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Light gathers beneath the skin, pulsing white water, pulling the sky down, charging the air with microscopic rains and threads, keeping us close, nearby... now the hands are floating away like moons. Their souls are in the water drums and transparent bells of the ears. They are soothing the fists of the inner ear, speaking in low sounds, resonance, colors of sound... tonight, light is all around.

I have been asleep and want to wake. Listening to Bach and Bartok. Miriam painting in the other room. Traveling behind, traveling ahead. Reading Stump Farming. The wall flashes into sounds of human breathing, smells of tart flesh moving on flesh... If I could see through, I would say there are rivers beneath the streets. I would say each house is a lung with formica paneling and rayon carpeting covering the pure wooden floors. I would say the apple is a wheel that will go anywhere, that there is no joy greater than falling into water, than the faint smell of dust in air turning cooler! I would say there is no feat greater than burning as a sun, in your own images, in your own meditation... if I were awake, I would say, “this dream, this dream!” and blank out the world to see, as if a tree were leaping up and running, or a stone threw itself into the air, to knock against the particles of ozone, as if all around there are only stones moving, knocking together, vibrating under light, the undulating stones of sleep, the thin leaves of stones... it is, as if nothing stood still, to be counted on, and that was all... if I close my eyes, there are wings coming out my temples, as if my brain were a sea gull ready to dive for fish... there is no joy greater than entering water, changing...
the entire surface of the body in one movement, listening to
the store clerk cry out in joy, letting the snail have its
babies, believing the world is an atom in another world, feeling
a hand pulse into a crow in the white pine, knowing nothing
is worse than the sorrow of division... nothing is worse than
the sorrow of holding on... oh, breath inside, around, poem
going where it goes, pass with those who move, into one breath,
one spear of pollen, one fish of sperm cracking into earth,
in the cry of the full moon, from the mother of dust and bones,
from the mother of the last bed buried deep in earth, from
the mother of the flashing sky, the lightning skin, the joy of
falling into deeper sleep, into deeper and deeper sleep... .

SHORT LITANY OF GREED

No. I do not want to begin
Fresh again.
Just give me my old poems.

And give me my desk which is covered with ashes.
And give me this wooden floor.

And give me my jeans with their patches for each planet.
And give me these visits which are like last year’s magazines.
And give me the five addresses of the salvation army.
And give me dirt roads with covered bridges.

And give me my face which is drilled with your names.
And give me my arms which have turned themselves in.
And give me my back, for I often misunderstand.

And give me my ears and their brother my nose
And their mother this place
And their sister my wife.

Yes. Give me my wife.

TREES

"Circumspice!"

All around us,
Trees with extended powers!—
Five-winged Maple.
Jagged tongues of Ironwood.

Fish-shaped leaves
Swimming over the cabin.
Continuing green flame.

Trees moving their one syllable
And each peasant
Who is us,
Eating from the garden—
Seeds cakes,
Sprouts we can enter!

And all around us,
The open faces of Oak.
Visible ghosts of Elm.
Talking Ash.
Trees whose hands are lungs
Turned inside out,
Whose brains are turned out
Into the sky!—

Trees, good spirits,
Give us your breath.

AFTER RAIN

There are barges of pure earth floating in the air,
The bodies of grass pulsing.

Steam breaking like skins from our bodies,
Lifting the rainbow of flesh above us,
Waiting to be open
Waiting to become fire
Like a root burning over fields

I pray to hear I pray

Mark McCloskey
Four Poems

THE STYLES

My house recalls her like a soupy uncle;
even the chairs gain weight praising her.
My past itself takes her in its arms
and sits her down to its madness—
the snow, the slow roads, the parlors
that don't know what to do with sunlight,
my friends training their nouns like pets.
My books, too, pick up on her:
some even follow her home,
and others parse her name in their sleep.

She, of course, can do without them—
the furnitures, the holdings, the fictions.
She is surrounded by her own needs;
they come at her like bankrupt Italians,
talking fast as though nothing were wrong,
sometimes in the white gloves of self-pity.
Her highstrung musics with their fat legs,
the fanmails she feeds adverbs to;
even the ocean with its greasy hair:
hers is the history of all this,
as mine is only taking it all in.
I don't know how else to say distance,
that love sets up its flags there,
that no one can make them out for the wind.
My own effects confuse her with themselves,
like Iceland imagining an ostrich:

NORTHWEST
And it is this perhaps I don't want
to risk losing? Not to mention the fish—
sucker, garbage-mouth, but big,
the only big one I'd ever caught.
Why come down from that? Why
be usual at this stage of memory?
You understand. To put it
this way—if I should come with you,
because you want me to,
because I like the taste of killing
and would use love to salt it, make up for
whatever comes to nothing in the mountains.

A MAP OF THE KINGSTON QUADRANGLE, RHODE ISLAND

The headlights on the freeway bubble toward me.
Are they an inlet from the ocean? Here I go
to that ocean that stopped the long adventures.
The last bar on the beach is their basement—
the pony of Red Fox, the cavalry war flags
hanging from the ceiling in powders,
the wing from the Great War; the spoons
and wicker perambulators of the New World
oxide and kindling now; the sawdust on the floor.

