

Elevator Shoes

Words build bridges that can never be crossed.

Poems by Tom Portegys
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Angels sometimes got big tits

Hey Dad they let the 60's loose and you didn't wake me up!
Never mind
we're on another mad camping fugue
across the country
my mother's ghost
stowed neatly in the trailer
and I've been sleeping up against the road.

And so it was that somewhere
in the soft languid summer hills
of Tennessee or Kentucky or Okinawa
a concrete pond had been prepared for my undoing.

In those days if you broke your neck
you didn't have to wait around for pneumonia -
it was served to you with cookies and milk
so no one really minded as much.

The cool green water beckoned and I dove
the eager rough bottom surged
but only stunned and raked
my forehead, nose, and chest.

Suspended in the algae-choked gloom
two hands find me
pulling up
coughing and goggling
into the vast safe harbor
of gingham breasts.

Back off Mother Teresa

Creaky car beneath me.
A survival fugue
in search of a place
that's all corners
where you can't get a clear shot off.

Flipping the radio dial
a crease in the static
muted horns reaching out
big band quickening luminescent silhouettes
in geriatric limbs.

I'm in there with John Wayne
bad teeth and unexamined life
sitting in the Iron Lung dining room
at the Holiday Inn
amputated just above the buttocks
by a seed casing
that once held love
then rage
then nothing.

Can't go there again.
Crawling back into this creaky pod
hunkering down with mustard seeds.

Barnacle en brochette

The fisher lady
in a fur-lined boat
mordant eye and skewering tongue
lodged in her throat
locks her gaze
behind the counter
across the parquet floor.

There two capering fish
gills flush with crimson folly
leaping and gasping
through the daunting air
rapture in the exotic depths
behind other eyes.

Lithe and gentle liars
splashing in the tippling churn
teasing new air
into a stagnant afternoon.

He comes out from the back
with whipped cream on his name tag
to find her caught midair
salt-rime forming beneath transfixing stare
as bidden she breaks the menu down
into atoms digestible by morons.

She feels the dull edges
the barnacle urn
calcifying around her.

He sighs into the back
as the musky light
that surely was God's promise
of cool flannel thighs
begins to fade.

Blind spot

Kept awake by raucous succubi
rising from the pall
from the depths leaking
sweat down the backbone
bleached crows
help him get downstairs
and sit
Buddha-like on a full bladder.

Portents everywhere
on the far side of the kitchen
on toast
on the receding edge of carnal energy.

Atop the refrigerator
a cat makes slitted-eye contact
and looks away.

The wind-tossed rain
shuffles outside
a nice feeling in a way
a nice tea-sipping feeling.

Then meaning gathers:

*A thing remembered
a thing foretold
a thing at hand
meet now as lips
pressed onto skin
ready for ritual.*

Too much of this
this is too far
and lurching up
he begins to spin
generating power
the TV flickers on
the news arrives
eyes ignite and burn away
the grotesque afterbirth.

Tonight he sleeps
far from the sweat lodge
of his bed
tuning into sports and civil wars
boiling his socks
with grand eloquence
and deep meaning.

Filling a bucket

I filled bucket
not long ago.
In a rush
I needed that bucket fast.
It was a single letter
in a novel I had planned.
It was a draft of air
in a windstorm I was stirring.
It had no right to take so long to fill.

Half-way full I knew it would never finish.
A fiendish illusion had grow real -
water flowed up into the faucet to confound me.
It splashed and roiled merrily on
but got no fuller.

It was playing a game -
it would be no one's thoughtless pawn
no one's fool.
Deep down in that well
those laughing liquid curtains fell
so I propped me up on my elbows
and watched it fill.

Do it yourself Buddhism

What is on top of the mountain?
What is up there where no one can go?
Perhaps a man encumbered with earwax misunderstood;
or a woman's brain tumor spoke;
and that is how the Turtle god got on the mountaintop.
Don't bite your brother's leg!
Why?
Because it angers and grieves the Turtle.

