desolate as a moor in winter, a sterile firth, but we must, we must trust that uninhabited places are luminous too and from the valleys of the moon the satellites of the sun seem to suggest home.

Marchiness in May

Audacious, impertinent: this Marchiness in May. The seasons seem to have bumbled, bungled into anarchy, lost their way, like migrating birds whose inner compass has dislodged and whirrs futilely in the air, no longer pointing home.

It is as though winter and summer reject their separateness, their polarity and have vowed to amalgamate, so we'll no longer need twelve names for the markings of the moon.

May, the merry month, the harbinger of jeweled summer nights and the gilded dawns of June, what must we do, what burnt offerings, what incantations, what penance must we serve to break the spell, and remove today, this unsettling Marchiness in May?

Mask of the Panther

The black of the panther is so intensely black that in openings in the jungle their forms stand out, instead of blending into the shadowy foliage.

It's hard not to wonder if the constant onus of appearing ferocious, menacing, unapproachable instills a fear even greater than his prey's.

Never to be able to soften, to uncoil the lean, sculpted muscles of his back, or to gaze absently at the hypnotic trickle-trackle of the rain: so heavy the mission.

Surely even the fearless stalkers of the impenetrable rainforest can feel this— this disconnectedness, this separation. In rare, unguarded moments if you dared to get close enough you might find signs of another kind of hungriness in his eyes.

Mayan Temples

The disintegrating steps of the ruins at Chichen Itza lay scorched in the sun.

The guide told us that for years the pyramid had been obscured with jungle vines.

I looked to the pinnacle before I began to climb and stared down eternity.

Step up. Step up....

Streamers of inexplicable regret, like choking lianas, descended on me when there were no more steps.

I withered in the absence of the gods.

Maypop

In her frilly lavender or blue fancy-crown with a luna-moth green star sequestered inside, passiflora incarnata trails majestically in the grass.

Coveted for her divine nectar by the handsome Gulf Fritillary butterfly and by homo sapiens for her luscious green berry which makes a pretty jelly, she is passionately courted.

A bit pretentious, and prefering her more dignified Latin moniker, she judiciously rations her nectar should anyone call her 'maypop.' Like men and nations, she can be confrontational at times.

Meandering Back to the Fork in the Road

Comes a time when past actions seem so foolish to us now and we tell ourselves resolutely that had we to do it all over, we'd take a different path.

But would we have?

We see the diversions in the road ahead of us, the estuaries and bayous of the river we're sailing down, and wonder where they lead. The young are curious and easily distracted.

And had we not veered off, had we dutifully followed the worn path, the guiding current, would we be writing the same poems, singing the same songs, dispensing the same wisdom as now?

All paths and streams, it would seem, can take us somewhere, even if they come to an abrupt end and turn us back to where we began. Sometimes, even, we can retrace our steps and seek again the paths we passed back then when we were in such a hurry. And armed with experience, and a hunger for adventure see finally what we missed.

Medicine Man

The newly licensed interne scoffs at shamans, herbalists, and witch doctors, as he lifts his vial of purple tablets toward his patient and shakes it rhythmically.

He scoffs at those charletans who "read" auras, prognosticate from palm prints and tarot cards, as he studies his CAT scans and EEGs as a theologian poring over the Dead Sea scrolls.

Thumping and rattling bones with his expensive instruments, he pooh-poohs poultices and potions, as he scratches out indecipherable hieroglyphics for narcotics and mood-enhancers.

Managed care, he assures us, will set us free from the stranglehold of our superstition. Step into my apothecary and behold the magic of modern pharmacology.

Medusa is Mad

The irony of it (sort of like Medusa getting bit by a snake) did not escape her.

She was the one who ALWAYS had the upper hand, who never gave an inch, whose venom was 100 proof.

She could not for the life of her pinpoint the moment when she had lowered her guard, exposed her vulnerability.

Betrayal is a slithery thing, reptilian, if you will. She didn't see it coming or she would have coiled and struck first.

Memento Mori: a Memo

If to dust we must submit, and with the cold December wind incorporate our breath, when lowered last into the pit, let the lees of my life blend with the ashes of my death.

I hope there'll be diamond or two dazzling in the dirt.

Metamorphosis

Chrysalis: jade pendant, suspended in the wind from a dill weed stem like a Chinese lantern.

Beauty concentrated, compressed, bottled up, wired to explode.

Migrant Mother

Every wrinkle, marking her skin, burnt parchment, every ache in her body, every Great Depresssion, every dustbowl, all the backbreaking work of men and women who draw sustenance from the earth, every graying lock of her once-silky hair, all the tears she's shed, all the tables she's set all the meals she's cooked when the crops failed and winter loomed; the tender glance she gives her husband when he's broken by cares: All is written in the holy book of her eyes.

Milky Ghosts Who Wander in and Out

In certain situations, some people dissolve, as trees lose their greenness when night descends and turns them into frozen shadows.

A woman of beauty, for example, is diminished in a congregation of beauties, like a rare orchid at a garden show obscured in a sea of blooms.

Shy, unhappy people who stand out in a rejoicing crowd, wander invisible among themselves.

It's as if we're phantasms, milky ghosts who wander in and out of perception, peripheral visions.

Perhaps it's only when we fall in love, that we feel all here; that another spirit has plucked us out of the murky river of life and said to us: There you are. You are there.

Milky Light of Early Evening

Cherish that sliver of time descending at the close of day like a window shade slowly drawn—a white gem glitters on the fabric: a solitary diamond, a star.

The day is as fatigued as are we, the nourishing sun has resumed its manic chase around the globe, like a dog in eternal pursuit of its tail.

But it has left behind for a few fleeting moments traces of its brilliant presence like white dust lingering in the firmament, as if to say: Remember me; I will not forsake you.

Milky Moods

It was a milky morning that day. Spilt a quart, drank a pint. Milked the piggy bank for the last dollar and a half.

Outside the sky was still blue, thank god, but seemed blended in white, as if a dropp or two of Coffeemate had overturned in the firmament and creamed it up. Opaline, I think they call it? or Opalesque?

Driving to work in my Opal Cadet (just kidding), I noticed the cows serenely nuzzling the fenceposts on the side of the road, their udders swollen like matrons' purses.

Funny how milk gets on the mind, or a tune chases us around all day. I think I'll have a latte or a café au lait today.

Miniature: Woman on a Horse

Rippled like the red dunes of Oman, patterned by thirsty wind that meanders serpentine like a cobra, like ribbons of air, her hair is the color of the horse; her mount's nostrils are flaring, like beduoin tent flaps, its breath is quick, like the wind but wet.

Missed Calls

That cell phone dude, Can you hear him now? Who is he talking to? You?

Why does no one ever answer him? Has his life come down to thisa dropped call?

That good man is trying to reach you.

TURN ON YOUR CELL PHONE.

Morning Geese

At 7: 36 A. M. I heard geese. The unmistakable honk-honk demands, DEMANDS, attention. My shiny new edition of Elizabeth Bishop: The Complete Poems slid to the floor, protestingly.

Mesmerized, as though sleep-walking, I ran to the glass door and there they were: changing from perfect V's into perfect checkmarks back into chaos and then back into perfection and yet back again in the matter of seconds. No airforce precision drill exercise could compete.

Unusual to see them this close to the city. Why this place? Why this moment?

Overcome with emotion and not really understanding why, I watched as the last ones moved out of vision. I could not express my wonder until now.

The quietitude they left behind, the stillness in the atmosphere, seemed resonant, vibrated freneticly, until once again the birds resumed their caroling, the clouds carried on their voyage across the sky to India, to China, somewhere exotic, I'm sure, and Elizabeth Bishop's exquisite voice summoned me back to my reading chair.

Mr. Wobbly Prepares for Work

Before he goes to work he must pack his briefcase. First, in goes a canister of insecurity (for a midmorning snack) . Next a couple of reams of worry, double-spaced, bolded.

Carefully, he positions his anger (a mixture of anxiety and road rage) next to a Ziploc full of disillusionment and perplexion.

Finally, he adds a protective layer of arrogance and Voila! He's ready for the day.

Muriel Panatella Extra

My Aunt Ana says:
Back when smoking was still
cool, back when game show
contestants told the truth and their secrets
amid mighty clouds of spiraling smoke,
there was a commercial
in which a Marilyn Monroe-ish
blond bombshell cooed:
"Why don't you pick one up
and smoke it sometimes?"
She never understood until several years later
why her older brother
(who didn't smoke)
used his whole allowance
to buy cigars.

My Dog Is Not an Existentialist

If my dog were an existentialist, he might lay awake all night, disturbed about the implications of dog spelled backwards and how it might add more responsibility to his already onerous life.

He might wonder if his gnawed-down bone is real or just perceived and even whether perception exists or whether there's a heaven or whether there are dogs in heaven and if so would he get in.

And what if humans don't exist?
Who will take me for walks
and fill my water bowl
with fresh clean water?
I bark, but where does the sound go?
Are fleas saints in disguise?
Dare I ever scratch again?

Did Little Sheba come back? What does it all MEAN!

But thankfully my dog does not read Schopenhauer, though he's fond of Lassie re-runs.

Mystery Lady

I remember she used to rub the wings of luna moths over her eyelids for shadow, foreshadowing ingenuity and a darkening cruelty.

She was a colossus cocooned in a dollhouse; a behemoth among forests of bonsai, ever expanding, the world too small to contain her expectations, her wingspan.

I saw her the other day, on a dark street looking inside a café Gazing at a flickering candle on a bistro table, entranced, impatient, incomplete, waiting for me? for you?

Nathaniel's Workout

Nathaniel approached his daily workouts with the determination of a tyrant. Deviations in his routine were regarded as a sign of irresolve, a perverse weakness.

He mounted the treadmill as if stepping into a sacred river, gingerly and expectantly.

As he began the rhythmic pacing, he deftly lit up a handrolled, illicit Havana cigar, eyes watering pleasantly as the exercise room began to fill with its sweet smoke.

Placing the stogie on a silver tray attached cleverly to the exercise machine, he then enjoyed an enthusiastic swig of Wild Turkey from a crystal carafe kept within easy reach.

The liquor and the exertion produced a vigorous sweat on his bushy brow.

Setting the jug aside, he then (as was his routine) unwrapped his double-glazed doughnut, which he had luckily pre-buttered and dusted liberally with powdered sugar and swallowed it down in just two bites (a record for him).

After a good 4 and ½ minutes, (his normal workout limit), Nathaniel switched off the machine, enjoyed another swig and smoke, then retired to the master bedroom for a nice cozy nap.

When he woke up his wife asked him how his workout had gone. "I think I overdid it this time, my dear. I'm afraid I'm becoming one of those over-eager health enthusiastists."

Nature Class

Much like slender zebras queued up, an infantry in black and white camouflage, the birch trees in the distance motioned to me with palsied gestures, green hands tembling, torsos imperceptably bent.

I will teach you a lesson in grace, poise, and flexibility, they seem to say, though in a tone I could scarcely hear above the wind.

I will teach you to look at black and white while seeing the whole spectrum, and the gradients too, in the sky and in the black earth wherein my roots seek support and nourishment.

When I reached the hilltop, removing my shoes and entering the classroom with the blue domed ceiling and the floor carpeted in last year's leaves, my mind unfolded like a flower.

Never Mind

his mind worked like this ungrammatical rhetorically disjointed enjambed with none of the mechanics the signposts the markings that sort out and separate words into phrases into sentences into paragraphs into stories into books into sets of books ideas whooshed through his forehead like startled starlings before beings filtered through his ears and sifted between his lips toward the littered atmosphere of speech

and worse

he never finished a

Noir

She left nothing behind but a three-quarters-smoked cigarette, menthol.

For a moment the spiraling column of smoke reminded him of her: wispy, thin, dead, deadly.

The smear of pastel on the filter clashed with the primary colors of the smouldering tip, fiery, menacing.

He picked it up from the crystal ashtray, hers, expensive, and took a deep draw from it.

Outside the night descended, darker than he remembered and he wondered if it would ever end.

Nomads Going Home

It is said that the reason we keep going back to places from our past is to find out why we left.

Maybe some bedouin instinct an irrepressible urge to fold our tents and move on when the seasons begin to change—is embedded in our nature.

Maybe we can't resist seeing what's around the curve in the road, on the other side of the hill, at the water's edge and beyond the water.

Melville called it that "November in his soul." Is it some icy zephyr in our being that makes us leave our families and friends to set off looking for the promise of April? for warm southern seas? for the neon beacons of the city?

Yet, we reserve a point of return, that place on a game-board marked "GO"— that place we left, not fully knowing why, (maybe it was just our turn) but still a place to where we can come home when the season turns drizzly and cold again.

Not Quite Silence but Almost It

It was in the Algonquin forest of Ontario that I first experienced it: Not quite silence, but almost it.

I only noticed it after we band of ruffians, weekend hikers from Ann Arbor, out to wrestle with the elements

and time-travel back to a time when mobile phones were not even a nascient idea in some geek's back burner

and a time when people worked for food and shelter, not rectangles of colored paper and did not call it work.

It descended upon me like the laciest snow flake, after we had all stopped our chattering and squatted down next to the crystaline

creek which ran like the deer and glistened in the last halos of the sun. Not-quite-silence, but almost it.

On days when primevel forests seem something found only in travel books, when it seems that the color green

has abandoned the spectrum and vanished in the hills far away, I ransack the million compartments of my mind

and I'm almost back there; not quite, but close enough to feel its mighty pulse.

Not-so-random Inquiries

Who are you? Are you a homebody? Are you a nobody, like Emily Dickinson professed to be? Are you everybody, as the pantheists suggest?

Are you what you do? A teacher, an accountant, a retiree, a mother, a father?

Does your identity abide in your gender? in your beliefs, in your heritage?

Does who you are change? Are you the same person you were yesterday.

Who will you be ten years from now? Do you like who you are? Do other people like who you are? Does it matter who you are?

Who am I to ask such questions?

Octobering

Every year about this time you start octobering. You've long tired of juning and julying and it's too early to go decembering.