The first house I had was high up,
and there were wild strawberries all around it;
it was torn down. The second one had holes
in the floorboards, a cold-wave came;
the third one flooded, dead worms seized it;
the fourth one went mad from sonic booms;
the fifth one had a landlord in the keyhole.
Now my wife is gone, my children are postcards,
my neighbors flush my sleep in their walls.

And I am driven to the sea edge like a sewer,
thinking I have never made my own decisions,
being a dainty will, a mere historian

THE RISK

for Paul Vangelisti

You say “Come fishing.” True,
the mountains aren't far, and the air
and the water there would taste
delicious. Don't you come back
on Monday burned with such adventure
as though the rainbows were more than fish?

But I won't go, perhaps
because the Bronx is still my place,
and I had seen so many kinds of rattler
in the zoo, obeyed movies for so long,
the West is too big for me,
too venomous to fish in.

The last time I went fishing
was off a street-bridge on the Bronx River:
the sizzle of tar and iron, the shimmer-
green of the reel-flank, sudden
doubling weight in the rod bruised me
some delicious inward—
of how Christ whistled from his electric chair
for me to be his last meal, and father, charging them,
bought four graves and lay in one
beside my brothers, willing the fourth to me;
of how my wife cried from her red pillow
for me to cover my face, and my children struck her.

Here I am at the last ocean, desert rat
who second guesses the holes he left out,
and digs a map of that backward country
from a trash trunk, and glues it above his dream bed,
and says, "Follow the veins in the Great Swamp,
the Chickasheen west to the Usquepaug, then south
to the Pawcatuck, and on east; the Chipuxet also
south; Mink Brook from the east; Alewife north:
trace them to the unnamed island in Worden Pond,
and do your panning in ninety feet of bum water."

THE NEW MAN

"I'm off with the new man,"
the wicked phone mouth said.
I stuffed it with opera,
and went off to the tide-line.
But everything was dead there—
jellyfish, kelp, shoes;
even the water was greasy.
The sky looked like the low end
of match flame. And the men,
they had such measures on!
The girls couldn't get over it,
they rubbed them like snake backs,
like ballbearings. I went home,
made thumbprints on the white walls—
hex on all handsome.
But then the ammonias whispered,
"She's playing canoe with him,
but she will come to water
no man can swim in,
and you will skirt it like a road."
Oh I was halfwit then,
and sang for the short times left—
sang like a phone, like a match,
sang like vein on wristbone,
sang till the tears came.

Roberta Hill

SLEEPING WITH FOXES

You burst into the world with smiles wide as April,
a crimson baby, blossoming, called Rosa.
They drenched you, not knowing it dwarfed indian magic,
and you were blessed with names of flowers, saints. Dad's guitar
rusted near toys. You, a red-brown nugget among sparrows,
rann to touch azaleas, Lou'siana tenderness,
and chased chickens during hurricanes.

When you were ten, the neighbor boys tied, burned a savage.
Mother pulled you, crying, from the flame.
On the shaker porch, when spring rain whipped
trees, we philosophized as children
about drops caught in our eyrie. Small eagles,
one in blue flannel, longing for leaden wind and pride.
Lady who no longer lives with time,
listen, take this ragged shawl, this dew.

The years have swung roughly since you left Denver.
Stones anchor these mountains.
Where or how can I reach you?
I've checked mail from Lake Tahoe
and points east, asked detectives
who confessed you were a bride, a bone.
Are you sleeping with foxes, noses deep in warmth,
buried in thickets of blackberries and ground fog?
Wind blows the marshgrass along the bay shore.  
Bees twist honeysuckle in our backyard.  
It is we who have grown desperate, bitter,  
sensing that wind blows in gusts, skims  
this jagged distance without leaving sons.

STAR QUILT

These are notes to lightning in my bedroom.  
A star forged from linen thread and patches.  
Purple, yellow, red like diamond suckers, children  
of the star gleam on sweaty nights, The quilt unfolds  
against sheets, moving, warm clouds of Chinook.  
It covers my cuts, my red birch clusters under pine.

Under it your mouth begins a legend,  
and wide as the plain, I hope Wisconsin marshes  
promise your caress. The candle locks  
us in forest smells, your cheek tattered  
by shadow. Sweetened by wings, my mothlike heart  
flies nightly among geraniums.

We know of land that looks lonely,  
but isn't, of beef with hides of velveteen,  
of sorrow, an eddy in blood.

Star quilt, sewn from dawn light by fingers  
of flint, take away those touches  
meant for noisier skins,  
anoint us with grass and twilight air,  
so we may embrace, two bitter roots  
pushing back into the dust.

David Zaiss

Three Poems

A FIGMENT OF FIRE-BREATHING

After the dragon tonight your hand is a legend; the street  
is mystic with stories. The stories all flow into an  
underground river, but the milk coating your mind coats  
pure space.

After the dragon you stop for a shake and thicken two  
lives in a Western Drug. A fat Billy the Kid tosses  
a bullet into the mixer. Over the counter every moment  
is a double conjuring.

After the dragon you have your version. 1872. The gun­  
fighter is in contact with the fire in his throat. He  
is always moving in, moving in flush with the bulk in  
his dreams. And after the dragon, silence. They tie  
him up in a coffin and lower him, dreams and all, into  
the river where the legendary Fortis is known to love  
to hunt the dragon.

And after the dragon, sucking the snake of milk through a  
straw, you speak in two directions, changing your mind  
constantly, biting your own tail.