Some time later the Jehovah's Witnesses are on the porch
while the dog bounds in the fresh cement
that I mixed with blood from a crushed finger.
The Turtle god
beckons in their eyes.
Don't bite your brother's leg!
They are right I know
entirely outside of being true.

The extinct American Chinaman

The Chinaman came out of the sea here
leaving it full of tears, not dreams.

He is a loser, but a gentle one
his country's bones carefully encased
within the vault of his body.

Upon the shore before him
great and grinning and guileless to greet him
strides forward the specter of Mickey Mouse
gloriously arrayed in pressed fiberglass.

The Chinaman would go but the sea will not have him.

And that is why you cannot see the Chinaman anymore
he has fallen back and broken into a million children.

A game of forsaken croquet

A storm of afflictions
dispersed the croquet game this year
and left abandoned my brother's chicory clotted yard
dangling upon a strand of road
that runs through country
where once the Tully monster lived.

A tradition spurned for any reason
must be appeased
it cannot pass unnoticed
a whisper, a thought, a trace of memory
is enough to trip the web
and compound our adversities.

Deep in October
when the heart calls out
and answering shapes
press through veils of falling leaves
we lay out the stakes and wickets
retire early and await
the vivid sleep
that draws down the milkspore moon
eager for the specter of sport.

Digestible monuments

Often looking dumfounded and stunned
like a sheep in a treetop
reveals a commendable lack of rote
a prudent measure of shunned rehearsal.

Cultivate hesitation
stall for time
approach your quarry enticingly
skirt it winsomely
and let it come to you.

Raise the golem up
from coalescing clay
embracing gestalt
to do your bidding.

But only for a time.

Then return to dissolution
in the hot gravy churning
in the gut of consciousness
sprites and enzymes there at play
leaving only footprints
to fill another way.

Imagination is remembering
things that have never been.

What each does best

Little lightning bolt
with feathered tread
blinkless eyes astride your head
move out of my way
I am steel
and a mountain of slow-witted garbage.

This is my gift to you - a thrill.
Your craft is a quivering heart and blinding speed.
Mine is to sweat and fall down trying to avoid you.
Your joy is to reach the branch, the hold, the bramble
in one piece.
Mine is to sleep under a layer of fat
and go blind watching my neighbor's wife
from the window.

Upon shooting a dove

Trodding the gray slag piles
the green hills
along the sluggish stream.

With pumping wings
the dove flew in
barely distinguishable in the haze.
Place and custom seized me
I rent the air with burning powder -
the dove plummeted.

Tangled slope
startled water
there in a bowl of grass
wings outstretched
shaken from life
a bead of brilliant blood
upon its head.

False predator
risking nothing
taking all.

This was sacrilege.

Each day like the last

Almost, almost
like the last.

She fashions little paper boats
frets over them
just so.

With glittering eye
he sets them adrift upon the placid water
closes the lid and starts the machine.

First day of school
they toddle into traffic
acquire a taste for coffee
and show up for family congregations
in the third person.

I must hurt you a little to let you be free
knows the love that holds us thrall.

Fingers work the granite face of time
searching for a forgotten fold
leading to the core
of dearest treasure.

Echoes

Genghis Khan has chroniclers to soothe him.
If it can be imagined,
place him next to a peasant with a swollen throat;
a peasant he has smeared,
like glacial granite chips,
they find his wooden teeth in France.
The pill wedged in his gullet
is leaking iron tears,
which stain and darken and grow old,
pitiless.

What the eyes read, the heart must write

The words are plain and spare
and endearingly raw
spun with sweet sincerity
high violin heart string sensations
caught in a sod cabin
on the Oklahoma expanse
witnessed by indolent lizards
and wandering grasshoppers.

Days and years shutter by
the words sit on their page
once taking a mistaken voyage
in a garage-sale stack
of paper back books.

Lines that chime
against breaking adhesions of time
and clouds of being
gathered from afar.

February flowers

Not long after rising
the air begins to fracture
rendering unto Caesar
best taken
through a splintered throat.