It's as if the world has turned brown, yellow, red, and mostly orange. Everywhere pumpkins pop up, in the field next door, on the window sill, in the reflections in your autumnish eyes.

You were made for fall, or was it designed for you? The tart crispness of nights, the tart ripeness of late harvest fruit, the tart taste of things dying, yes, dying but not yet dead.

As for me, I'll go marching, marching forward toward May, the month of warmth and expectation, the season of blues and greens, in which, of course, lie the saps and syrups of darker colors.

Ode to a Mason Jar

Who is Mason? Let us thank him for this work of art. How round the vessel, yet so square, a profound basin, so elegant, yet spare.

Crowned with a golden lid, it talks; it says: Pop! to alert us of good things to come; savory things bubble below its top.

Thank you Mason for giving us jelly, jam, and marmelade. Graceful as a Hopi jug, with a sugary, fruity belly, all homemade. We salute you with a hug.

Ode to First Frost

Ah, there you are at last, you with your silver knife, an icy glint in your eye. Nosferatu from the North, you will siphon sap like blood tonight.

Your arrival this year has been late, but the clarion calls, anxious, flustered geese enchanted by a cyclical magnetism, impossible to resist, like Bela Lugosi's eyes, assemble into V's and leave us behind, huddled in our houses, blundled in our false feathers.

You've not spared one lingering aster, not one ivy runner from your killing touch; the crystaline crust stings like the wasps of summer.

Are you proud to be nature's executioner?
Do you shiver in your own lonely frigidity?

I'll try to understand your purpose for being, and marvel at the delicate lace you leave behind to mark your victims, but come March I'll be sorting my seeds for next year and burying for you your dead.

Okie from Skokie

I hear you bought a farmhouse in Sonoma, grabbed it for a song in foreclosure, and with a vinyard.

Had your fill of mergers and acquistions, you told me in your last e-mail.

Had it up to here in the phony intelligensia, the name-droppers, the white hiphop singers whose anger is based on deprivation, not rage.

Had enough of having too much, you opined. Want to feel the squish of grapes on your toes and want to watch the vines crawl toward the azure California sky.

The jpeg you sent of the adobe house where you will live looked sad to me; looked, well, foreclosed. Looked lonely and forsaken. Do you have enough heart left to fill the rooms, to ripen the grapes to bring your very soul to fruition?

Are grapes hard to grow?

Old Man, Wondering

He told me of a time, a time longer than I can remember, or even imagine, when people were less cynical, when humanity was not embarrassed by sentiment, because the sentiment was as real as the grass, a time when people could say things like "Alas!" and not regret it.

There have been times when I yearned to say "Alas! "
But mumbled some profanity instead.

When emotions are the fodder of comedians; when our deepest feelings are something that must be hidden like some drunken relative, then where are we to put them? Tears are real, watery things that I can touch.

Omega Wolf

I'm told that wolf packs are rigidly hierarchical. Each member knows its station and its role.

The alpha male and his alpha wife typically rule without resistence.

The omega wolf
eats last, and is
kept in his
place by all the other members
of the pack.
Any breach of contract
is met with threatening growls and
bared teeth.

It's said that some omegas stoically submit and accept their plight. Others rebel and leave the pack, seeking out other omegas, even finding omega mates and starting their own packs—proof positive that oppression is not inevitable and can be resisted if you're clever enough to sneak away.

I wonder if the omega refugees and their offspring have short memories and designate an omega as well.

On an Impulse

He spent his life at the rim of the vortex, teetering on the edge of the swirling miscellany of humanity; the cold indifferent thrust of time below.

But one day, an impetuous urge came from nowhere and nudged him forward. He stretched his arms behind him as if they were wings of angels and with one forceful inhalation, he dived head first into the spiraling-up and spiraling-down of life and all its giddiness and grief.

On 'Death Rides the Pale Horse' by Turner

Death in this painting is not beautiful, as you'll find Him in Medieval allergorical etchings—all slender with perfect posture. The horse He rides here is sickly pale and grimaces in agony as He gallops onward to His ghastly destination.

No angular stick-figure, not draped in elegant white shrouds, not smiling as though the viewer had just shared a Knock-knock-who's-there? joke. Death rides bareback and appears to be in a distorted position, almost like an acrobat, reaching out toward the viewer all bloody bones, all red and ENRAGED.

I showed the print to my friend who wondered what it would look like up close—
Too horrifying, too immediate.
We turned the page.

Now, when I look at the painting, I hear hoofbeats. When I close the book and look inward, I hear my heartbeat.

On His Grandmother's Hair

It was sudden, the pang. Propelling the garish pumpkin-orange rubber raft with a black, fiberglass paddle, he struggled to zig-zag among the jagged rocks, against the rapids' intentions.

From the banks of the stream, the scene projected as some Chinese New Year's tiger float, the rider in black and the paddle two vertical stripes.

The feeling, it was not physical, but a spasm of anguish and of hot, incendiary emotion, of regret and confusion.

For a few seconds, the white swirls against the shadows of the turbulent rapids reminded him of something human, something now passed like the water behind him.

The natural waves and curls of his grandmother's graying hair for an eternity-in-a-moment seemed to flow once more the way he remembered it framing her gentle face, and like a comb he in his little boat parted it.

Long after he arrived where the rapids end, he pondered on the majesty of unleashed water and the potent thrust of memory.

On the Contrary

Roses are blue, violets are red. Sugar is bitter, or sour instead.

Emeralds are red, rubies are green. Happy is sad, Fat is lean.

Up is down, water is dry, Clean is dirty, the earth is the sky.

The head is the foot, heaven is hell, love is hate-Oh, well.

Always be wary of being contrary, and making a fiction of contradiction.

On the Widows' Walk

On the widows' walk the intoxicating perfume of early wisteria was blended by the blustery March wind into her own sachet of jasmine and lavender.

The purple vines themselves, grape-like clusters, crept up the crisscrossed trellis as if prowling for the invading scents, to repel or to merge.

Her shawl, which covered her head like a mantilla, whipped in the wind like an ultramarine banner, as if a signal or a surrender.

Out there where her eyes transfixed, were yellow buoys, their desolate bells clanging like church bells, funereal.

Out there where majestic clipper ships pierced the line of the horizon lay a promise of the sea

to return to her what it borrowed two years and three months ago: the man who hunted whales

and who was the repository of her heart.

Ophiciophobia

He was not born with ophiciophobia, the fear of snakes, but the swamps of Louisiana hiss in the sun with crawly things.

You have to learn to tell a moccasin from a water snake, a coachwhip from a cottonmouth and to keep your eyes on the ground.

"Watch for snakes, son, " his mama said when she heard the screen door slam. "Yes, ma'am, ." he called back.

Now that he lives in New York City, the only reptiles live in Bronx zoo. Yet other venomous creatures wait poised to strike, and he never fails to warn his son: "Watch out for snakes. You have to know the difference..."

Over Starting Over

She meticulously gathered up all her concerns, her worries, her torpitude, a suicidal thought or two, arranged them efficiently in Saks Fifth Avenue luggage and hurled the whole works off the Williamsburg bridge.

The she packed another.

Pain by Numbers

In your last letter, you arrogantly assured me that there are only three kinds of pain:

- physical,
 emotional,
- 3. social.

Must you innumerate?

But I counter that there are millions, trillions, immeasurable ways to suffer. I myself am on pain number 6,792... and counting....

I'm not surprised.
You who avoid
pain (or any kind of genuine feeling)
like cheap cognac,
invariably defer to trinities:
3 definitions of love;
3 ways to find personal fulfillment;
the 3 best toilet bowl cleaners.

Please refrain from corresponding with me until you can come up with more accurate statistics.

Your long-suffering friend, Sonny

Pair of Haiku

Spring

First bud on the plum, still huddled in brown shawls, Still stuffed with chill.

Winter

Plum bud sleeps deeply, pushing toward any sign of warmth, dreaming of springs past.

Pandora's Prayer

Frozen tears, frozen tears, diamonds, tear-dropp pearls.

Tears aflame, tears aflame, garnets, rubies, red quartz.

Sad tears, blue tears, sapphires, sad sapphires.

Jealous tears, envious tears, chinese jade, emeralds.

Here, take this key, this seal, this solder of gold.

Lock the jewel-case of sorrows, this repository of aching hearts

and liquify the key.

Parable of Five Stones

His son, eight years old, held out his perfect hand in which lay five perfect stones that he had gathered from the river bank.

This one (a purple one) is an amethyst, he said.
This one (a white one) is a diamond, he said.
This one (a red one) is a ruby, he said.
This one (a green one) is an emerald, he said.
This one (a blue one) is a sapphire, he said.

Ah, what beautiful stones, the father exclaimed, but they are not gems, not jewels.

But, the boy said, they are. Jewels are beautiful. Jewels are hard to find. Jewels glitter and come in glorious colors.

Ah, but jewels are more beautiful than these, more hard to find, more glittery, and the colors are more dramatic.

But these stones are beautiful to me, said the little boy. Then they are treasures beyond all price, answered the father.

Parable of the Inquisitive Boy

I want to jump over the wall, but there is no wall to jump over, said the boy to his mother.

Foolish boy, there are walls all around us. There is one between you and me, there is one of stone and silk, venom and honey between us here.

I want to sail on the sea, but there is no sea, said the boy to his father.

You are young, my son. Look out there: Oceans and oceans of life and love and losses stretch out as far as you can see. The water is deep, stormy, but there are quiet spots.

I want to travel to undiscovered lands, but there is no new land to discover, said the boy to himself.

Then explore the dark regions of your self, my friend, the places where goodness is kept, where courage is sequestered, where the man you are to become waits for you.

Parable of the Perplexed Sitcom Fan

A venerable Buddhist master visited the honorable home of his Western friends upon their request.

Every day, upon finishing his meditations, he would retire to the living room (his friends both off to work) to peek inside the window of the mysterious black box full of pictures that moved and spoke. Ah, what a hoot! he exclaimed, in Chinese.

He watched Klinger put on a cocktail dress and sexy city girls take one off. Naughty, he murmured, in Chinese. He saw Diane marry Sam and then not marry him and run off with a psychiatrist, and then to a convent. Good idea, he grinned, in Chinese.

He saw Lucy have a baby and move to Connecticut, and then suddenly Lucy had no children and worked as a secretary for a curmudgeon boss in the city.

No Chinese came to him to comment on this.

Finally, he understood what was happening: Westerners, when they die went directly to karma hell, where their lives repeated over and over and over until they were canceled.

From that day, he never again went into the living room, added an extra hour to his meditation, lit two incense sticks instead of one and prayed to the spirit of Buddha to release him from the eternal wheel of karma. A week later he was on a plane back to Nepal.

Parable of the Proud Butterfly

It's said there was a butterfly who desired to be the most beautiful, the most envied of his species. He rubbed against the reddest flowers and he stole a stripe of blue from the sky. He bathed in golden vats of pollen. He even gorged on nectar to become sweet and fat.

The day came when he determined to make his grand debut. Poised on a begonia leaf, his point-of-departure, his coup, he flapped, flopped, but never flew. So encumbered by his accoutrements, aerodynamics failed abrupt, as a streamlined lizard leapt and lapped him up.

Parable of the Time-stopper

Freddie Morgan, on an impulse, removed all the calendars from his walls, purged his belongings of watches and clocks, and uninstalled Outlook on his PC.

He carefully avoided the dates on newspapers and his onscreen TV Guide and flew into a rage when anyone asked him the time or the day of the week.

Disoriented at first, he barracaded himself inside his house and attempted to cook 3-minute eggs without a timer.

Soon he became adept at accurately estimating the passage of time without artificial means, and thus concluded that time is a bully who will assert his presence regardless.

Parable of the Willow Leaf

A willow leaf flutters in the wind, loosens and drops into the thrusting current below.

Whirling, pirouetting, tumbling like an acrobat, like a ballerina, it is carried forth.

The tree from which it came calls after: Come back, resist, come home. The river will destroy you.

The willow leaf calls back: The river is wise; I've heard he knows the way to the ocean.

The willow tree weeps. The river laughs. The little leaf wonders what's around the bend.

Parable of This Man and That Man

One day two gods were talking, the god of This Man and the god of That Man, over coffee.

The god of This Man remarks, perplexed: The thing that gets me is that This Man thinks I care what he does in his bedroom, as if I didn't have my own life to live and live and live.

Yes, and That Man erects the most gorgeous architectural edifaces, and then blows them to smithereens because he doesn't care for You, god of This Man, or because some one of them is irate about something or other.
Such children!

Yes, and they spend half their mortal days staring at a tube watching That Man or This Man live his life, while their own is spent cursing at traffic and procuring tubes with wider screens and clearer pictures, so that they can live their lives vicariously with more clarity and without having to strain their aging eyes.

There's barely a tree left, a meadow without one of their living-boxes perched on it, or a mountain pass without one of their wheel-boxes rumbling through.

What to do? What to do? said both gods at once. I say let's teach 'em a lesson, as he reached for his lightening bolt and volcano generator. Let's turn up the thermostat on the sun.

No, said the god of This Man, let's give 'em one more chance, the way we've done through eternity.

Thus said,

they continued their coffee, heads bowed, muttering softly. Sonny Rainshine www.PoemHunter.com - The World's Poetry Archive 322

Passing Torches

It always happens that way: A generation grows cynical and youth steps in all wide-eyed and exuberant to exclaim: No, this is not right! We can do better.

A force to be reckoned with, they are aflame with possibility. They are the repositories of energy and we would be wise to rally behind them. Can they make things better?

Yes, they can.

Passive Voice

You protest that love has passed you by, that life has passed you by, but was it you who were the passer-by?

Patience and Cherry Blossoms

In March the Japanese get impatient.
When will the cherries bloom?
Too late; too soon. These days the latent energy of spring simmers.

But the cherry tree is not on our schedule, not penciled in for a Monday show, not under our control, but free and under the rule of the laws of Nature.

Take your time, cherry-flower. You're worth the wait.