After the dragon Fortis slept in a circle of suns. The  
largest he selected for his mate. From their union the  
earth issued, and the moon went the way of a notched  
gun. Fortis didn't love the moon, but he tipped a mood  
thataway, like everyone else after the dragon.

Or after the dragon the Kid is a saint with a silver stomach.  
He picks his nose to think. With nothing wild, one of  
his kidneys draws a royal flush and becomes immortal.  
He is fat with immortality. You do not worry about the  
bullet; he will have to take it out of his own chest.  
The man in the coffin puts the rope to sleep, eases out  
of the coffin and swims to shore. The Kid lays down a  
bloody nose.
do not eat
anything that has entered
your smile
to fortify the lost sense
of a balanced diet do
not count on
the weightlessness
of surplus vitamins
to keep you anonymous
do not count on wm penn
letting you eat words
in the interests
of public hunger
affix this label to your
mouth and
eat what should be
in there swimming silently
around and around
behind your signature

WORD LABELING
this is the pennsylvania
department of agriculture
speaking
your ingredients are in
danger keep them out
of the reach of
children
your children must not know
they cannot trust
the good taste of chlorophyll
anymore there is a
live silverfish half-drunk
with ambition
sleeping with your health

THE SYLLABUS
A. Sit down quietly.
   Do not sit down
   with a knife drawn between
   the sexes. Build a fire.
   When the flames reach
   my mouth, signal your intention
   to ask me a question
   by smiling.

B. Do not speak.
   Speak like a prophet
to your smiling memory.
   Break your chair into words,
   into a sentence with a backswing.
C. Write your own syllabus.
   Your syllabus should be born impersonal,
   a dead whale drying on the beach.
   Later you will learn to fill
   your syllabus with blood and the living
   creatures you admire.

D. Imagine F.
   Make it beautiful in your mind.
   Do not imagine Vietnam,
girly mags or Phil Gaglardi.
   Rewrite your syllabus using
   only the beautiful letter F
   as in fulfillment or fun . . .

E. Tell me you'd love
   to be yourself. Tell yourself
   you are ready to push the button, you are
   ready to begin eating the Prime Minister.
   You are not ready anymore
   to sit down quietly.

F.

_Sonya Dorman_  Three Poems

**THE MYSTERIOUS DR. MORNING**

That's the way you arrive,
turning plain pine into honeywood,
beset by the neighbors' little dogs
one yap at a time.

The grandfather clock strikes you
at the door,
our pains turn the other cheek
to your mercury
and bag of blessings.

Awake in the operating theater
we need to be reminded: these
are real people behind the white masks.
Needles, knives, flash in corroboration.

You will make us cleaner than thou,
walking our dark streets
where dirty rain falls,
where joy reeks.

We called you, and waited hours.
Now your reminiscences
at our bedside are terrible.

**STRETCHING FENCE ON OUR ANNIVERSARY**

Six a.m., the grass white as platinum
with cold dew; an acre away
woodpeckers drill for breakfast.
Fence posts you drove yesterday
lift like weir stakes in the wet air.

The roll of wire we push
leaves a wide plush track on the slope.
Stumbling, I let go. One end whips back
striking my thigh with fire.

We go on rolling; at the first post
hook on, cut baling wire, join with the pliers
and turn the roll,
all snarls like a bad dream.

The sun's full up now, the aluminum
look of the metal darkens to blue;
hook on, cut, join with the pliers.
If I let go at the wrong time
the wire will snap a strip from my hide.

You lean down the slope
and I lean back, keeping our boundary taut.
Here we hang in morning silence:
hooked on, joined, and rusting together.
FAMILY POEM

Oh you, your rank determination,
that of the beaver to dam his pond,
of the heron to stand all day for one fish,
of the horse radish to wait out seven winters
and multiply underground;
oh you, in ridged boots,
a strong stamp upon entering
is your signature.

Oh myself, training words on trellises
with bloody fingers
so you won’t know which of us blooms,
all day alive at the top
of the house where ceilings fall;
oh myself, cutting away streamside brush,
forcing the waters to the sea,
brooking no dam that holds them back
and burning bridges which cross them.

And she comes in, oh you her father
and I her mother, blazing with road dust,
displaying in the hot noon
every thorn, gall and fruit
we ever wished on her;
that seedling who, as we mind
the house and the land,
thrives well enough to burst from us.

Oh you and I on a May morning
beating the ground we live on
in a rage to bring forth the beans,
the sweet peas of our marriage;
what shall we do in the grape arbor
gone to leaf, when the need
for grapes is over?

PLAY DEAD

1
As a kid I’d throw
up my capgun, stagger back, drop
to a knee, hug my stomach,
grunt, fall face first and
lie still
holding my breath. My friends
approved and once lifted
my stiff body off
the driveway and carried me into
the hayfield where, clearing
away thistles, they laid me down
and covered me with alfalfa.

2
Balled like a small fly
trapped, killed and stored
the spider over the kitchen
door knows death is the
best ambush

and we
learn death is the best
escape from death:

after the ship sinks
and the lifeboat capsizes
let your arms and legs
hang down and, your stomach
buoyed up by the life
jacket, float
like a dead man
till rescued—or caught lost
in a snowstorm, bury
yourself in a snowdrift

POETRY NORTHWEST
and sleep till the wind
dies—or shot
in the thigh, play possum
till the helicopter
lands.