Following late winter spoor
not to seek the flame
but to take comfort near the burned
which longing eyes cannot fully see
like flowers standing in a field of snow
emptiness where both seem to be.

Coming to a place that's all trails
of breath vapor in animal shapes
school buses hurtle by
neurons gaping out the windows
faster than ever they could aspire
in former incarnations
they flip over and fly apart
cascading fresh mats of yellow fiber.

The design is apparent from higher up
say the Muses taking leave
of the clouds parting
over fields of flowers
straight as keyboards.

The insufficiency of flesh

My sister's hands
enfold her kindness and decency
anchored by hooks
furling her body.

Be kind to yourself sister.
I grieve to feel your dear presence
etched cruelly by time.
Wisdom applies not only outside:
a foolish potter
tends not the broken pot
within her house.

Someday soon I will come upon you levitating
a stigmata of liquid arrows
male and female
knitting up your limbs
exhaling fond recipes
of our mother's mother
your days heaping upon themselves
like thistledown.

A flight of stairs

The Confederate Army is encamped on the stairs
bivouacked among family photos
soldiers press to the sides
as I pass with a bucket of wash water.
I don't see them
hiding in a passage that's fallen out of place.

I leave a faint trail
smoke-like filaments sloughing off
clinging to steps and walls
weaving a gossamer funnel of awareness
regressing to the top.

A thread becomes dislodged
an eye peeks out
and catches me perching there
tying a shoe.
I gaze around at this little glade
in starless twilight
beneath a canopy of familiarity.

Could it be that places like these
are where Tolkien's Elves have gotten away to?
Places gone to passages
Middle Earth hidden in plain view.

The fossil monster

I can see Francis Tully
the fossil hunter
come south from Joliet
in 1955
a quiet man
in a shallow pool of time.

It is hot and muggy
as only Illinois can be
and absolutely still
so still that sweat chills
glaze across his back
from time to time.

He kneels in a hollow
of gray alkaline clay
delved and abandoned
by the Peabody Coal Company
inhabited by scrub cottonwoods
and deerflies.

Monsters were waiting
just below the bruised earth
in 1955.

They were having trouble
keeping their long held place
beneath the riven land.

The frustrations of angels

You are young
and then you are old
just like that.

In between
birds pick at your bones
and sometimes other winged beings
regard you
shaking their heads
and sucking their feathers.

You feel that
"finger food of the gods" feeling
as they hover over your tiny boat
bobbing below
far far out to sea.

They know how long you have to go.

What are we going to do with this one?
Nearly all the stars
gone from its head
(fell out its eyes it said).

We can't pair-bond a thing like that!
Can't make it squirm on a spit of passion!

So they fill up your head with gravel
and stop your eyes with bottle-corks
and no one will know
if they don't get too close.

After seeing the gravestone of a young girl

If I ever had
to mark a stone
'My Darling Girl'
it would be
one stone
grinding on another.

Hard edges

In the cool hollow behind the house
where the ruddy brick lies etched with moss
the cicada has filled this space with sound
and nothing has gone wrong
in years
here
the creaking of an aluminum chair
the mended bone within a column of muscle
the owner full of dry rot
tears ended
looks around and hears
an infinity of little songs
coming from the bricks
garage, and garden plot
and knows the edge is coming
has come
to cleave this all away
in a single stroke
just like the one she made
upon a keyboard
only one
and a teller's job
in a tight economy
went off without her.

The middle harmony

Metamorphic walking
each footprint in the din
an open mouth
that cannot swallow
armor falling off
in brittle sunset snow
arriving naked.

Children achingly kiss you goodbye
as they part
their eyes search yours for guidance -
you see only ahead
hear only behind
throat in striction
as the mind-womb empties.

Are we meant to fly?
Each leap a tearing away
each alighting a nest?
There are still fine places in the world
islands of pink salt-water life
gashes of beauty left
in the wake of talons.

Inchworm

Having ideas about changing
I set out to do it.
I've watched TV and read expansively
and have the cut somewhat in mind
or at least I'll know when I get there.