Peter Pan in Limbo

As a child he wondered why anyone would want to grow up. "Oh, grow up! " friends would say to him. "I'm tryin', " he would answer, noncommittally.

Growing up, it seemed to him, meant growing down: Lowering expectations, tempering emotions, having toys, such as fast cars or electronic paraphanalia, but not calling them toys; learning that being an adult means that saying I love you to anyone becomes laden with gravity, not spontaneous and beautiful the way a child says it.

Is growing up much different from growing old? he wondered.

Picturing Peace

Picture a meadow sheathed in snow. Imagine the glow of a rainbow arcing toward the sun.

Now picture the world at peace. Nations sit down to feast on the bounty increased from west to east by proclamation.

The picture is blurred. How absurd, they say. But I've heard from the battle injured and from the dove

that it's worth the time, it's infinitely sublime, and hardly a crime, to want to climb toward universal love.

The fairy-dust of a dream? It would seem. But like gold dust's gleam, sparkling in a Sierra stream, it shines. It shimmers.

Plaintalk, a Love Song

She asked me not to speak to her in colors, or compare her to the passing of the seasons. She told me not to talk of Grecian ruins or classic rhymes and lofty reasons.

Converse with me as an everyday man, tell me about the routine of your day; Assure me that you enjoy my company; ask me if I'll stay.

I will not speak to you in colors; I will not compare you to a morning in May; I'll speak to you alone and not the muses, then my love will have its say.

Playing Golf at Midnight

Playing golf in the moonlight, at midnight, at night, when light cannot be trusted, when sight deceives, it can't be right.

He drives the sphere with the craters like the moon, white like the moon, orbiting like the moon; soon it will collide with grass or sand, and

the black night will swallow the white moon and the driving sphere and no one will know where went the white and where went the black and why.

And after the ball has divorced its tee and after the moon laughs and retires behind the roofs of the neighborhood houses, the silence of the green and the heartbreaking loveliness of the green emerge and converge and here in the suburban wilderness, the only home he has, he sees for the first time how clouds absorb and disperse the light of the moon.

Pneuma

The icy exhalations of a sudden Alberta clipper, the temperate gasps of zephyrs in late July, The inspiration and expiration of Nature's persona, a heave to defy or a sigh of resignation: Everything breathes; everything breathes; everything hinges on the moment almost imperceptable between the taking in and the letting out, and the letting go.

Pointillism

It doesn't take a lot of blue to turn yellow into green.

It doesn't take a lot of clouds to produce a summer shower.

It doesn't take much hurt to make us bitter, like green persimmons.

It doesn't take a lot of words to make a child feel unloved.

But it does take a lot of effort to carefully choose the colors we place on our palette everyday.

Portrait of a Lady

Drinking a glass of cabernet in the dark, she huddled on the chintzy couch, her pain seated next to her.

Portrait of a Lady II

Her allure was like a spider's web: intricate, purposefully engineered, designed for endurance, strong as copper wire, painstakingly developed, exquisitely esthetic, hazardous as a land mine, and utterly transparent.

Potent Medicine

He followed the tracks down to where the wild azeleas staged their drama in pink jackets and perfume.

He'd heard wildcats had been spotted along the pungent banks of Pearl River, licking their paws after a kill among the cyprus stumps rising there.

It was an overcast day, a day when fishing was pointless and worries that usually simmered in the background surfaced like goldfish to nibble at his equilibrium.

It was a day he needed to be amazed. It was a day he had to see a wildcat.

Pouring Tea in a Broken Cup

Let's compare Roderick to a teacup, brimming with the warmth that he syphons off his friends and diverts to himself, much as heating ducts do. His self-pity and lack of feeling exudes from his body like ribbons of steam from his Darjeeling.

All pretty on the outside, rimmed in gilt not gold, inside he's cracked.
Miniscule fissures from age and the heat of incendiary ferocity riddle his psyche like tributories, like capillaries.

Always emotionally arid, he looks at you as if to say: Fill me up.
But all the love you give him, all the kind words you pour into his thirsty china cup evaporate and return to you as distilled condensations—ungratefulness, tea that has brewed to long and become bitter.

At last, drained and empty you decide that sometimes a favorite thing such as a teacup is broken and can no longer contain your appreciation and provide you with pleasure and you either consign it to the back of the cupboard, bequeath it to someone else, or throw it away.

Pragmatist vs. Romantic

Her fiance was a metaphysician who constantly quizzed her: Why are we here? Who are we really? Is there life after death? Are there gods and do they intervene in our lives?

To which she responded: That shirt needs ironing; what shall we have for dinner, dear?

Prairie Flowers Don't Like Trees

Like prairie wildflowers she loathed the tree, obstructing her view of the pyrotechnics of the sun, the rising balloon and bubble of the Nebraska moon.

But she had not the heart to cut it down. There was something headstrong and hurt about it, like her.

Each year new growth, only a few scraggly branches struggling in the heated breeze of the plains, extended the slow, verdant inching toward the sky.

The tree was here to stay, to use up its allotted time, to try to be, well, beautiful and earnest, as she tried to be.

There are prairie flowers enough, she said to herself.
One tree will not break me.

Many times, as she sat in its shade in the summer dusk, she looked up into its branches and saw there a different moon, a different sun.

Pretense Enough

Last night you woke up in the middle of the night and said you were leaving for Berlin. When?

Tonight, before I chicken out. I will write biographies of Wagner and Kafka. Why?

Germanic, Teutonic, they understand my pain; I will interpret them for you. For me?

Your pain has many corridors, many chambers—you have neglected your suffering. I have?

You have neglected me. I am Suffering. I am the Immaculate Deception. You?

You will come with me, my Beatrice, my Dulcinea. You will finally confront your heartache. I

will not. I will not. I will not. Because you are insufferable.

Priscilla and Her Piety

I sensed a subtle change in her, barely perceptable, like the precise moment when rain turns to sleet, or when parafin melts.

She had been through a harrowing separation. Words were said, incisive words, words that still buzzed around her ears like mosquitoes, like tenacious gnats.

She began to read St. Augustine and Teresa of Avila: more words, but quieter ones, sorrowful ones, hopeful ones.

She spends her days off drifting from church to church, chanting novenas, replacing hymnals in the holders on backs of pews, charting the faces of the pious there.

She sent me a postcard from a crumbling chapel near Guadalahara, where she sits in vigil, hoping to catch the teardrop of the weeping madonna before it falls.

Procession

A sinuous black worm, the funeral procession of black limousines crawls toward the cemetary.

The headlights on the hearse stare straight ahead like zombies' eyes, illuminating the way.

Automobiles passing the opposite way pull over, some passengers hushed, some restless.

Burdened with baby's breath gladioli sprays and black lace, a funeral is solemn departure—a journey before the journey after the journey.

Proposals

You said you wanted to live where mandevillas grow wild, where the rain is warm all year long, where willows don't weep.

I said I wanted to live where flamenco music prolongs the night, where sunsets are infused with colors not yet discovered.

You said you would be happy to live where flamenco music prolongs the night, where sunsets are infused with colors not yet discovered.

I said I would be happy to live where mandevillas grow wild, where the rain is warm all year long, where willows don't weep.

Proverb

Constrict a dream with a tourniquet of pragmatism and plain horse sense, and it will no longer be a dream. It will be a duty.

Encourage a dream with imagination and a serum of undiluted confidence, and it will no longer be a dream. It will be a possibility.

Pursuing the Mist

All comes to focus as through a wedding veil, or a shroud, depending on your mood. The silhouettes of the hills there are pale today. Is this the hour to contemplate or to brood

upon all that is soft and pliable in my life? or upon all that is blurred and distorted, like a Cezanne landscape, slashed with a knife, all angles, all so real, all contorted.

The mist, I note, does not collide with obstacles like hills and houses and trees; it will encase them like a cocoon then slide beyond with the first breeze.

Mist and fog and even rain, seem benign today to me. If I can learn not to strain, but to glide by adversity

and anguish as the mist does, just maybe the barriers will bend, and a veil of soft gauze and the happy buzz of a well-lived life will descend.

Putting Paradise on Hold

Like a good Buddhist, you set out to vanquish Desire; but Desire was not quite done with you.

You still long to be noticed by someone you find cute; for someone you don't have to pretend to be attacted to.

An instinctive yearning for Desire to vanquish you intrudes upon your chanting shanti, shanti.

That enticing object of desire over there-the one with the soul-melting eyeswants to know your name. Nirvana can wait.

Quandry

Barefoot boy sees ten-dollar bill hidden in the middle of a poison ivy patch.

He recalls a toy sailboat that costs \$12.98. Will he retrieve the bill?

Quandry II

A boy with a pair of scissors sees his older sister asleep out by the pool, her hand on the hilt of a large flyswatter.

Next to her she has tied a cluster of helium filled balloons from her birthday party.

Will he release the balloons to watch them drift off toward Jupiter? Or will he give his sister a stylish haircut?

Questions Dangerous; Questions Dark

If you could be, which would you be: the moon or the moonlight?

Would you choose to be feathery apple blossoms suspended by the wind, or would you be the wind?

If a wizard, a generous god gave you a choice: You'll be a blue planet, whirling `round the sun or you'll be the sun; which would you be?

Do you wish to be the lover or the beloved? The wishing well or the wish?

It's time to make up your mind; you're not getting any younger, you know.

Rage Like Turkish Coffee

Your rage, like Turkish coffee, dispenses in unctuous streams. Dark, rich as concentrated syrup, you like the taste of it, and you serve it in miniature cups with no saucer to collect the over-spill.

You take it black and bitter as green persimmons. Fury and wrath are your substitutes for milk and sugar, and the taste lingers on your lips, and the heat is fiery on your fingers.

Take back your scalding pot of roiling words and boiling spleen. I have drunk your incendiary liqueur, once too many times, and now I spit it out.

Random Wars

Shield me from wrath of the wraiths troubling the surface of the lake. Cradle me like albumen does the yolk, cuddling it toward birth.

Rein in the twitching fiends that annihilate my equilibrium and crush me like an atom smasher as they congregate like buckshot in the dense cartouche of another day.

Rebellion and Renunciation

As if one of those cubist nudes had chastised the master Picasso

and whittled off the angles that chafed her skin like mangles,

she broods now among the rotund and exudes opulence and rotundity— $\,$

a pillowy Rubens angel with ineffectual wings, conversely, she feels lighter now.

Reconsider the Lilies

True, they do not spin, but toil they do.

It takes a lot of energy to rupture the seed's strait-jacket, and then to drill upwards through soil and rocks with the flimsiest tools to reach the sun and photosenthesis.

Then they must develop sturdy stems to support them and leaves to store water and nourishment, the perfect pump.

Then there's the matter of sex. It takes a lot of effort to be a flower, to look alluring for some stray bee or butterfly even in the pouring rain; to put up sweet nectar preserves every day:

No, even the meadow flowers must work and worry; they are not exempt. But Solomon and all his glory could never preempt the product of their toil.

Red Clover

I'm looking for red clover.

It used to grow in profusion by the highway that ran by my home when I was growing up.

Like a crimson brocade it lined the way for travelers, swirling gently when cars passed by.

It makes me wonder what else I'm looking for and don't know it. What do I need to see again, maybe only once more in my life?

When I find again my red clover, on the roadside, and I will, maybe I'll lie down, and bathe in its perfume.

Rejuvenation

There is an unsettling experience of listening to a song that you loved as a youth and have never heard since.
The experience is more than hearing and reacting to lyrics and instrumentals once again after all these years.
The uncanny feeling is that you feel strikingly as though the ear into which the vibrations enter is the ear of the person who first heard the song.
You are 17 once again, and you are not embarrassed to get up and dance around the room like a madman.

Rendezvous

Violet Crowley sat upon the cast iron loveseat in the backyard arbor and bloomed among the startling blue starburst of clematis and the lipstick smears of bougainvillea, prominent like crepe-paper swatches or the lips of Joan Crawford in Technicolor.

Her dress, a willowy shift in Egyptian cotton, also bloomed, in chaotic confusion, fluffy peony prints and meandering lines suggesting, no, underscoring vines. A sprig of bridal's wreath lay clutched in her hands.

There she sat as she awaited the arrival of her current suitor, Marvin Singleton, who approached her gingerly, wondering whether he should pluck her or simply watch her grow.

Repirations

Like a cyclone spiraling up, apprehension rises.

A maelstrom drilling toward darkness, despair falls.

The follies of mankind rasp and heave like asthmatic lungs.

Open the windows, air out the rooms. Breathe new air.

Requiem

He dreamt that night that without warning the earth's magnetic pull let go, as a boy lets go a kite, to watch it careen untethered.

He and the people in the street began to rise ever so slowly, ever so gently, and it happened so suddenly that nobody had time to be afraid or to comprehend the gravity of the situation.

Thousands of feet into the atmosphere, he looked back toward the receding globe, a blue Christmas ornament now, diminishing, finishing.

So fragile, so exquisite, he thought. I lived there once and would give my very soul to go back.

Resistance and Surrender

Fierce and unrelenting, the rain that morning was so visible, so penetrating, that the diagonal marks it made on the slate gray view from the cottage where we stayed resembled nails, blunt, transparent nails driven and hammered by a determined wind.

Maddened at first, indignant that our plans had been altered by mere weather we mumbled first, then muttered, then stuttered, then surrendered to the rhythm of the trickling from the eaves and the bowing down of the leaves, and succumbed with a sigh to nature's soporific and a cup of China tea.

Rich Man's Rag

Bobby Bolt declines invitations and dines by himself on silver plates behind electrified gates.

Tawny port or ruby: What would it be? was the toughest decision he would ever see.

Bobby Bolt, who has never been poor, always orders the soup du jour at the finest eating places and never misplaces

his napkin. Open your gates, Bobby Bolt before it's too late. Your wealth and excess have bought you only loneliness

Right Smack in the Middle

Ha.
It was kind of funny at first.
Barely March and a bird
sat in the middle of a pot of begonias
I had set out on a warm day.

Right in the middle.

He, like me could not wait for the Edenic promise of summer. He wanted his paradise now and he would have it.

Maybe heaven is sitting in a pot of flowers.