Driving home I imagine
myself dead. Friends have flown
with my ashes across
the Atlantic, taken them to the theater
in London, and driven
through the rain into
Wales. They stand, as directed
by the will, in the hot
depths of a coal mine,
their faces black. As they
scatter me through some dark
tunnel, they quarrel.

To love is to mock
death. Coffined in each
other and winded by moves
to get beyond ourselves,
we delight in the last
spasm with a god's gasp.

"Play dead, Daddy,"
my children laugh, and I lie
still on the cool ground
as they happily bury
the god of their house
with leaves thinking
he'll come alive again.

HOW TO BE HAPPY: ANOTHER MEMO TO MYSELF

You start with your own body
then move outward, but not too far.
Never try to please a city, for example.
Nor will the easy intimacy
in small towns ever satisfy that need
you have only whispered in the dark.
A woman is a beginning.
She need not be pretty, but must know
that everything serious is funny,
and no less serious for it. She must
aspire to the unoccupied space in rooms,
above the crowd. Together you must love
to exchange gifts in the night,
understanding the superfluity of ribbons,
the fine violence of breaking out
of yourselves.

No matter,
it is doubtful she will be enough for you.
Or you for her. You must have friends
of both sexes. When you get together
you must feel everyone has brought
his fierce privacy with him
and is ready to share it. Prepare
yourself, though, to keep something back;
there is a center in you
you are simply a comedian
without. Beyond this, it is advisable
to have a skill. Learn how to make something:
food, a shoe box, a nice day.
That should be enough.
Remember, finally, there are few pleasures
that aren't as local as your fingertips.
Never go to Europe for a cathedral.
In large groups, create a corner
in the middle of a room.
LAKES: THE OCEAN SPEAKING

The first thing you notice
is their lack of shoulders,
and you recall a woman
whose lip would occasionally tremble
and another who needed something
as swift as perhaps the wind
to move her. Then you observe
a certain deficiency of spirit,
the ease with which they allow
fishermen to take all their secrets.
And, everywhere, the unrocked boats.
You note that nothing maniacal
seems to rule them, neither God
nor Devil, and their record of catastrophe
is marred by leg cramps and carelessness.
You notice, though, how much better
you can see yourself in them,
how, if you swim in them and drown,
there is only yourself to blame.
And how their quietness seems
so righteous, yet so engaging.
Gradually, you sense a reluctance
to say anything final about how deep
they are, or if they are beautiful—
a feeling that you must wake up
next to them many mornings
and become part of their worst moments,
their imperceptible breathing.

INSOMNIA

Somewhere someone, I hope,
takes on big questions.
I’ve tried. I do not.
Something ails the scope
bounded by what-not and—what?
Will my shirt last one more day?
Why this hacking cough?
Camels, Kents, or gum?
Does coffee ruin digestion?
There’s three thousand miles on the oil.
Our kitchen sink still drips.

Unblinking checker at Sam’s
Stop-n-Shop: stop. Madame,
were you aware you charged
nine cents too much for the soap?
Were you annoyed I was annoyed?
(With plumbers eight dollars a trip
plus ten dollars an hour . . .)
Talkers whose points I barged into,
who did not hear my suggestions,
am I one you’d like to avoid?
(We can live with the sink.)
Poodle that squirts on our doorstep,
why that particular spot?
I refold my pillow
and try to broaden scope.
Dry uncle, do you think,
seeing how your life has turned out,
you might as well have drunk?
You are my favorite stoic; but
what do you get for your pains?
Friend, your mother’s death
was two years ago; forget it.
Remember you have our pan.
With it back I could use
that old blue pan to drain oil.

Wife, sleeper across the room,
suppose you woke up wise
to what I am not, am.
Some day the mask may slip:
I squat there like a chimp
sorting in little piles
nit cases, dandruff, pinched lice.
To what of my choice shall I pray?
And what say?

EXCHANGE IN THE NIGHT

With my heart full I say:
"I love you too, Elaine"
to Jan, who takes that in.
Our moment breaks.

I lie: "It's a mistake
to read much into such
old names our tongues picked up
so far back."

"Will you call someone someday
Jan?" "You only." She tries: "True lovers
who talk straight as they can
still trip in the dark."

HOW HE LIVED

Braced by two winks left eye two winks right eye
left shrug right shrug, he talked about a dog.
Up on the hill most nights this mutt would yap.
The worst thing was it yelped by fits and starts—
not like the radio (two winks), not like

After some muddled weeks (two left two right)
he had taken his .32 target pistol, which
he found now on the desk as he talked (left shrug
right shrug), up the hill to stop the confusion.
The night there (he snapped the gun) had been so dark,
some rocks kicked loose had finally struck so far
(two snaps) below, he had to sit down in the road.
Too near to the ditch he just held on
to the gun at least (two snaps), held on to the gun
by the barrel. Back home, he said, uncertain of his aim,
he kept in mind that order is a game
that no one (snap) wins (snap), it is a game.
He watched the hill and listened just the same.