I can only hope
after painful and long work
sculpting strata of diamond and jelly
that the thing I will be
will want to be itself.

The inland sea

The Ojibwe have put away secrets
cached them on the islands of this sea.

Once they were sharp flakes
on the killing crescent of life
caught in the void between dissolution and silence
between water and ice.

Tonight, when the languid eye of the sun
slips indolently beneath the sea
I and others will be drawn, trancelike
each toward a star-flecked path
each an island
each a cache of secrets.

Innermost outermost

The senses chime
in natural rhythms
that catch it all -
the friction at the knees
the belly-thrust
the warm salt sea
beneath the breast.

Romantics would drape you
in linen and cloud-stuff
and make you more?

A turn of the jewel
to catch another glimpse
of illusion at your core.

Love madness

Philos stand aside
Eros take me.
Let me be consumed
by the Black Widow of passion.
Let not the disordered pockets of the day
distract me.

Love will unmask all
behind its veil
there is no substitute -
feasting on chaff will fill
but slowly erode spirit and body.
Do you want to become
a hunched hoarder of meager trinkets?

The spirit must burn itself clean
must break the bonds of self
leaving wires and tangled cords
snapping in the unseen chasm below.

Now -
speak to me softly with spiced breath
and let it begin.

Love me, love me not

Over decades
men learn the lessons of the hearth
and become the fiercest of women
even the young rogues
cannot meet their gaze.

Having been told not to have those thoughts
warned about it
under the covers
they crave, fantasize and faun.
In public
they gaze with wistful eyes
and pursed mouths.

Inside is the bad dog
dangerous and deadly
notions in his head
guarding the house
but not allowed near.

Down in the well
nothing to eat but liver and gall
he wags his tail
yearns for a kind word
and sees light at the end
of his gun-barrel world.

Sealed meals

Sergeant Pepper, we called him
a man whose options had closed and opened
like the elusive blinking lights
in a mid-summer field of fireflies
and reeling after glimmer
after glimmer
left him here with pepper can in hand.

No more pepper!
we said in a line.
All he saw was a line
of straight white beautiful teeth
still awash in milk.

We watched for signs that he could hear -
a change in peppering was just one.
But none came:
he peppered the same
limped the same
sought out prostitutes the same.

And we still washed his burning offerings down
with gallons of milk
and wished as least for his vengeance.

Little metamorphoses

Bedraggled river nymphs
born to paddle the earth
through the vapours of heaven.
Holy beings in a dry fluid
abstaining from cheesecake
and improper forms of sexual congress
laying on toward paradise.

The hazards of wine cannot be refuted
by those benefiting
from the pleasant unknotting effects
of slipping away in the body of a marsh fox
and never to return.

Through tiny fissures
created by the strain of laughter
the snide carny-man
grows nocturnally from her hip
as she walks in the certainty of error.

Flying with moths

It helps to welcome doom.
To know that a dream is beautiful
for no more than itself.
To write poems on grains of rice
and eat them
with a mouthful of strangers.

I met a man who stepped aside,
whose tales seem whimsical
and sometimes a little mad
as they passed across the narrow isthmus
that divides us.
He left behind a card marked "duty"
on one side
and "cowardice" on the other.

Two decades ago
a singer was born already
saying goodbye with her eyes.
I fly smiling into the night.

In the tracks of Nokomis

March is the yester-eve of the year
when trees sing
and clocks strain forward inexplicably...

The near-wolf lopes ahead along a muddy track
water-sky ladling her prints.
A stammering rabbit flushes
into pounding flight
dodging across the sodden turf.

I consult fables that my people have about hers:
watch
strike quickly
eat fast
and don't look back.

Beneath my mud-clad feet are trestles of old wood
quavering under summoned weight
gelling thunderously into a force of nature
and the purity of blind action.

Later...

In a yellow globe dripping
dangling over a coruscating river
youths caper, faun-like
on the edge of the world -
sanguine tribes of my people.

Two guys are re-calculating pi
according to the original Greek method.
Doubt feeds and grows fat.
Tomorrow then.
Maybe
when March is over.