River Wedding

The wedding bouquet, gardenias and baby's breath, swirl in the eddy as though looking for an escape.

Up river, a boutonniere of coral rosebuds catches the rapids and is pummeled forward.

Colliding with the vortex, it too merges with the whiligig, a churning water-garden.

Back upriver, a man in a tuxedo drinks whisky straight; a woman takes shears to her gown. Love is liquid.

Romantic Dialogue

You're a phoney, she said. You are a blood-sucking vampiress, he said.

You make me nauseous, she said.
You are bull-headed and where your heart should be is a hornet's nest.

You call yourself a man. Ha! she said.
You make a mockery out of womanhood, he said.

One of these days I'm leaving you, she said.

One of these days, one of these days; one of these days: You're repetitive and oh so prosaic.

You're disgusting!

You're repulsive!

Wanna go to Starbucks for a latte?

Rosa Rugosa

Thorned temptress dressed in a shift of dusty pink, wide-eyed Irish rose rambling, reaching for the weathered fence, speak to me about love and music.

Emblem of the erotic, you represent romance and tenderness, yet you will not be touched, you knick us with your spiny canes when we reach for you.

Rough Gabardine

It was her mercenary heart that made the deltas of blood in her veins molten rivulets of obstinance, hot resolve.

Look through the bay window on any given night. You'll see her silhouette stationed there in the sinister illumination from oil lamps filled with juices as blistering as her blood.

She sways in a rocking chair made from fox grape vines all twisted, all twined like the notions in her head, like the spinning notions.

She executes her crewel stitches because she likes the word crewel and the word cruel. For the pattern she uses gabardine and calico, because she likes the sound of the names of the fabric, reminding her of ladies gabbing and calicoing.

She sits and she sews; she sews and sits. She'd be outraged if she thought you felt pity for her.

She's a cruel stitch herself, rough as raw calico.
She's embroidered her life in patterns of unfinished dreams, all in the wrong colors, all in delicate spidery filament.
Listen to her ripping out the threads:
Pop, pop, pop, pop, pop,

Sonny Rainshine

pop.

Running To; Running From

He always coughed before he ran. She often thought of the sound a car makes just before ignition, which also coughs before it runs.

There seemed something purgative about his early morning jog, more than just a constitutional, beyond mere aerobic kinetics, something like an auto da fe or walking fast through fire.

Something there about flight or possibly pursuit.

Was he running from or running to, and to what? From what? From her? From his life?

Here, take this amulet, my kiss, she says as he opens the door. You must know always that my deepest affection runs right beside you and over you like a cool wind. Tell me what you tell the wind.

Samara (Maple Tree Seeds)

Paper whirly-birds.
They look so much like pairs of insects' wings, spi-ral-ing down to the ground, helicopters landing on springy tarmacs to deposit next year's forest, gently, like precious cargo.

Sweet to think that trees once had wings and flew.

Scarlet Letters

Drown'd down deep in Dimsdale's eyes, probing, tantalizing, bottomless, Hester wears The Letter on her bodice, but in her bodice resides also the alphabet of love, tender, true, unrepentent.

(Inspired by Nathaniel Hawthorne's 'The Scarlet Letter) .'
Sonny Rainshine

Scene from a Reconciliation

Who do you think you are, Grover Cleveland? she asked. Who?

You, know. I do?

He was the only President to serve two consecutive terms.

I don't get the connection.

I've decided to take you back.

Back where?

Into my generous and incredibly well-sculptured arms. Cleave to me, Grove.

Seeds of Betrayal

All day long he worried about the nasturtium seeds he'd planted yesterday. Had he planted them deep enough? Were the seeds fresh? The soil rich enough?

All week he vexed about the seeds, the nasturtiums. Shouldn't they be sprouting now? Did I plant too early? Should I have planted zinnias?

All month long he wrung his hands. Maybe, maybe, maybe, maybe, maybe I did plant them too deep. Maybe they were contaminated. What a fool.

All year long he regretted having planted nasturtiums. Never again. Maybe I'll let it go to weed. Nature is a traitor. You can't depend upon her.

All his life he shuddered to think of the time he planted nasturtiums. All his days he pondered and grieved over the potency of things of the potential of things, and the lack thereof.

Self-Protection

The boy vowed he would never cry again and he didn't.
And he didn't

ever laugh again. And he swore he would never love again and he didn't. And he didn't

ever feel again. And he promised he would never fear again and he didn't. And he didn't

ever care again. And he took an oath never to wonder again and he didn't. And he didn't

ever live again.

Self-Reliance

From what do you wish to be saved: from yourself, from wickedness, from mediocrity, sickness, from being deprived, or depraved?

Not all redemptions are benign; aren't there times when we need to persevere to resist the gorgons, fiends and fear without a net, without a lifeline?

Some spend their lives waiting to be rescued, or to be subdued by husbands or wives

or a lover or a friend, who'll make them a project; nevermind the logic, they are trees that cannot bend.

Save us from saviors well-meaning, and knights on white horses; let us draw on our own resources with minimal intervening.

Serenade

The stray dogs huddle in packs, gathered like galaxies, ravenous like black holes.

Canine brigands, prowling, growling, the dog star is their star, their mentor the cresting moon.

All orphans, all had mothers and all had human masters who turned on them and turned them out.

Now like their ancestors they are free, tribal covenants bind them for survival and they straggle in the night, and they struggle in the night, half-breeds, evicted from the human realm, creatures in perpetual flight, singing in the cold moonlight.

Serendipity

We thought we were dharma bums back then, remember? You had just quit your job in sales and I was bound for the West Coast, to write heroic sonnets and get laid.

Do you remember that precise moment when the earth seemed reborn and all the planet benign and supple and awake?

We had just driven across the desert and up ahead, the High Sierras loomed. A quick September spritz came up and the highway became a mirror for a moment.

I remember you said: "Holy shit! " and I said: "I love you."

The highway, an endless looking glass, reflected all the firmament and its clouds. That day we were riding on the sky.

Serendipity II

Upon a pewter platter lay Leila's soul, her persona, her role in everyday life.

Ripe, striped peaches.
The first of the year,
their seductive fragrance
escapes with a cut
and reaches the pleasure sites
of my head.

I gingerly cut a pristine wedge, but she raises one like a sacred host and bites it whole, a residue on her lip yellow like the moon in October.

You slice up your days, your duties your life, halving and quartering, quantifying your senses, your feelings, your days, she said.

Here, just this once take the fruit and eat it whole; let me watch the juice dribble down your chin as a fresh stream trickles over a smooth rock after the ice has melted.

Serendipity Symphony

Skim a plumed lure over the lathering cascades of a clean brook ignited in the July sun; Fish for rainbow trout; fish for rainbows.

Get lost in the cool forest behind your house the emerald copse where you search for mountain laurel; search for mountains.

Go out and stare at the starlit sky, moon the neighbors, then point to the moon up there, up there laughing at the jolly folly of life below.

Shades of Green Eye Shadow

You capture the luna moth resting against the sliding glass door of your condominium.
You carefully slide your thumb over the wings: the left, then the right.
Then you rub the luminous jade dust over your eyelids: the left, then the right.
Then you release him, after which he alights again upon the glass door, unaware of his loss and of the vanity of mankind.

Shadowing the Genuine

Sometimes it seems that most of our living, our experience, is about sifting through acres of insincerity, inauthenticity, mounds—no mountains—of rhinestones and fools' gold, yards of burlap and synthetic fibers, just in the hopes of finding one or two genuine articles to clutch onto and trust.

As fluid as mountain run-off, thrusting toward the valley at spring thaw; as elusive as the rare puma stalking in the arroyos like a phantom who's lost his way: What is real, what is of value, lies so near and so ever-present that it sometimes takes a lifetime to realize that it has always been there.

Ship to Shore

If you are an ocean apart as you say you are, not an island, not an isthmus, but deep and blue, then I must be a ship skimming your surface, blue too.

Beneath the aquamarine ripples, down where sunlight never penetrates, down where galleons and pirate ships navigate under a different sky, where muses and monsters congregate and where starfish twinkle in black milkyways: that, you say, is where I must travel to unravel your love, your music, your madness.

But your depth is not open seas, but tiered zones, impenetrable waters, so here I float in murky dolrums.

Oh that I had a seine, a wide fishnet, wherein I might capture your thoughts.

Shooting Star Haiku

White hot snowball fight, a coy moon the referee: Meteor shower.

Shots from the Attic

They can puncture like a bullet: snapshots, fading photographs that pinched a sliver of time from yesterday and plunked it into today, as if that moment had tried to escape, to scurry along to join its comrades, the past, but couldn't.

Photographs: pictures of light— and shadows too. We peer at the youthful faces and for a moment wonder who they are, the boy with the funny shirt: Me. the girl with the flaired skirt: My sister. the weary-looking lady: My mother. The empty space next to the weary-looking lady: my father.

Something snaps, sort of like the click of a shutter, the crisp break of a twig in a silent wood. This was my youth, fading, no longer glossy and immediate, but real. There it is.

Sights Unseen

Of the impressionists, only Van Gogh could see flowers or a tree.

Filtered in mist or blended with precision, Monet's landscapes were brilliant smears, smudges, and daubs juxtapostions of color and texture, but not quite alive, merely impressions.

Dive into Vincent, though. Swim with sunflowers, pulsate with gnarled olive trees, caw with ominous blackbirds.

Too many of us walk by these things each day, but never see see them. Great artists remind us what we're missing.

Silence and Silver

Whoever said silence is golden must have been mistaken. It seems silver to me, or mercurial like the substance in thermometers; it's volatile and on the move.

It is precious but not priceless like gold bullion or nuggets sparkling in a pristine spring. Against the golden voice of a newborn baby or the jeweled caress of a lover's hand it seems tarnished, an alloy, but incomplete.

Silence and sound, silver and gold, music, meditation. Sometimes it's the caesura that makes the poem whole.

Singing Rivers and Roses, Talking Clouds

Someone whispered, the river does not talk; the river is mute and goes about its business of carrying water, carrying water.

Someone told me, you'll find no wisdom sleeping in the folds of a rose, like a resting beetle. Looking for a home, looking for a home.

Someone said to me, The clouds are vaporous things; they are up there, you are down here. Clouds make rain, clouds make rain.

Listen, "someone":
The river, the rose, the clouds know more than you could ever imagine.
They sing to us, they sing to us,

but not to you.

Skipping Rope

He was at the end of his.
After watching Hitchcock's classic film, ,
he felt dirty and started to look for his soap on a.
He gd around in the dimly lit room
for several minutes but was unsucessful,
so he resolved to write a poem, a t, about.
After several impr attempts,
he was back again at the end of his,
and was provoked to shout:
"Oh, for chrissake, skip it!"

Slippery Guest

I see you have surfaced again, like cicadas do when the days get short, or are they long? When the moon's orbit truncates, or was it quickening revolutions of the sun that signaled your advent?

Have a slice of rhubarb pie here, with strawberries on top and graham cracker crust. Have a cup of orange spice tea. While you're at it, pour me some apologies.

There's no ghost like an old ghost, a spector loosed from the jewel box of the past, all a-twinkle with costume pendants and rhinestones unglued.

Have your tea and go. These are years that my soul craves constance.

These are days when fair-weather friends and birds in perpetual flight rattle me and make me say: Stay.

Snapshot: White Horse, Grazing

A white dot on a blue bedspread: ivory-toned palomino grazing in a meadow of indigo lupines: peace, beauty, unbridled freedom.

Soil Amendments

I planted honeysuckle and trumpet vine. The hummingbird did not return that year. So I planted honeysuckle and trumpet vine but added patience and hope to the soil.

Songlines

To get from here to there, say the Aborigines of Australia, you need a song.

Follow the songline and everyone you meet on your journey will be your brother or your sister.

The earth is crisscrossed with my songline, with yours. I stop and wait for you to cross as I listen to your song and sometimes we sing as one.

The songlines are vanishing— erased.
I walk forward a step and listen for the rhythm, a prompt for the next verse, but am met with only silence and the echoes of my own footsteps.

The sprawling oak-tree-song has succumbed to the axe; the fishing-lake-song has been drained of its life-giving waters. Birds-songs sound distant now.

Without the songlines we drift without a guide, without a compass—
I think, I hope, they're still there, hidden, waiting for a voice to sing them back.

**Inspired by Bruce Chatwin's book 'The Dream Songs.'

Sonny Koan

A perfectly healthy young man and an eighty-year-old woman with a cane and poor sight found themselves needing to cross a busy street.

The healthy young man tapped the bent old lady on the shoulder and said: 'Will you help me across the street?'

The old woman helped the young man across the busy street and then said: 'Thank you, young man.'

Why was the old woman grateful?

Spark

You rolled your Havana hand-mades the way you rolled your r's, the way you made love with an ar-ching and a ruh-ruh-ruh to your handmaids, had you any.

Where did you go after your neo-Marxist tulip farm fell through? What did you do with that red serape, woven in llama's curls you used to cling to when you were scared? You used to sing to me back then.

Things just ain't the same, too tame. You always made us feel as though something was about to happen, some spark in the dark about to ignite, something maybe good, maybe not. Sometimes my sister stands out on the porch chanting that Tibetan prayer you taught her, gutteral, splintering the icy air, looking out toward the gate to see if that little speck of red or that whiff of smoke is you.

Spring Tones, Spring Tonic

Little green capsules swollen from within, the mid-March buds are filled with sap and sassiness, and concentrated chlorophyll.

Give me the pill.
I'll swallow it whole.
Magic medicine, laced
with the liqueur of transformation,
now plumped and graced

with promise, rejuvenate me in the whirling cycles of the year.

Squeeze an Orange

The way an orange sprays mist, scented mist, into the air if you peel it by hand:

kind words on a gray day.

Stardrops

The first time he witnessed the spectacle of the Leonid Meteors, he knew why they were called showers.

Instead of raindrops, stardrops were plummeting in pristine arcs, diagonally across the appalling expanse of space: There goes one! There, another! like roman candles they discharge fire-music, note by note, sizzling arpeggios. The milkyway is melting.