Lewis Turco

LANDSCAPE

Winter is hanging fire behind the sun.
Back of my eyes, a leaf grows its shadow.
Beyond that there are hills turning to fall,
and a river is disturbed by the sound—
like water casting over the millsite
beside a road curling near the graveyard.
Earth is flesh lying upon the ridges
of these eastern places. Wind makes it move
as though it were a sleight of vetch or elm.
It is a hard thing to say where we stand
as shadow lies beneath the leaf, beneath
clay and moss the colors of winterlight.
Silence is hanging fire behind the moon.
UNTOWARD OCCURRENCE AT EMBASSY POETRY READING

Thank you. Thank you very much. I'm pleased to be here tonight. I seldom read to such a varied audience. My poetry is—what it is. Graves, yes, said love, death and the changing of the seasons were the unique, the primordial subjects.

I'd like to talk about that. One subjects oneself to art, not necessarily pleased to be a colander for myths. It seasons one to certain horrors. Not all. You can read or formulate philosophies; your death is still the kernel of your dawn sweats. Poetry is interesting to people who write poetry. Others are involved in other subjects. Does the Ambassador consider death on the same scale as you, Corporal? Please stay seated. I've outreached myself. I can read your discomfort. But tonight the seasons change. I've watched you, in town for the season, nod to each other, nod to poetry represented by me, and my colleagues, who read to good assemblies, good subjects for gossip. You're the audience. Am I pleased to frighten you? Yes and no. It scares me to death to stand up here and talk about real death while our green guerrillas hurry up the seasons. They have disarmed the guards by now, I'm pleased to say. The doors are locked. Great poetry is not so histrionic, but our subjects choose us, not otherwise. I will not read manifestoes. Tomorrow, foreigners will read rumors in newspapers... Oh, sir, your death would be a tiresome journalistic subject so stay still till we're done. This is our season. The building is surrounded. No more poetry tonight. We are discussing, you'll be pleased to know, the terms of your release. Please read these leaflets. Not poetry. You're bored to death with politics, but that's the season's subject.

John R. Carpenter

Two Poems

APOLLO AND MARSYAS

The contest is over, the prize awarded To Apollo. Marsyas howls, flayed alive For having challenged a god.

The victor mingles with the judges And well-wishers, lovers of technology; He speaks of numbers and formulas,

Of ancient myths whose names recall letters Engraved in stone. They listen in rapt attention, Ignoring the sickening cries of Marsyas.

Apollo is honored with a monument— A machine is installed underground And rows of moving parts glint as they hum Through the night, storing his information. The guardian tiptoes past in awe when he hears The sigh of its twenty-foot ventilator grill.

As a curiosity they kept Marsyas' skin; It was dried, the hair gone and thin As paper, punched full of holes.
THE COLONEL

Papers go by, they always go by
Into the wastebasket: orders, official acts,
A mortgage and credit installments.
He has known four wars and to crown
A life's work has a monopoly in the PXs:
All soft drink dispensers and pinball machines.

At night he discards supports and the dials
Before him are cities on the ground.
They twinkle and move as he touches
The other dials. This is the kitchen,
Glowing with silver—the cities dance
Like electric grills. Here is the timer.

He reaches over, feeling his way in the dark
And winds a knob, the earth dwindling
Below. He makes an instrument landing
And a few hours later flies over
The South China Sea as the sun rises,
Reviews tall desserts of whipped cream,

Then home to the great sleepless
Eye revolving around the clock, past
The flight line, bomb carriers and gantries
To the lids, the cans and bright labels,
The magnetic can opener and Mixmaster:
Ready, shining, indestructible.
C. G. Hanzlicek

EVENING IN LOS ANGELES

I slide into deeper shadow
As the sun falls off
Its shelf into the sea

Each time I take in air
My lungs rise
Like moons in my chest

In the darkness and old
Despair comes on
Despair that turns to desire

Desire to see TV sets
In a million rooms
Explode into artichokes

To see suns set in the East
And roads retract
Like the tongues of snakes

To see my name flittering
Like a canary
In the mouth of a mountain

To see the city plunged
Like hands to cool
In a barrel of sweet rain

To see wood turn to steel
And steel to wood
So wood might win in the end

To see the violently planned
Hills bend at last
To touch the dry earth

Because all these desires
Are endings
For a sky that is endless

A sky whose vague stars
Have twins
Failing on the sea's surface

I find myself as on any night
Between the two heavens
Singing a song

About life that divides them
Without an end
Without even a good beginning

Gerald W. Barrax

BIG BANG

Some kind of flying insect—
its existence beginning
only in my periphery
and ending at the windshield,
exploding
in death / the yellow shape
a galaxy.

Between those worlds and me
just right of eye level
other systems are coming into being
worlds without end.

If I can push a button and bring water,
turn a knob and wipe it all away,
why not someone else?
STRIPPING AN OLD FARM HOUSE

Plaster and bone-dry lath splinter and crunch
And spike the air with dust, or a whole ceiling,
Pried loose, comes crashing down and history puffs
From every broken window, to be hauled away
To the meadow, burned and buried—as history should be,
Fed back through roots and grass. In here, the walls
Yield odd and useless data: the living room
Was replastered during the Coolidge administration;
Somebody stopped an upstairs draft with lithos
Of fourteen Union generals from a Kelley’s Weekly
For Christmas week in 1867;
And inaccessibly under the kitchen sink,
In the safe and secret dark, some Fafnir rat
Had assembled pencils and spoons and sponges and can lids
And corn cobs and rags and a doll’s leg and soap and wire
And thumb tacks and paper clips and a brass cartridge
And unidentified substances—and himself,
Knowable only by fur, bleached bones, and teeth,
Guarding forever what he would not let go.