To Oreo and Ruby, the Elder Cats

If I could send my senses
out past the tumbling crowded maze of symbols,
and see what once I saw but cannot remember,
I think I would know the starry twilight,
the dazzling shadows,
and iridescent gloom -
the vast outside
that is the inside
of a cat.

Ossification

Children have smooth surfaces but tough.
Among the young
disputes boil forth
bumping matches
with little damage done.
Might is right
and the vanquished glad of it -
fatigue is the final victor.

How arise from this
these porcelain beings
bristling with law suits
nuclear missiles
and flaying sardonic wit?

No more to touch
lest spikes be broken off
alarms triggered.

Eye cannot meet eye
without the mouth spewing forth
a mollifying stream of words.

Paydirt

Poetry is a gauze of words
gently hefting aside the jealous lobes of self
which sit astride the soul.

While distracted by soothing abstraction -
quickly
stab/clean/curse/cauterize/chastise/tease/titillate
the delighted captive there.

Like enchanted coins we have rolled in here
with tales flecked off the mother lode
of human experience
melted and running down the fault lines of time
that carry us so far apart
distilled now into the black blood of language.

Be still and let the words find you.

The perils of self-medication

He's gone to New Mexico
wearing crystal baubles on his hat
a stammering hobgoblin
with UFO shit on his shoes.

Four children reared
almost unnoticed
while doing crossword puzzles
and selling cars.

He must have a brain tumor
but won't get it checked
down there in the desert
poking holes in the ground
talking to dead Indians.

When we get him back here
he'll have a lot to answer for...

That's what we're afraid of.

Get out there and be perky

A bag of genes
some say we are
never meant to hold
a burden of six billion
strangers everywhere
my cat more dear to me
than you
(as is your pig to you).

Feral edifices are awakening on the planet
mosaics made of fragments of frightened people
tribes once profiting by mimicking machines
now caught inside.

Tenderness used as tender grows debased
a currency deeply disconcerting
yet necessary
for the living
to animate these cyclops:
strip naked
jostle aboard
take up levers
and slip into handpuppets.

Market whims
and corporate forecasts
assail and beguile the psyche.
A poet once said
good fences make good neighbors.
Now must inner walls be erected
treaties drawn
and self divided
between what one does
and what one is.

The junkyard man
sure to outlive the cockroach
past the Apocalypse
wears an honest mask of Caliban
upon his face.
He only takes cash
and won't help you carry
unless he knows you well.

A pilgrim without a guide

Marvels there are off the path
among the rocks in the Bright Land.

Trailing long unhesitating strides
the long tether hisses through the forest
like a snake.

The awakened people yearn to find the way home
to be among the trees where their sleeping kindred lie
deep in animal dreams.

Where do we keep the potters?

There is a pot perched on my TV.

I had just gotten a shipment of poets' bones
and was tying words to them
(careful work that was),
when in southern France,
five feet below the loam,
a cave dweller's pot was found.
Had they dug to six I wondered?

Tended by soft murmurs of adoration,
the spade-like fingers of the diggers
put gently down the lumpish thing beneath my pot.
I could see them in ascendance of creation.

The cave potter has gone to clay,
but I'll wager that potter #47 is still among us.

Prospero's secretary

My hands are bloody with paper cuts
but my face is free from any damage
and I have made piles out of the papers
and am watching them for suspicious movements
so talk softly.

And yes, I have seen the gargoyles
in the clouds tonight.

In fact, I have had a hand in the matter.

Rags and wishes

It's happening again - the voicelessness
the return to the place of slanting light
and long shadows.

Water purls over stony beds
trickles -
then dry.

I've never written anything
that hasn't written me
cowardly skirting the white-hot center
outside the horizon within which words go not.

Gentle shock waves
buckle your being
shake you apart
into rags and wishes
orbiting tossed salad
face, feet, and temperament intact
yet disconnected.

Within the stream of bric-a-brac
the nearly invisible god-being
wafts along like smoke.