Who would have known that the pure act of disintegration, this celestial auto da fe, could conjure up such a blizzard of blazing snowflakes, vanishing so swiftly that you wonder if you saw them at all.

Stay

Like a child leaps from shade to shade on a broiling hot sidewalk in July, you keep a lover long enough to release the heat and then hop-scotch ahead.

Shadows, though, follow the sun. The cool darkness you bathe in now, though blistering at noon, will return at 3 o'clock. Passion is variable.

Strange Seance

Whose ghost are you?

-Yours.

I am not dead.

-Yet.

Then you are a ghost of things to come.

-Ghosts are not bound by things temporal.

Whose ghost are you?

-Mine.

The ghost of a ghost.

-Yes.

I do not believe in spirits.

-I do not believe in you.

We're a sinister pair.

-Yes, we are.

Stray Mutt

No Pekinese, no poodle, no twinkly-eyed terrier, his supper was served in garbage cans and backyards.

Every evening he would slink up to the front doors of the neighborhood, tail recessed, head down, whimpering.

His fur was spotty from untreated mange and scars from the scalding hot water of unsympathetic residents, having seen him lurking outside the sparkling white doors with the musical chimes and chrome knockers.

Some say dogs don't feel the way we do, but this one does all living beings do. His eyes express all unkindnesses, and his body, like an interpretive dancer's has been contorted by barrages of merciless beatings and hard words. But yet he still makes his rounds every evening, not understanding why no one cares about him and his simple need for food and for love.

Subdued Thoughts

Under the patina of ice on the rim of the lake swam fishes, submerged but clearly visible, like troubling thoughts.

Sudden Insight

A sort of shaking-out, a trembling gesture, as though the emotion dislodged itself from the body and escaped through the cranium:

such is the sudden recognition of something we know at first glance to be universal and true.

Sufficient Closet Space

And here is where I store the flour and rice. And here the silverware. Here the bread, slice by slice.

Over there in the nook is where I keep the dustbin and brooms. Around the corner, look and you'll find the other rooms.

Everything in its place, my mother always said. If you can't find for it a space, throw it out instead.

Too many stars, an excess of trees, Too many cars, park them, please.

But where do you store your heartache, where is love sequestered? How do you contain heartbreak and dreams that have festered?

Oh, don't worry about the gloomy past, There'll be plenty of room. I'll make a place for them at last in the chambers of my tomb.

Sugar Shock

Remember that time you went catatonic and succumbed to sugar shock when you doused your Little Debbies with coffee liqueur and powdered sugar?

We attempted to stop you, but you had just broken up with Mulroy and boy were you wired and fired up about speed dating and online dating and even offline dating, god forbid.

Took three of us to hold you down and two bottles of Pepto-Bismol—It was dismal.

Now when you're depressed you pass on the sucrose, lock yourself in the bathroom, and cry the sweetest tears.

Sunrise

Night thrusts back the light. Summer moon fades like a ghost. Stay with me awhile.

Superfluous Saint

What happened to you in Guadalajara? That day you found yourself in a parish church, soaking wet from a sudden cloudburst.

That day you felt the madonnas with their oh-so-human faces staring at you, beseeching you with their glassy eyes.

And the robed statue of St. Teresa glaring at you and you saw the Pieta, the lean, limber body sagging across the lap of the virgin transform into your body and you were dead and she was grieving for you.

You told me after you came back that you left the sacred place to become a sacred being, though you never wanted such a thing. You have lost your passion in order to become passion. I don't need another holy relic. I want you back.

Sylvia Plath

She reached for grapes and grasped a cluster of words, which she crushed in her fingers to make a concoction of nouns and verbs, demonstrative adjectives, and then she drank them,

bitter.

Take a Soap Bubble

Take a soap bubble: spherical but graceful as clouds, ethereal and transparent, but solid enough to reflect all around.

Like an emotion, you can describe it, you know it's there, but you can't hold it in your hands, and make it stay.

Tale of the White Adirondack Chairs

My sister not long ago suggested that we rent a car and make a visit to the house where we grew up.

At first I liked the idea, but as the time for departure drew closer, I begin to feel a strange reluctance, whenever the trip came up.

Something eerily white, like light, something made of wood, yes, chairs on a lawn, Adirondack chairs painted white with tall glasses of iced tea resting on the wide-open arms, etched themselves in the populated areas of my mind and would not leave.

Then the cause of my consternation revealed itself: I needed the chairs who would not leave to stay. If I went back to the magical lawns and the familiar days of my childhood and the Adirondak chairs were gone (which after so many years they surely are), the loss would be too much.

I had my sister (long accustomed to my fickle whims) cancel the rental car.

So, somewhere in the tangle of memories, as distorted and inaccurate as they may be, my family still sits with our cool iced tea laughing, oblivious of the future, snatched from time like a photograph, framed forever in my remembrance.

Tanka

Shuddering branches thrusting sharp toward the sky. Twigs twitching in wind. Limbs lengthen as sap rises. Spring goes up like fire and smoke.

Tanka: Saved by the Cliche

Let's talk about Rose, not Rose the woman but Rose the image, the over-used cliché, so maligned by lit'ry types, to their loss when flower-words are required.

Tasteful Arrangements

Mrs. Parsons would buy the flowers for the dinner party. She'd not permit pretense to intervene-There'd be no dissembling, nothing arty.

To impose a tasteful subtlety-to command restraint: that's the key

to buying flowers.
Dahlias, therefore, she despised.
Peonies she found intrusiveeither might antagonize

her guests. These white mums will look quite nice. A simple spray of baby's breath will suffice.

As she digs deeply into her handbag To pay for the bouquet, A photograph falls to the shop floor and lay

at her feet. A long forgotten thrill resurfaces now and arrests her breath as she wipes her brow.

'I'll take a dozen crimson dahlias and ten gladiolus stems. How much are those sunflowers? These orchids are gems.'

The florist obliges, but Shaken to her core, Mrs. Parsons has fallen with the baby's breath in a heap in the floor.

Tea and No Sympathy

Now, dear, let's not quarrel anymore; in fact, love, let me pour.

This is absolutely heavenly; from what is it made?

It's a hearty herbal tissane of belladonna, nightshade and a soupcon of henbane.

So soothing, so light I think I shall sleep well tonight.

Tea'd Off

Oh, but it's been so long since I've tasted oolong.

But darling, have some Darjeeling. I'm feeling brewed, writhing in agony like tea leaves when the scalding water arouses them. I feel positively pungent, dear.

Here, here.
I say,
try an Earl Grey.
Have we still any China black?
From the leaves we found in that shack in Taiwan?

Honey, I'm pouring myself out to you, and all you can talk of is tea.

Tell Me a Story

Tell me about a place where pundits and politicians have mastered how to use diplomacy and mutual understanding as weapons instead of missiles and mustard gas.

Tell me about a place where people can pay their own medical bills and insurance is obsolete because no care is beyond anyone's means.

Tell me about how people in that place are different, but the same, how they tolerate and respect each other's differences.

Tell me how people in that place all have flowers in the windows of their freshly painted homes.

Then tell me that it's not a story, not fairy-tale fiction, but the absolute truth.

Tempered Steel

All the highpoints of his life were like bookmarks, beauty marks, landmarks, delineating his passage through this enchanted region where all things are captivated by gravity and by the gravity of having been born.

Like all of us, he did his best. He married young, but not for love; love seemed to him an abstract thing, too mythologized to make much difference.

He resented those who insisted that failure was the fault of the man, that fortune had no function in the destiny of us all.

Cruel! Unbearably cruel, indifferent and merciless Lady Fortune could be, the bully.

But strength and courage do not come to the coddled kind, those ones who never flirt with fate and who glide through life without resistance. This man would mark his place in the book of the struggle and carry on until the last page.

That Word

Definitions are dangerous sinuous loops within loops, mulligan soups, tenuous.

Take the word love. Look it up in your dictionary; But be wary: for the meaning of

this short but laden word is slippery as oil, like wet soil, elusive as a bird.

Other tongues specify: Eros or agape, but in English we have only one syllabe to say, one syllable to try

to express the word of ages, the utterance of all time, the feeling sublime, the subject of sages.

Webster's, the source of exaction, claims it's a strong, tender affection or a sexual attraction, or deep devotion.

But then what constitutes devotion; and can't I feel attraction without feeling affection? The tree of love has many roots.

Will a new word do, or a million, or two? For such a feeling, false or true, I'd like clarification; would you?

The Alchemy of Growing Old

She was born with a coronet of wispy gold twine.

At seven Sunlight and weather tempered and forged for her a tiara of fine copper wire which she wore until middle age.

At forty she was bequeathed with a diadem of diamonds and topazes.

At sixty time has refined the contours of her face and filaments of silver have modeled a halo for her head.

The Asters and the Goldenrods

I always dread to see the first asters and the goldenrods, those flushes of cornflower blue and tawny plumes that stand on the edge of the roads as though hitchhiking or waiting to get across.

Most people praise them as summer's swan song, a final extravaganza, fanfare for the fall.

Without even thinking, I begin to look for them as early as late June, peering out the corner of my eyes as I drive to my job, for a blur of blue, a glint of gold.

But when it's scarlet poppies I see instead, white zinnias, black-eyed susans, and acres of the greenest grass; when I let down the car windows and inhale the reviving wind, and absorb into my innermost cells the scent of late honeysuckle, I understand once more that asters and goldenrods are, like us in our season, temporary guests.

The Bell on the Buoy

He dreamed that night of separation and mortality:

Land ho! there the continent rises from the sand and spume, dead ahead, but it recedes, not approaches.

Veiled with vapor, sandpipers and terns speckle the beach, calling, cawing, watching.

The ghost of John Donne, somber sailor-saint of souls, treads the surf prophesying of islands and bells.

'I'm severed now from terra firma, adrift, unmoored, anchorless, and the bell on the buoy is tolling for me.'

He awoke, shaken, moist with mist-no, sweat.

The Bond of Star-gazing

Son, his father says, why do you stare at the stars? How can something millions of miles away be of any use to us?

Son, of what good is a nest-full of blue-speckled birds' eggs? They won't feed your children; nobody will buy them.

Son, why do you plant marigolds and zinnias in furrows that could be used for lettuce and radishes?

Hummingbirds, butterflies, wild ducks on the pond over there: pretty, but we have chores to do, by the sweat of our brows.

One clear night, though, walking out into the moonlit field, the son saw a man standing among the zinnias and marigolds, looking upward: Father, why do you stare at the stars?

The Burden of Obscurity

Larry, Larry, why so contrary? It can be ninety-one degrees Farenheit and there you are shuddering right in the dog days of August.

You receive a letter from your sweetheart who vows her perpetual devotion, and your shoulders make a sagging motion, as if you'd been drafted.

The mortgage payment bounces and instead of weeping you cavort like a kangeroo leaping: picturing a bouncing check.

You win the Publishers' sweepstakes and grinning celebrities knock on your door and hand you roses and you're poor no more, but you sulk in righteous indignation.

Larry, Larry, why can't you be normal? When happy, smile; when blue, rue. Your friends are weary of the riddle of you; Your schtik is showing its age.

The Butterfly Effect

The sun is dimming, as at the end of a play. Particles in the stratosphere bommerang heat and radiation back to its source, disguising the warming of the globe.

If the flutter of one butterfly's wing in Guatamala can ignite a tsunami in Indonesia, consider what a rise of even one degree farenheit will do to a cornfield in Wichita.

Deferring the problems of the planet, is like playing chess with pawns made of ice, like reading a book whose pages are on fire.

What if we spread our own wings in Everytown and Everycity and cause a wave of resolve to innudate the earth.

The Cannibal Tree

The newly planted tree was devouring itself.
The newest, tenderest leaves were surely diminishing, and changing shape, from perfect lovers' hearts to translucent lace.

But this is not a cannibal tree. Consider a diner who feasts upside-down, underneath its green wafer hushed, hidden, camouflaged, rapacious, pitiless. The color of leaves, it is becoming a leaf inside and out.

The planter of the tree, inverting the disintegrating leaf, exposes the catepiller's secret table and wonders how it not only hoodwinks birds and men to mistake it for a vein on a leaf but also how it knows to dine on the hidden side.

Planters of trees too are vulnerable to hidden things, secreted under the surface, consuming life-energy, excreting pain, cutting perfect lovers' hearts into jigsaw puzzle pieces— Seekers, gardeners, and goumands must look beneath the leaf.

The Chimera of Knowledge

Most people do not like not to know, and especially despise those who know they do not not know; and futhermore loathe those who admit that they don't know.

There are even those who claim to know the Unknowable, unknowing that they are being contradictory.

Am I right? Who knows?

The City Down There

When I drive home from work, on the perimeter of the hill where I live, and will forever, I look to the right at the city over there, and then to the left, toward home; my thoughts scale the incline before I do.

Living above the city seems more important than it did when pretty girls and the swirls of crowds aroused me, sustained me.

Urban persuasions undulate down there—music, cafes, dance—romance. Up there, only the dahlias are dancing, the only diva the sparrow, the day ends at 10 PM not 2.

Up there
the exuberance is defined
in the breeze. The air
above the city ignites,
like colliding weather fronts,
as the spirit of the city
waves goodbye
while I motor on up the hill.

The Court Is in Recess

Did your mom ever say:
"If you can't say something good about your neighbor,
Don't say anything?"
That way is not in favor, today, if I've understood.

Doesn't he get it?
She's so inane.
What's the matter with him?
I'm so right;
you're full of shit.
Remove them
from my sight—they're a pain.

Wouldn't it be fine, (what an idea!) to hold our judgments in check awhile. Not to renege but just to opine that our resentments are the result of fear.

If you can't say something good....

The Day Sunita Cut Her Hair

India ink and all the nuances, all the associations that spill from those two words applied to Sunita's hair.

Splashing over her angular shoulders, the inky tresses curled loosely, like fine Sanskrit calligraphy, mysteriously pulled apart and left suspended and askew, like a dangling participle.