DEATH BY STARVATION

The hungry children with their bony knees
And their fingers like witches’ brooms in berry bushes
Know in their bones and bellies that the world
In which things happen is always outside, outside.
Behind their eyes, empty of happening,
Nothing but hunger; hunger in their hands
And hunger filling the empty space around them—
Outside, outside—beyond which lies the world.
They are not ours, but hunger’s; time and space
And world—outside, outside—touch nothing there
Where their thin hands lie, the only happening
Filling their emptiness with emptiness
In slow growth into the end of hunger.

INTO A DROWSE OF ARMS FIRED

Once it was
an actual graveyard I went to,
overrun with grasshoppers
in the treeless field
where my Chippewa relatives slept,
halfway fitfully,
(and the rest—
in another part of town—
thought they owned their ground...) and the old parting pacts were kept:
every Sunday unless it rained
my mother and I pulled weeds
and, kneeling, remembered
each one’s habits
or how the wool would bite my face
roughly concealing each breast
darkened in a white world
as we sat out every after-supper time.
Winter after winter
the smell of venison and tobacco
would cloud me as I climbed
to a mountainous knee
and laughed at the laughing
of the tall men and women
who joked and storied all my dusks
into a drowse of arms fired
by snapping stoves
and the mild starlight.
And I would stop, like this, my hands
full of pigweed, to recall
the timbering that broke the back
of their days and hands
blistered for the blood that finally stalled
like their time that I knew
would never be completed in me.
even as my head grew into the sky
of the yet unborn
and I hunted with a heart
already dead to the warm
they still smiled out in the little buds
I broke, the long, braiding hair
of those graves.

Myron Turner

AT THE DOOR

The chimes ring. I am afraid to turn around.
Outside, the Red River flows under small peaks of frozen current.
My heart thumps its ineluctable code:
Who's there, there? Consolation.
And desire. Who's there,
in the heart that will not turn around?
At the suffering door of the cathedral?
On its burning dome where an angel ascends to nowhere
on his painful wing?
To the south, on the shadowy moonscape
of the River Without the Glance of a Bird's Wing?

A jack-rabbit leaps toward the altar,
over the tombstones.
In the aisles narcissus bow from their stems.
Waiting bells.
Iris open the inward edges of their lips,
under the eyes of saints, under pale-gold glories.
I am alone. I kneel at the altar.
My eyes open into watery brilliance.
As though I'm crying into the afternoon.
As though I rose through the lips of the river
into the sunlight, unbearable tongues
striking against the open bell of sky.

Harold Witt

GOLDEN GLOVES

He ate right, slept right, lived right,
training for Golden Gloves,
worked out every day
the way ballet improves
step by step by step—
cut bad once in L.A.,
still he kept it up.

And how his mother worried
about his ears and nose—
his father crowed with pride
wild in the smoky rows—
those shoulders under the lights,
what a left, what footwork—
the new world champ—who knows?

But he got knocked for a loop
on his big night in Chicago—
ever the same again—
paunchier and slow,
he sells sporting goods,
showing, in better moods,
punk kids the old one two.
D. S. McCoy

APOLOGY FOR OUR WORKERS
(Found on a honey-jar label)

Humble and Sons, Apiaries
Daysend, Michigan

Due to the drouth experienced last summer
we began our work in clover,
but could not overcome our
Production Problems, and completed it in aster
and goldenrod.
No strike, no oversight, no dereliction of duty;
the diminished flow
of our capital made it impossible to go
on in clover; the cells were uncapped, and oddly
for July, had room there for each of our workers to carry
additional nectar in August, and the seasonal blooms vary.
(However acute we remain in proboscis,
we cannot presume to assume the powers of an Absolute
prognosis.)
Drouth being the work of God,
we hope for your pleasure in this unique flavor.

Robert L McRoberts

TRYING TO WRITE BEFORE THE LAST PRO-FOOTBALL GAME OF THE YEAR

I regroup and shift
some veteran lines, ask
myself, why all tercets
here? There, again. And that last word
slipping down
field to this stanza. Think: ho-hum,
tonight Bart Starr is narrating
a show on great
passers, great
receivers. Think: found
poem, Losers, Weepers
but hear no crying yet.

Leonard Neufeldt

HANDS

When the question bends crazily from an empty doorway
Like the summer-worn wicker chair and startles
Into autumn
I am down among leaves
And I look at my hands.
Summer reddens across strong lines.
These hands grasped firmly, uncovering only touch:

It is always enough, even for the blind.
Love is a kind of choosing,
A calloused hand bleeding the Sibyl's quiet song
That has sought to reach me and now seeks the earth.
"You must learn to face your fears"
Mother used to say
But I look at my hands.
These lines tell a fortune—years of choosing
And loving:
No cracker barrel revelations.
I can see what's coming, blood welling
Through fingers, falling, falling to the leaves.
And I lean on my hands until the pulse in the palm
Shakes the cold earth, in answer to the leaves
Gently.

POETRY
FATHER

The house is burning.
It can't be stopped.
When Father stands near
Fire leaps from his hair.
Flame stands on the pond.
Frogs stop croaking.
Where will horses run
If the sky burns?