And like the Ganges it flowed, but downward toward the ground, as if seeking a place to pause, to momentarily cease its purposeful rambling, like a semicolon or a dash.

Thus, when Sunita cut her hair, ordinariness descended upon her and she knew she had made a grave mistake. It was as if subcontinents had severed themselves from the terra firma, as if ink wells spilled their contents on white-tiled beauty parlor floors, and there in serpentine coils lay exposed her error, black and indelible, like India Ink.

The Disgruntled Catfish

A sudden spring cloudburst: mud-colored catfish pissed off splatter, patter, splat.

The Ecstatic Thrill of Monotony: a Parable

At first he tried to pinpoint the precise time that it materialized, or that he became conscious of it, since he suspected it was always there, recessed, praying, cursing, whatever it did when not creating anarchy.

The problem was that inertia, ennui, boredom, or whatever you want to call it, would not be dispersed by motion, activity, or by resolve. It, like Glenn Close in Fatal Attraction, would not be ignored.

Today, instead, he would give it the attention it so craved; he would not get up and turn on TV Land or load up Solitaire on the Mac. Hello Mr. Boredom, what do you have to say? If anything?

Well, you'll be cheered to know, this story has a happy ending. "The purpose of my being here, " the nagging presence revealed, "is to jar you from the compulsion to always be doing, of transposing motion for emotion. To teach you the difference between discontent and malcontent."

Well, la-di-dah.

At that he retreated to the place where reflection lies, but promised to return for another lesson.

The Empty Bee Hive

I never really thought about their connection to the food supply or what perfect testaments to the fragile interconnectedness of all beings they are.

I never considered their intricate navigation systems or their astonishing ability to hover in midair or to zip away in a nanosecond.

I never noticed that the minute hairs on their bodies helped to transport pollen from blossom to blossom. That they loved borage flowers, but not so much marigolds and petunias.

But now I hear they are vanishing en masse, abandoning hives, deserting our gardens.

If I plant another row of borage this summer, will you come back, happily humming creatures? I miss your industry and purposeful lives, and what would life be like without honey?

The Eyes of an Abandoned Building

Blackened windows, rectangle cavities, naked, screaming like open mouths of beings strangled, they gape where café curtains used to dangle concealing the creatures inside from us and us from them.

The Face in the Clock

Life has become for him metered pulses of time, a rosary of sequenced spaces. Minutes: small beads, hours: large beads, decades, days, weeks, repetitions.

And the numbers on the clock seem also like strung beads, an invisable hand pushing toward the next Ave Maria, the next Pater Noster, the next sorrowful mystery.

Peas in a pod, the seconds seem frozen and unwilling to thaw into minutes. Time has run down; it no longer flees toward culmination toward resolution toward fulfillment.

He feels that something must be done about time, that he grows more anxious by the minute; he's unwinding.

The Feather in the Hat

Ah, there it is.
The feather I found
on a hike in the Maine woods
that day.

The apartment is nearly empty, I'm returning to Maine for good. Ten years lie there crated up and tagged.

I thought I'd lost the feather from an eagle, the park ranger had said but there it lay.

Leaving New York City, kindles no regrets. The tall buildings don't need me to lean upon.

But should I take the feather? Will it have the same meaning when I've returned to the woods where the bird who wore it lives?

On the floor in the closet, I spotted a hat that had been my father's. I tucked the feather into the band, hoisted a box, and headed for the realm of eagles.

The Fly-Tyer

For his black salmon-fly only cat-gut imported from Nigeria will do. The veiled belly will be a bronzed eagle-claw hook with an eye upturned—Pretty things.

Pretty things are often illusory things, so the hook will be painstakingly looped in Christmas tinsel that will sparkle in the sun and reflect in the stream when the first cast is thrown. Finely shaped hairs from a deer's tail will mimic a shimmering wing. A hunter-friend saves them up for him calves' tails can be used, but they are not as beautiful. Over the years he has learned to bind the tuft of hair in precisely the right spot: three-quarters, with the first segment the head, the second the wings. One black seed bead will represent the insect's eye.

After five hours of steady work, eyes strained and aching he places the finished fly with the others in his tackle box. Rows of stunning, frozen bugs gaze grimly back at him with with beautiful, murd'rous eyes.

The Forest Is Silent for Some

The forest is silent for some. In order to hear the subtle arpeggios, adagios, the animato of woodland animals, the bisbigliando of breezes among the pine-needled canopy, dappling and dimpling the the grass below, you have to stop being human.

You have to regress to a time when we stalked the forest barefooted or in hushed moccasins, before I-pods, before recorded music, a time when the tones and rhythms of the wilderness were thrilling, were enough, were tender, not rough, were soothing stuff.

The tempo of forest sounds is so natural and so ordinary that many never hear the tat-tat-tat of the woodpecker or the silky trembling in the brush of the garter snake. It seems tragic, a renouncing of magic, that city children dismiss a walk in the country with "I'm bored!"

I count myself among the lucky in that a parent taught me how to listen to the ever-changing orchestration of the woods. Crescendoing and diminuendoing, accelerandoing and decrescendoing, and accented periodically with pure silence, a serendipity caesura—the perfect antidote to the cacophony of the work-a-day world.

The Girl at the Bus Stop

I thought you were a ghost when I first saw you hovering there, ethereal and vaporous.

You were lost, you wore wisteria in your hair, diaphanous.

You crossed the street and we sat there as I waited for the bus.

In your gypsy dress you tossed your skirts with flare, beauteous.

I stood up to see if my bus was in sight and when I glanced back all I saw was a sprig of wistera.

Your absence haunts me.

The Gradual Approach of the Storm

It has been gathering since mid-morning, the wispy mares' tails around the breakfast hour were the first harbingers, the haze over the water tower the second warning, a barely perceptible change in temperature and now I'm sure.

It takes a day to make a storm; or does it take countless ages? Like a sonata or a sonnet, or the shaping of a bonnet, the work is done in stages.

I'll study the storm and its dynamo of energy and how it took an entire day and intricate interplays of synergy to conjure up and to form this magic interplay.

The Grass Is Greener

When we lived in the country, in a cottage painted blue like the sea, with window boxes of violets in spring and cerulean asters to usher out the summer, you talked of moving to Manhattan, and told me you never cared for blue.

So we rented a loft in Soho and grew American Beauties on the terrace; you bought fresh crimson tulips, even in winter, imported from Spain. One day you spoke of moving to Barcelona and how bored you had become with the color red.

In Spain you cultivated sunflowers our Moorish villa obscured with hundreds of golden faces, tracing the arc of the sun. You even sowed dandelion seeds, mowing them down before the yellow daisies went to seed. Yellow is a heavy, harsh color, you said the day we departed for Paris after the sunflowers ripened.

One could say we lived a colorful life back then, but the colors ran.

The Grumpy Grammarian

She lives her life in lower case with no punctuation. Her moods are subjunctive and she is just plain tired period, new paragraph.

She shuns participles and finds objects of prepositions intimidating if not objectionable. She looks upon her existence as a run-on sentence and each day as an infinitive.

The Haunted Bus

He dreamt he was on a bus, dreaming. He awoke with a jolt and looked about at his fellow passengers. One wore a grin that filled her face. One grimmaced at him. One looked puzzled. One guffawed unceasingly. One looked clinically depressed. One looked like those ubiquitous happy faces. He had boarded a busload of emoticons.

The next day he deleted his screen name and resigned from the chatroom.

The Heartbreaking Beauty of Innocence

While governments come and go, as politicians duke it out and vulgarity and tawdriness define the day, a six-year-old boy sprawls on the floor among his friends with his coloring book, thinking about the ice-cream party tomorrow honoring his perfect attendance in first grade.

The Idea of Perfection

The day finally came.
The island was part
of a sheltered archipelago
off the coast of Greece,
secluded, renowned
for its serene beauty.

Years,
years! of planning
and doing-without,
poring over maps
until his eyes stung,
combing the ads,
reading travel books and logs,
consulting the best travel agencies
and eureka! his painstaking
research paid off.

He booked the perfect flight, first class, the perfect hotel, four-star, and purchased the perfect travel clothes, white linen suits and a panama hat.

It was the very first day of his stay on the island that he admitted he had made a grave miscalculation. Lying on the perfect beach, on perfect sand, in a perfect beach chair, to the background of ocean waves a perfect blue; looking up into a Grecian sun that could not be more exquisite, sea birds that performed pristine gymastics in a cloudless sky, he suddenly felt a darkness descend, a sadness deeper than he imagined sadness could ever be.

For he had both lost and found something there in paradise:
By fulfilling his dream, his fantasy, he had annihilated it; and in its place a profound emptiness filled the void,

descending and deepening as the perfect sun sank into a perfect sea, and night approached.

The Kingdom Where Rainbows Stay

Have you heard of a kingdom where flowers never wilt, where rainbows never dissolve and nightingales sing all day?

In this idyllic place the trees are never leafless, the grass is always verdant and green, and the temperature neither rises nor falls.

Here lions purr and serpents never bite, babies never cry and grief has been banished; Love has become commonplace; happiness just a word.

And over near the horizon, a glorious rainbow arcs transfixed; It is a rainbow that stays, but stays because it is perpetually raining in the kingdom where flowers never wilt.

The Last Buffalo

The last buffalo died quietly in the snow where he had fallen against a solitary scrub oak, one of dozens of swelling mounds, white graves.

That night the wind blustered and swept a top layer of the snow from the bison's frozen crypt, leaving his head exposed.

His eyes, capturing the glint of the post-blizzard moon, gazed upward, gazed across the Great Plains, as if to say to them: I'll return again to graze

in meadows that rustle in the wind and sun, and slake my thirst in the streamlets and ponds, sequestered there among my fellow beasts.

The moon then vanished behind a cloud, the wind gathered up the snowy shroud, and the last buffalo dreamed of tall grasses.

The Last Romantic

No one had ever told him that slow-dancing in the rain with his wife of twenty-one years was cliché, sentimental, affected, suspiciously pretentious, so Fridays when his construction job was rained out, you might find them swaying to Peggy Lee or Bobby Darin on the patio, her head angled on his shoulder, the velvety North Pacific drizzle misting their faces, sprinkling silver beadlets in their hair.

The Lonely Buddhist

He traveled to Rangoon amid lotus blossoms strewn, there to learn not to flinch at the withering and the stench of the bodies of monks in decay.

In some way he sought release from the pain; he thought from deprivation to attain the shining, sharp dagger of peace and to plunge into it until the cease of suffering.

Buffering himself from the rigors of life, his fear was the butter, he was the knife. Never did he suspect that loneliness was the root of his stress, his banishment,

a vanishing point of no return, his achilles heel. There, drifting in the incense, he'd feel for once the yearning of us all, to break the membrane of self-absorption and the wall of separation.

The Loop in the Wall

Sometimes the most impenetrable walls are the ones we erect to protect ourselves from pain.

Sometimes the most excruciating pain is the kind that topples our emotional walls and makes us vulnerable.

The Origin of Discontent

A quart mason jar filled with sprays of lavender heather and a spike of borage dominates the rustic kitchen table, constructed from the 100-year oak tree that held sentry over her front porch until toppled by a windstorm last July,

Leila gazes at the pinkish-purplish-blueishness of the bouquet and waits for The Feeling.
She had bought the farmhouse, as it was advertised by the realtor, after she decided the leave New York to seek the serenity of pastures and crystaline brooklets, and to awaken to birdsongs and the soothing lowing of cows.

But after two years of country living, the same city-thoughts returned and began to whir around her head, like the bumblebees in the lavender patch in the backyard.

Perhaps, she thought, the origin of discontent lies not in where we abide, but in the circumstances of our lives and the rich alluvium of our perceptions.

For the first time, she saw not the bouquet, but the bouquet's symmetry and textured colors; running her hands over the rough oaken surface of the table, she sensed the spirit of the fallen tree and knew for sure that The Feeling had come at last.

The Parrot on the Porch

The parrot on the porch stood out from its white-washed surrounding like the dropped uppercase character of an illuminated manuscript from Medieval times; his throaty kwaaarrrkkkk!, along with the argumentative kaw-kaw-kaw of the crows in the yard, sounded sacramental, momentous and perhaps apocalyptic.

Was it envy, or was it vanity that caused the common crow to descend upon the parrot on the porch to provoke and assassinate him? The brilliant yellows and reds and greens were mirrored in the glossy black wings of the crow as they fought until the sun set, the crow's cohorts growing quickly bored with the spectacle and fluttering off to attend to more pedestrian affairs.

The Perils of Paul

He took up tango, mambo, limbo.

He tried to learn Swahili, Danish, Cherokee.

He learned to fence, channel his soul, wrestle, knit.

He dabbled in voodoo, judo, I Ching, Go.

He read Melville, Ayn Rand, Kierkegaard, Peanuts.

But he still can't get a date.

The Pessimist's Answering Machine

I am your quintessential cynic, he said, I'm a nihilist. Don't put me on your speed dial, Pollyanna, cause my voice mail is half empty, not half full.

Call me later, luv. I'm watching "It's a Wonderful Life."

The Power of Peace

He dropped the a-bomb on me when he whispered in my ear: 'It's a lie.'

'What's a lie? ' I whispered back.

'It's a lie that peace is unattainable. That's what the hawkish say.'

The thought exploded in my hand-a detonation that sounded like jubilation.

The Quest in the Song

If there is room for a sonic boom as well as for the soft swish of pine branches in the wind, if the tension of a Beethoven symphony and the quiet sigh of young lovers can coexist and thrive, If a fragile sparrow and a massive eagle can make their nests of the same straw and grass, why then can't we upright creatures also follow the harmony of the universe; and master its melodies?

The Sanctity of Tears

I was about 11 or 12 then. She and I were sitting in the living room, not the den. Maybe that had something to do with it.

Living rooms back then were for company, a lavishly draped and bedecked holy-of-holies which made me, the rare times I entered, feel as if I had entered a chapel, quiet, the scent of polished wood like incense.

My mother sat there eating grapes and I peeled an orange. Inexplicably, I felt something was about to happen.