Too many crimes and nobody
Jailed. It starts
Where the baby starts.
Hand of the hoodlum
Delivers the child.

All night I look
Into the cold sky
To see fires.
There's no father of water.
Not in the deepest dark.

REJECTION SLIP #14 FROM THE NEW YORKER

The dog plays at wildness as I strew halfmoons,
old craters of grapefruit on the garden
(inches below a turkey neck rots carefully)
and imagine glory until the red flag drops.

The mail today, my selfaddressedstampedenvelope,
returns to me prodigal with nothing
that is news from desks shimmering like lakes
in imagined elegant offices where secretaries

read Ulysses and eat olives: I dream
of exotic positions on indoor putting greens,
bent over chrome glass tables, among the olive eaters
for whom this is old stuff yet oblige.

The sun is pale as milk here
between the gangs of pines,
but I plow in coffee grounds and moldy salad
with rare hope.

THE WIND TUNNEL

The director holds one ear away from the buffeting.
With his hand he describes an airfoil
in the empty space his sandwich left;
he knows he's lost his final chance of flight.

Mechanism has taken over his dreams,
releasing a milky rush of statistics into the sheets.
And though he understands the concept of limits
in terms of lift and drag, he doesn't believe

blood and sinew and bone, the teguments
of waking shredding away at dawn,
can lift his feet from the bottom of his day
to a hollow place, where the wind booms.

Yet he has that itch at the neck's base
and moves his shoulder blades together in his coat,
half-hoping, even though he knows
that the wax melts as the sea waits.
**STILL LIFE WITH LUMBOSACRAL SUPPORT**

My monkeybar and traction geared me for this stretch.
If I could write *Corsage with Corset* in a hand
that didn't shake, raise the body in these words
and, growing wild, unearth a shock of fireweed, I could take
the simple cure prescribed, endure the nervous system.
This wide-mouthed tumbler from a better year spills thistles
on my black decor. I know that proud spine.
Pain moves it. Extends the possible, slow exercise
that brings me to my knees. I believe the things I drop
will be picked up on time. Hairpin turns, knitting needles,
the lumbar strain receding. Between steel tracks, a complex
cord articulates dependence. I come to terms. Sisters
of Charity welcome me home. Their bills have backbone.
I call my friendly witchdoctor to counteract the breakdown.
Trussed for the difficult routine, I limp to bed,
a laggard disc of moon, abject sensations, high
on codeine and coffee. Night contracts its thin reflexive
arc. The switchboard signals every shade of risk.
I step out, cautious, into total dark.

**DINING OUT**

across the street the lake begins to boil.
everyone suspects the chef,
recently arrived in the neighborhood,
who has received international acclaim
for his new entree: *l'homme flambé*.

while the lake simmers,
backyard gardens are raided at night.

rabbıts no longer sit in the grass at dawn.
many things stir in the hissing waters.

after dinner we settle down,
in striped lawn chairs, before our houses,
in the bug-free evenings of October,

powerless and hungrier than before,
in the dense aroma the children rattle coins,
each one stamped with a hat and a rabbit.
"o we know where to spend them," they say.

when it is dark we go to bed,
fully clothed, napkins tucked in our collars,
ready at every moment for the bell
that calls us to this desperate cuisine.

**DIRECTIONS**

like a game-losing error, the magician
continues to haunt us. we find his key
in our mailbox, notched with promises.
we return at night to find messages
that he has phoned. should we be disturbed
that no one was home to take his calls?

we are disturbed. in the classified section
under "personal" is a notice advising us
to contact him at once. at the intersection
is a sign reading "Magician: 5 Km."

the arrow points straight ahead. the light
changes. the ears behind us are honking.
PLEDGE

Dark trees along the river lowlands wait;
every catch-water or run from gully to sea they own.
They hold the high desert mountains and ridges.
Up to their knuckles in flat winter sky,
their black nervous systems click like quick
knitting needles—counting their numbers.
Like peasants they wait, bannerless now,
but like armies on orders they gather battalions:
many are old and remember how it was
before the dark age of the bright ax-bite.

Deep in their waiting they listen to waters
explain that water can’t do it alone anymore.
Conspiring like peasants, they talk of the spring—
out of the earshot of huddles in houses.
Tribes of white pine and north spruce,
box-elder and oak hand down to the cypress
their troubles and plans; the redwoods concur:
it will start in the south by the mesquite and olive,
first with their banners, soon to be followed by all
spreading out of their hollows and off their ridges.

All is in mortgage, double . . . come due.
First to the water, and then to the trees.

THE FIST, THE SUN, THE PALM

day lily, back, forth, back
forth, back, breathing, breathing, rocking
rocking throat, the throat, opening
opening, the fresh opening dragon
lily, banana speckled stomach, peeling
peeling, standing, the light striking
sweet, sweet sun
the unwrapping of the purple tissue Iris
jack-in-the-box, shutting, leaping, shutting
leaping, the sour night fleeing, the sun
swinging, swinging, back, forth, the lily
opening, to a raw sun, throat crisp bursting
stemming, stemming of the celery in
the central valley, jutting, pushing, the night
plow, seven mushrooms punch and fruit, fruit,
spilling, spilled. the spore soaring, again
the fist, again the fist, the sun, the palm,
the fist the sun the palm, clenched in the storm,
the sun striking the fingered valleys,
the slivered ear lobe, the lily, the lily
unravel, unraveling, cold, and wind, the fist,
fist, fist, palm, palm, and sun
rain, sun, rain, sun, rain and calm, stems
springing, the white root is falling down
the leaf is crisp, it breathes, back, forth,
back the wind, it sheds, the wrist shoots out
the wrist shoots out of the sleeve, again
the fist, the fist swollen in the storm, yellow
in the sun, the outlet, the damp throat, the damp
fingers running in my arm
the lily pistil standing in the water, the wind
rocking, throat open, fresh
ON MY OWN TWO FEET

This trick, new, would amaze!
I lift on my toes, sway back on my heels,
pivot, bend, stretch, jump
for no more reason than feeling
a phrase dance along muscles,
each act speaking memories.

From a knuckling shuffle, heavy-skulled,
a furred man rises. Such heights!
Sky's vacuum draws out a thought, a bird-god
striding the air. Earth beneath him
barely holds him at his feet: Stumbling,
he will grab it, but differently.

A pelvic basin gives me a precarious balance
(he will learn to think this act and call it grace).
A neck keeps my head high (he will call this pride).
Mud plastered on a bone frame, a clever doll
—look at it, rattling and shuffling, loose,
grinning, dance (he will call this joy) upright!

WHITMAN'S SONG

When they tried to catch (to identify and tag) it in clever pens
it rattled and banged, escaped as you on your bed, cagey,
misered one last secret (Traubel scribbling and scribbling), launched
diversionary south and west a troop of wild imaginary bastards.

You and your Self, bodied airs, hugged fiercely together, frightened
boys lost on a raft. When the storm broke, lungs, song-bubbles, collapsed.

Your singing had no more meaning than wind in off the ocean—
less for the curious (the Professor of Gross Morbid Anatomy dissecting)
tracking you down to your last known address.

BURGLARS AT NOON

They are sleeping now, lying in the grass, turning green and forgetting.
Beneath stone they are quiet, tangled in the roots of trees,
Growing dark and rotting like bones, broken and forgotten, buried
Long ago with wood that crumbled and words that fell to the ground
and were lost.

But I have seen them, staring from rock, rising in water, moving up
Out of the sun, turning with faces in ruins, scratching at windows,
They were howling at doors in broad daylight, covering the land, thickly
as dying leaves.

The grave, the size of the cathedral, a single bell, echoes
Falling like rocks. In the garden, light falls, waking the weeds,
Snails sliding through the wet air, frogs digging in for winter,
The spiders walking through the grass, preparing for change,
getting ready.

NIGHTSONG

Above them now the day is silent. The air has stopped and far away
The moon splashes on the sound of a voice of someone I don't know.
The earth slides across an empty window, and the lengthening night
Is heavy and black as soot. The halls are thick with lies and guards
Walking through walls whispering to themselves.

I said the light
Is breaking down like sleep and warmth goes out of the vacant rooms,
Out of the perfectly smooth white cells that have become home. From The corner sink song rises one more time, from the men who have fallen
In love with their pillows, where all blood becomes itself. They try
To rise from themselves, try to walk away from the blank face on the Wall, from the lives they cannot find. They turn once on the hard
Cots, adjust the gray blankets, close their eyes and live.
ON THE ROAD

It is November and you are still here, walking the wet streets,
Past the market in old town, past the wrinkled fruit and the workers
Standing on sawdust floors, sorting cabbage and dead fish.
The late afternoon throws shadows over the waterfront.
Leaves circle the roofs of the tin sheds and a newspaper vendor
Sits silently behind a wooden counter.

There is so little left to do. You turn down the winding hill.
You are reeling between locked walls and the moon's old confusions.
Even the wind can be seen, a dirty hand over the dying
Buildings. The clouds falling in the harbor, the rain dissolving in air.

You stagger, like a man in a strange country
Who has come to land's end and has no where to go.
You hide beneath the pier, in the dark, with now
And the end of your life. You wade in the mud and green water,
Smiling, a child who knows he will never die.

MOONRISE

Love, if we had this place and time, I would tell you
All that ever happened. The way the moon
Like a rotting stone moves across the mind's eye,
The way a stranger walks
The back roads at night, where the eye cannot see,
Where all that's worth knowing
Is just beyond reach, where feeling
Is touch and go.

In that dead silence the moon goes out
Over darkness, over water where its light
Gathers in pockets as soft as skin. The trees
Lost in fog, birds floating through night, animals
Standing, quiet, their breath scattering the still air,
And the sky a mouth, drifting toward day.

THE ABSENCE FLAG

In memory of James Hall
Professor of English
University of Washington
1949–1971

Now you are away. The absence
Flag is flown over your yacht.
The owner? He's unknown. Under
The ground his whereabouts. So
Now grass is sparse above the
Too-late-shelter of your casket
("we are proud you chose it,"
Our letter from the coffin's
Maker said.) This flag (of
Blue) this rectangle above

The main yardarm of your old
Yacht, shall stay. Not that
you went A.W.O.L. from life,
But just the same, did life
Give you the will to stay?

The flag is flown over your
Yacht to state: the owner
Who has been, who was loved,
Who taught us much, is called
Suddenly (finally?) by earth.
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