In one quick movement she let the basket of fruit fall to her lap, placed her hands over her mouth and began to shake silently and gently.

Something was occuring that had never occurred and never would again to my knowledge: My mother was crying. Drops the size of seed pearls were falling into the basket of grapes.

It was over in less than a minute. She picked up the fruit and went back into the kitchen. I remained in the sanctuary for a moment embarassed, disturbed, and suddenly older.

She never told me what had made her so unhappy that day, and I never asked her. I sensed that it was something far too personal ever to talk about.

To this very day, I often wonder what I witnessed that day, what holy thing, what immeasurably sad thing.

The Sea between the Trees

Learning to know you is like cruising along a beach highway, heavily fringed with trees and brush; only an occasional glimpse of a vertical cerulean sliver, or a blinding glint of the sun's refraction on the sea tells me there is more there than meets the eye.

You reveal yourself in waves, subtle breakers that lap against my senses, eroding the distance from the shore to the deep fathoms where treasures lie.

Between the clumps of oleander, the frilly branches of ocean pine, like the frames of a reel of film in fast motion, you call to me: "It's not I who is in perpetual motion, but you. Knowing someone takes time.
Park the car; take off your shoes and come meet me on the sand."

The Simplicity of Surrender

Like an opulent cluster of Concord grapes—No, more like the silky conical impression of wisteria vine—the thought first dangled before him, a sign that creativity had emerged and begun to flow.

The sudden thawing after a winter prolonged: first the shocking cracking of the ice, then the pooling of water at the interstice of the expanding veins, branched and pronged,

softened his self-denunciation; he would begin to oppose the simplicity of surrender beginning today, to imagine the possibility of elation and to slant toward the true and the tender.

The Singular First Person

Do you feel a barely perceptible quiver, a frisson, as a Frenchman might say; someone walking on your grave, as my mother might say, when you write the word "I"?

Such a short, vertical, twig of a word, perched there on the paper looking like a Greek column but signifying my very self, a lifetime shriveled into a scratch like a hairline fracture or a healing scar.

We wonder why in almost all tongues the word we use to represent us most is among the most condensed: je, yo, ich, etc.
It takes a lot of time to discover who we are, who I am, and you— all the letters of the alphabet and still we often find that mere language is limited; it comes up short.

The Sound Snow Makes

Sometimes on those days in February just before the snow hits and the air gets as dark as black lace, as dark as possible without succumbing to complete obscurity, it feels as if the sun has gone for good, scurried off for another planetary system, leaving this one enshrouded in a hood of quiet velvet.

Then, when flakes at last begin to descend, like eiderdown, it seems as though the drooping clouds were slit through, as a ripped pillow; and though the falling of the snow is exquisitely silent, the sound of a quick, distant whisper seems unmistakable.

The Space between the Space between

So many miles of earth and rock and we linger here on the surface, living on the crust, and dying just beneath.

Why does nature not optimize? Why are there stretches of nothingness between the planets, separating the stars? Merely elbow room?

As an artist does, can we make negative space beautiful? Meaningful?

Can we embrace the economy of emptiness? Voids violate our sense of purpose. We look up and see black space, and can only assume that beyond that lies

black space, sprinkled with spinning spheres and spiraling wonders.

The Space Where the Boy Was

One war ends; another begins; both armies are sure they're right; that's why they fight.

I knew a boy, he used to make me laugh. He used to play with his toy trucks on the sidewalk, under the elm tree. Where has he gone?

One war ends; another begins; both armies are sure they're right; that's why they fight.

The Taste of Beauty

The peas he planted in April are bearing now, not sweet, not ornamental, but gentle and tender—a treat for a late summer suppers.

All summer he had watched the progression from bursting sprout to vines entwining, tendrils clutching, pods getting stout with emerald cylinders dangling.

Now the last harvest, the final picking of the year has come, the sum of summer bounty is here, culminating bitter like chicory; sweet like cherries.

His pleasure has been squared, his joy is double. The beauty of growing things was well worth the trouble, for this miracle is a matter of taste.

The Tyranny of Time

Who rules? Kings, emperors, presidents, prime ministers? aghas, shahs, queens, princes, potentates?

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Clocks rule.
And calendars,
and watches,
and Earth's breakneck
orbit.
Bow low:
time is passing.

The Veiled Tints of Blackbirds

They roost upon the railing, stentorian. Laser-eyed sentries scanning the vista, they will guard the nest on the roof 'til the last hatchling gets its wings.

Not crows nor ravens and curiously not black, though at first glance that's the shade that registers on my sight: no these are smaller, neater, and do not caw-caw-caw, but cast soprano notes into the chilly, late spring air, songs not nearly so dark as the shadows in their wings.

If you look more closely, beyond the inky textures of the feathers, irridescent emerald and orchids and yellows, like gold dust in the stream glint and glimmer, fine applique on shimmering velvet.

It's rather disconcerting, isn't it, to discover that what we first perceive is not always what's there. Though the fundamental whole is only the sum of its parts, sometimes the parts themselves are whole universes.

The Vociferous Vine

The vine has reached the top of the stake and waves at me as it billows in the autumn wind.

You betrayed me, it seems to say. You directed me toward the sun and then you left me groping, reaching.

But, I would answer, such is the paradox of life. As a young man I scaled the ladder of opportunity, buoyed by dreams, by aspirations, by the glittery promises of youth.

But all journeys end, mountains peak, love dies, or transforms into something elsewith luck, affection or friendshipand we find ourselves a vine with nothing to cling to.

As I go out on the porch with a string and a slender bamboo branch to extend the vine's support, feeling the first chill of fall, I feel I'm ready to face the long nights of January, and to push upward toward May.

The Wedding Ring

My mother bought her own wedding ring.

My father was too young to make much money (it was the custom to marry young in the South at that time) and my mother did not want to wait.

He was devastatingly handsome back then, she said. I thought I was buying happiness, a ticket out of my father's tyranny, an escape from boredom.

I'm sorry, I said.

Oh, my money was well spent, she responded, as she hugged me as if she would never let me go.

She would tell this story (and others) many times before she died. Most of these things happened years before I was born, before I began to write poetry to put them into words and finally comprehend their beauty, their aching sadness, the love hidden within them.

The Well-Digger

This drought of serendipity, famine of the heart, this dry spell.

This caesura of expectation.

The well-digger knows where ice-cold springs are buried.

The well-digger knows where to look for things that flow.

The well-digger has grown old and has forgotten where the water runs, where the water runs.

The Worth of Weeping

Measuring his days from high to high, barely getting by; living on the fly, Henry Worth began setting by vials of tears for a rainy day, treasuring the warm fluidity of them in a dirth of heat, and in the absence of good fortune.

Pleasuring his ego, marking time with petty crime; he carries the vial of tears into the vale of tears and gritty grime, and a veil of tears that hid his valor from his fears is parted and for the first time he can breathe.

These Days Are Those Days

Every generation thinks it's the best and thinks it's the worst; we think in superlatives and comparatives and who will be first.

Some say society is in decline; others insist it's sublime. Optimists say it can only get better; pessimists say we're out of time.

Positive thinkers are bullish on good cheer; Naysayers say Nay! Stoics and nihilists say drink some beer, while believers proceed to pray.

This is our age, our stage; do with it what you will. Like the wind on a March day it is never still.

It's a mélange of good and bad, pretty and sad, up and down. Let's take it for what it is and order another round.

Three Stalwart Stanza

I remember when she first responded to the cicadas, that stentorian August when the winged choirs chanted their hallelujahs in the crinkly grass.

I wish they would stop, she murmured, hand on ears, a gathering terror lapping at the edges of her eyes. It's as though all the women of the world were keening and all the old men of the world were rasping, a distorted OM from cauterized larynxes of Eastern monks.

Her cri-de-coeur resounded in the ponderous air and converged with the desperate telegraphy of the insects, then subsided just within the rhythm of the cicadas' song, rising and falling like the tide under the moon, as she let go her breath.

Thumbnail of a Woman Grieving

Peering imploringly past the intricate gaps of its delicate tatting, she wore her grief like a black lace mantilla.

Tireless Duplicity

Some people are indefatigable. Many never tire of doing good deeds, of righting wrongs, of fighting good fights.

Others toil endlessly to destroy their neighbors' good mood, to seek ways to get revenge or to create havoc.

Some greet everyone with a smile or a compliment, genuine, open, and freely bestowed.

Others see you or me walking down the street and their first thought is: What can I do to get his goat?

To a Friend Feeling Low

Your largess is large as the Indian Ocean, but your famous generosity stops with yourself.

You peer into your filmy-dark waters, in depths only you can access,

and behold there only the stony matter clinging to the crystals, not the rubies and the gold.

You see the dross not the silver, the leaves but not the refreshing tea;

Your repect for all others is renowned, but in yourself you see only the unforgivable

and thus the unforgiven. Have pity. The legions of unkindnesses, the black thoughts,

the hurtful things you've done—all are from a heart that is human.

Here is all the love we possess: take it—apply it like balm

on your suffering so profound that only you can know it.

Who would have thought sometimes the hardest one to love is ourself.

Today's Horoscope

Aries:

A Libra seeks solace from you. Share your gift.

Taurus:

Your friend, a Virgo, is stranded. Give him a lift.

Seek the company of a Taurus and an Aries this week.

You are nearing your sexual peak.

Virgo:

Expect a good deed from a Taurus today.

Cancer:

Sagitarius will show you the way.

Expect sympathy from an Aries.

Scorpio:

Your good fortune varies.

Capricorn:

Learn from a Pisces.

Aquarius:

A Leo suffices.

Sagittarius: A Cancer needs directions.

Pisces:

Capricorn awaits your discretions.

Toward Home

He pointed to the jade horizon shadowy in the morning mist and said, "See the hills, the Kentucky hills, the heartbreaking hills?

"Yes, there are the hills, the Kentucky hills, the heartbreaking hills. Is it your heart you speak of? Your heart—splintered, bruised?"

"Severed right into.
Half my heart festers over there,
what's left languishes here.
I can never go back,
though the Kentucky hills, the heartbreaking hills,
beseech me every night."

We gazed together at the darkening hills as a snow squall obscured our view.

Tragedy Strikes at the Big-rig Grill

Bobby Bolt lost his napkin last night at the Big-rig Grill. He'd made his chauffeur stop there for water to take his pill.

Driving back to New Jersey from seeing La Traviata at the Met, his heart began to murmer, presaging an ominous threat.

Smirking at the stainless steel tableware, he shoved it away, while his paper napkin slid under the salt and pepper tray.

Inquired Louise, the waitress: "What'll it be today, honey?" "A glass of water, miss, and I don't find that funny."

"I didn't mean to be forward, " Louise offered shyly. "You've given me no napkin, " Bobby responded drily.

"This is atrocious!
The poorest service I've ever got."
Bobby jumped up, stormed out
and passed out on the parking lot.

When Louise called 911 as she cleared the setting away, she was startled to find a paper napkin under the condiments tray

Tropical Heat

And let's not forget that week in Isla Mujeres when you were inebriated with tropical sunsets and tequilla sunrises.

We booked a room in that hotel, where wild orchids were tamed and potted palms were mulched in old cigarette butts.

The owners, expats from L. A., had almost succeeded in bringing the jungle into the hotel and the hotel into the jungle. You found a fake anaconda in the restaurant ladies' room. I observed cell phone towers, slender gray Eiffel towers, on the hiking trails.

One night one sultry, cicada night, I woke up and you were not there. The Aztec-motif sheets still held your impression, but I lay next to your absence, not your warmth.

Last I heard, from your mother, you had left Mexico and headed for Bolivia to seek solace in Change, in Chance, in Risk, in Revolution.

Tropical Noir

The night held the consistency of Turkish coffee, dense, deep, heavy, viscous. They kiss beneath the sinewy bougainvillea vines, drinking up the cascading passion and the mingled scent of frangipani and sweat. Her husband was back at the hotel, he wouldn't mind, being dead and all.

Like a jaguar she purred and lit her Lucky Strike with a hundred dollar bill.

Tropical Sundown

Tremulously, tremulously, green-blue, radiant light filters off the lagoon.

Green-blue, radiant light reflects the waning of the day folding into night.

All the hours of the day converge and dissolve in green-blue radiant light.

Truth Melts

Purple and pungent are our lies, counterfeit cobblers, mendacious pies. Poppies made of blue ice, discarding petals of pretense and deception: integrity settles slippery on the ground and dries.

Trying to Make Wine and Getting Vinegar

So, what does Thoreau have that I don't? he asked.

Thoreau is dead, you said. It's 'what DID Thoreau have that you don't.'

So, what did he?

He believed that the industrial revolution heralded the end of mankind's individuality. You and I, according to Henry David, are living desperate lives.

You should not be enamoured of the deceased; it could be misconstrued as necrophilia. Who's Henry David?

You're making my life desperate, you said.

Your life is desperate because you are promiscuous. What's with this Henry David and Thoreau and all. Who else? I'm very concerned about this new lifestyle of yours.

Never mind, you say, I'm off to check out some real estate on a rural pond in Massachusetts.

Tung Trees

Blooms ivory with roseate veins, like brush strokes from a single hair. Low and spindly, they remind you of bonsai and things Japanese, being indigenous to there.

The fruits, nuts, begin apple-green and are tapered at the end like a child's spin-top.

When they mature they burnish to a matte black, become dessicated, and fall to the ground. Everywhere they fall a tree will be.

The oil inside stains the harvesters' hands an ocher yellow.

For years they were planted in orchards for their oil, additives to paint and varnish.

In the 1960's Hurricane Camille blew in and leveled the fragile trees like a samurai's sword. They were never replanted.

Take a drive in rural Mississippi and you can still see their ancestors shinto gods rising resolutely from residual kernels, orphaned, displaced, exotic emigres.

Two Haikus: North Wind; South Wind

North Wind:

Let me in! the wind against the windows demands. It's cold out here.

Southern Breeze:

My lungs are sweet with fragrance and heat from the sun. Savor my warm breath.

Ulterior or Interior Motives

Last week my best friend Manny said, Still writing poems, I see.

Still passing judgment, I see, I replied.

Under the Veil

Colors soften under a patina of frost. All that's left of the original tint resides in the film footage of our memory, though antiqued there now and sepia-toned by the mach-speed of time.

I wonder if faces are like that. The rimy shadows of pain and suffering, those coldsnaps of turmoil, descend over a visage like a white wedding veil concealing the innocent softness there, muting the illumination there, like a summer garden blanketed with frost or covered with ashes.

Just as May faithfully melts the frost, maybe a warm convection of summer thoughts will lift the veil and disperse the ashes and restore us to our original glow.

Undertow

An undulating undertow, a syphoning-in, moods can be like riptides, heaving, upheaving,

but formative too dredging up rough pebbles from beneath, polishing, softening, seeking equilibrium, thrusting to the surface shipwrecks, but sunken treasures too.

Unsaid Words before the Word Goodbye

Breaking off from Cara was as uncomplicated as detaching the pit from the peach, as fluid as extracting the loose rinds of a tangerine, but deep inside he knew the separation would bear no fruit.

Unsetting the Unsettling Sun

Not unlike the constancy of the sun, always descending in its assigned place, a little north, a little south, depending on the season, I keep going back to the same place.

And just like the horizon that in the evening bites the sun and consumes him, I seem far away; I seem hungry for light, for white and yellow, not the blues and blacks of night.

And the places I go are always the places I've been, cold, sad places of shame and regret, stagnant seas, burnt hillsides, desolute dunes. I go obediently, irrisistably, to my master, my memories.

I cannot unset the sun but I can chase him.
Maybe some day, I'll catch up and wrestle him and capture the light and heat to carry with me when I visit the dark places of the past; then I'll finally see what's really there.

Unwanted Gift

It was when I drove by your house and noticed that you had never taken down the Christmas decorations that I first understood what had happened to you.

It was the beginning of March and the plastic reindeer seemed eerie, disoriented—the bluster of winter's last fury had broken the neck of one and he stood shaking his head in disbelief and horror.

The angels on the front porch, with hymnals open, with mouths open all in unison, sang silent carols, to the silent night that was filtering in from the east.

When you didn't answer my phone call, I drove back and knocked on the door, all pasted over with wind-ripped foil depicting snowy, happy scenes.

I could see from your empty stare that you didn't recognize who I was and that the world had stopped spinning for you around mid-December, about the time that you got the news that he had left you.

I saw beyond you the brown-needled spruce tree with the unopened boxes underneath. I held you in my arms tenderly and felt suddenly cold like the lingering snow on the window-sills; inadequate like the glistening tinsel on the tree.

Upon Outing My Friend As an Optimist

I want the old you back. You were my Edgar Allen Poet and I could always be sure that no matter how crappy I felt, you felt crappier. Now you've betrayed me and have become happier.

Who do you think you are, Walt Whitman? All smiles and lilacs blooming in your dooryard; It's all very disturbing, curbing your lack of enthusiasm. You're up on the pinnacle of joy while I'm teetering on the chasm.

Your favorite past-time was to crash a funeral, pretending you're Maud and I'm Harold.
Now it's weddings and christenings every day. Hey, what happened to serious stuff like Death? What led you astray?

It looks as though
everyone I know
is embracing la vie en rose.
What's the gloomy-gus to do;
where are we to go?
I must find an antidote to purge
the happy virus. Anyone know
a good elegy or a dirge?

Ups 'n Downs

Like white ink on black paper sometimes life seems turned around. Like ice in summer, desiccated leaves in spring, like fish swimming in the Gobi Desert, like a bell that will not ring, it's disconcerting, I've found.

Like black ink on white paper sometimes things seem straight ahead. Like iced tea in summer, cherry buds in spring, like fish catapulting in the thrusting whitewater, like a bell that rings and ringsthen life's a dancing thoroughbred.

Utilitarian Music

He listens to music, to mask the rhythm of his loneliness.

When he drives to work, he turns on the radio loud to dispel the pervading anxiety beside him and in the back seat.

He never goes to concerts, because the music demands to be heard.

When someone asks him who his favorite singer is, he responds: The Beatles or ABBA, and quickly changes the subject.

He goes to sleep to the sound of easy listening radio.

What would he do, without music?

Violet Haiku

Wild violets: blue and white ribbons trim the creek. a lacy brocade.

Waltzing with Eureka

Mrs. Carolina spent most of her days in the valiant deification and praise of sanitation. The very elation

of wiring up the Eureka, stopping to seek a just-right attachment, a match meant

for heaven, yes sir. And then the whirr, like a purring cat, stirring that

sanctified feeling in her that will occur when she cleaning, leaning

her toward contentment and resentment of those who don't see dirt, who hurt

the balance of things with bathtup rings and lint on the sheets. "Beats

being deadbeats, " she purrs. "Dust bunnies and cockleburs make me ill. I will

not yield to the filth of the world, " she said as she twirled around the floor,

waltzing with her upright gentleman, Eureka.

Warm Nights, Restless Hearts

That night you stayed out all night and came home drunk at 4 AM: What were you looking for? Flight? Was it wine or was it roses or other pleasures that night discloses; Was it a reaction to routine—a keen sense of deprivation, a holy ritual, a pilgrimage to the consecrated zone of the demi-monde?

Were you like Proust in search of lost time in the sparkle of the grime and quartz particles of city sidewalks?

I know that it is possible to feel lonely even with people you love. I hope a time will come when we can battle our demons together.

Weathering

Such is the case: The first flowers of autumn, the last of summer, are asters, golden rod, and queen anne's lace.

There is a changing of seasons in your eyes, and all the reasons are vague and disturbing—
I can see it in your face.

There's a trace of a more rugged blossom there— a bloom that can bear the coming chilly nights.

Permit me to stay by you, for this disconcerting equinox of mood. After the zinnias and phlox are wilted, we'll plant together next years daffodils and hyacinths.

What-nots

Life is not a river; love is not a rose.

Grief is not a bottomless well; joy is not a flower.

Wisdom is not a pearl; pain is not a knife.

Strength is not an oak tree; fear is not a color,

but all the world's a metaphor, or so it seems.

What's After That?

The farthest galaxy yet known to man is Abell 1835 IR1916, but what's after that?

The most distant star is one of the quasars, but stars, like people, expire and what's after that?

Believers and the faithful claim heaven is the farthest place, but what's after that?

We are born with a yearning to comprehend beginnings and endings: what came before; what came after, but...

We also love surprises.

What's the Big Idea?

Greyson made a living selling plot ideas to aspiring novelists.

As a result his wealth had increased exponentially, as had the world's quota of fourth-rate writers.

One day, however, Greyson was reading the local rag and noticed an article in the "Literary Luminaries" section that mentioned one of his clients: "Joe Fitzmeyer, a local author strikes it rich with sleeper blockbuster."

The name of the novel was "The Plot Merchant."

When Blue is Blue Enough

On some days the sky is not cerulean blue, it is not azure or indigo, nor is it the tint of someone's grandmother's antique ewer.

It cannot be compared to the aquamarine, or the ultramarine of the sea, or your lover's memorable eyes;

It defies classifications on spectra or color-wheels, spinning, spinning the names of the layers of light.

On those days, we look up and though astounded, we are content to plunge through the labyrinth of words and reconsider the sound and sense of the unassuming word blue.

Where the Earth Bends

I often look at the azure sky of mid-morning, or the purpling crawl of twilight, the Joseph's-coat of the sky at sunset.

And countless times I peer out beyond glass doors toward the gray-green contours of the hills, broken by the points of conifers and the sparkle of white houses.

And the river there: color that travels, color that changes and robs the palettes of the trees and sky.

But hardly ever do my eyes focus on the horizon where the earth abuts the sky; where the sphere arcs and reminds me that I'm planted precariously on a twirling ball.

Artists say there is no such thing as a true straight line.
All creation curves all things resist uniformity. Yet, we strive for straightness, building our homes in cubes, our streets in immaculate grids, lives in neat compartments.

Lately, I find myself looking more at the ever-receding horizon, marveling at the soft roundness of things. And wondering what's beyond it and beyond the one after that.

Whirling Disease

Something is wrong with the trout in Huntington Creek. Instead of following the current's flow they mimic eddies and whirlpools—drowning dervishes striving to scratch their tails, sensing that something is wrong there. Unnatural maladies should not have pretty names.

(Note: There really is an outbreak of this illness currently afflicting fish in Utah's freshwater streams.)

Wild Grapes

They grow high up to attract the birds who will disperse the seeds, and they grow high up to stay out of the reach of hungry creatures like me.

You keep your feelings high up there too where only gods and angels can reach them, among the gnarly vines of your complexity.

The ascent is too precipitous; I cannot climb this tree; bend a little so that I can perch there in the cool, emerald shadows and savor the fruits of your mind and heart.

Winter Solstice Invocation

No need for you clanking old sycamores to shake your death rattle at me, Wild goose from Manitoba, precise in your perfect V: honk if you love summer, if you remember the blue of the last of the autumn cornflowers.

Nobody need broadcast the flight of the sun and the triumph of night, I can feel it in the tips of my fingers, in the pores of my skin, as the solstice crawls like wooly caterpillers toward consumation toward annihilation and finally toward light.

No regrets, only the embers of remembrance flickering in the ripe kindling of the first fire of the season. Winter will have its way and winter will go its way.

Winter Thoughts on a Summer Afternoon

He resisted it, nostalgia.
He longed to be here now, reacting to events as they occurred, not reliving long past victories, calamities, assignations.
Not living where the dead live, in tombs where cobwebs and dust linger in the silence.

But at night, when ghosts assemble and remember when they lived, and where they lived, and how they lived and want to live again, the fingers of remembrance beckon him back—to times back then, back when he was happier, to where he first fell in love, and how deeply he felt things then.

No resisting nostalgia. It never forgets us.

Wishful Thinking

But what if there was a pandemic of empathy, a pause, a sudden quietude, in which things shifted and for once a significant majority of the human race decided that they had not tried hard enough, no, not tried nearly hard enough, to coexist, to expend the energy it takes to figure out how to solve our problems without violence.

Wooden Phoenix

A single needle drops from the pine, but the tree remains.
A storm snaps off a branch, but the trunk stays.
The logger saws down the tree, but the stump is still there.
The wench uproots the stump, but leaves a hole in the earth into which has fallen a seed.

The seed is embraced by the earth which closes the hole and roots form from the mulch of the stump. At first a fragile stem then a trunk pushes up and branches out in the shape of a tree tinseled with thousands of fragrant needles.

Word Unspoken

In some religions, I'm told, the word for God is never spoken. It is verboten and a taboo that must never be broken.

I wonder if there's another word that would be better kept unsaid, since it's overused and quite cliché and ineffective when it's read.

Love, amour, amore, amor, over and over and over again, We wink, or sign, or moan it, but must we quote it in a quatrain?

I love your hat, I love your style, I love your love, I love your smile.

I love the theater,
I love to dance,
Surely there's a better way
to indicate romance.

So, from here on out, tell your darling true, I've something to say, but it's not I () you.

Working Poor

A tin can of flour, the last tablespoon of oil, an egg. He listens to the news as the water begins to boil.

For months now he's been out of work and looking. the GM plant closed last winter and he stands here cooking.

His wife took the kids, but he doesn't blame her. Her parents could feed them; he could no longer claim her.

The man on the TV was saying: "All this talk about the poor. Lazy, unmotivated people—Nothing More."

All he had ever done, all he ever knew to do had revolved around hard work, oh, and love too.

The TV man went on: "Not a penny out of my pocket went to charity last year. Not a cent."

He thought about that and then made a decision: to turn off the television.

Working the Simple

Working the simple, playing the plain notes of ordinary time, tumbling into the gentle swirling smoke of our lives today, or lives after today, seems appropriate, seems perfect.

Like a white shirt for a man or a basic black dress for a woman, satisfaction does not need to be coordinated with complex accoutrements, with the encrumbrance of precious beads or beatitudes.

Working the simple, playing the plainsong while sifting through the hours of our days for smiles and kind words and other precious beads and beatitudes:
These are the gestures that make life worth wearing every day.

World History

Now show me a picture of pain, the little boy asked his mother.

You are not ready, she softly said, let's find another.

We've looked at pictures of joy, of me as a boy.

You shown me daddy at your wedding and me wrapped up in bedding.

You've shown me our life, but you haven't shown me pain.

Where did you hear of pain, my boy, my love?

I hear of it more and more, and from the woman who lives next door.

Here, my son, go ahead and look. You'll find pictures here in this book.

"A History of the World" he read on page one. When you're older, will you rewrite the book, my son?

Yellow Epiphany

This time of year hundreds of pale yellow butterflies descend upon the early purple thistle blossoms and daisies, buttering up the landscape.

Common as dandelions and not nearly as brilliant, they churn and suckle, insignificant, ordinary. I'll wait for the monarchs and the swallowtails—now there's glamour; there's glory.

I'll wait.

But wait!
Yesterday, I went outside
to bring in the laundry
when a single pale yellow
butterfly alit on
a white sheet, resting,
drinking the cool,
moist whiteness.

I never knew yellow could shimmer so.

Yellow Is the Sunniest Color

Give a child a coloring book, a box of crayons and a lined sphere to represent the sun and she will resolutely fill in the circle with yellow.

But the sun is not yellow, is it? More white, but the sphere is already white and it's such a boring color.

But yellow is the sunniest color and the happiest one. Perhaps the spring blooms know this, as daffodils and forsythia are the first to affirm the season of Helio and express their homage in buttery and lemony bliss.

You're Not the Same Person You Were a Nano-Second Ago

Yes, you honeyed your tea or sugared your Kenya coffee, but did you sweeten your outlook? Are you a softie; can you cook?

Or do you drink it black and drink it in the dark, reading your Rilke, so immediate, so stark, both rough and silky.

Are you lofty, thoughts like cave bats fluttering in your brain, or do you crave stats; are you sane?

As for me, it's all day-to-day, I change with the weather, I shift from mood to mood, both linen and leather, constantly renewed.