The restoration

The herald comes
fasting
heightened
aware
the taut acetic soul
vibrating at an insensate pitch
Winnie the Pooh comes.

What else could be expected
if not a baggy awkward creature
an avatar maligned
irked and hampered?

The world must have its cloisters
for the restoration of equilibrium
willing or no:
fallow lives apart.

Beauty and sadness
are the essence of existence.
Someday it will be my turn
to pay for callousness
and grieve for a millennium
that I did not see it then.

Reverence

On a branch in a green afternoon the Serpent coils up and up
closer and closer to the Children.

First Words still hang in the air.
That is how young the world is.
But now there is nothing more to say.

There is a river outside of the garden.
The river is Time.
Let us go there and set forth.

Pushing off into the current,
no hope of return.
We will forget
but our blood will remember forever.

Each day awakens
looking up at Father Sky,
looking down at Mother Earth
embracing her children.

Weirdlings stand among the crowds,
hands lifted to the vault of heaven,
feet rooted in the earth,
uttering shadows of true Words.

Words that comfort and beguile,
myths binding tight the past,
billowing net-like into the future.

The Abyss that is timelessness beckons.
Treading to the edge either to drift away
or fearfully withdraw into soothing numbness.

The road takes those who do not take it

You go to put yourself on paper
and you're dry -

a bad sign.

Hello, anyone home?

There should be more
than duty and dreams.

Far between the shores of life,
your choices crowding close,
you stand the long watch.

Rounding the horn

I'm at the office
cleaning fish and answering the phone
when my niece makes an appearance.
Her unabashed clothes and numerous earrings
shame my antiquated pirate shirt.

She's brought a map of South America
to help visualize our journey.
We lay it on the floor among ocean-shaped puddles
and admire the effect
praying for abstraction.

Darwin's vessel was never this well equipped
for harvesting mutants.

Cold cold ham sandwich

The man in the coffin lay molded to its door
a thin and nervous corpse
victim of a bone disease
they said in cheery whispers
how he had my likeness
except he was a ladies man.

And so seeing I could not make it to the funeral
I went home and lay against the mirror
with the door shut
and saw my neck within a paint-smeared shirt
and thought for a moment it was my father's
brown and sweating neck I saw
I was so tired.

I love well these tunneled eyes
and gentle hands of mine.
Saddest of all would be the laying down
of this faithful mute beast
into a box of burnished steel.

Upon arriving at work without a shirt

It is healthy to watch oneself
as if acting in a soap advertisement
bending over a sudsy tub
mouth-breathing like a carp
blowing bubbles
antechambers outside the skin
appointed with stuffy secretaries
worn carpets
and icons of ancestors
so visitors carrying knives
and ill memories who come calling
must be announced and properly signed in...
time enough to run ahead and enfold
the playing children
and get them out of danger.

Snow angels on the interstate

This guy with a congenital condition
spends a lot of time sleeping
shoots out into the night
we collide fragmentarily
at 4:00 a.m.

He's dreaming of giving
an inaugural address:
"We as a nation
beset by so many problems
must face the future..."

I was creeping down the architecture
of Notre Dame
now he is
the sway-back gargoyle
seeking renewal
short of oblivion.

Two mice far below
bidden by dark music
tempted by the braziered fumes
stand hip to hip
toes to the threshold
past which no one returns.

He sidles up behind them
and works the mossy tongue
over which innumerable bright plumes
have fallen on the faltering -
warm baths for all.

Meanwhile at the podium
I can't work the presidential tongue.
Luckily it begins to snow.
I find myself swaying toward the interstate
to finish the ceremony.

Sodom and Gomorrah: the aftermath

There's a lot of furious hunkering
and very little central planning
as the stampede goes past -
the fairy folk leave nothing alive above ground.

A peddler comes by
selling sex organs he's found.
He's got special glasses that let him see
which kind of customer
is inside of me.
I haven't taken inventory
but I don't need any more trouble.
I buy him off with jokes
and send him on his way.

An awkward visitation impends
a fresh carpet of ashes must be spread on clothes
aura-sending must be practiced
despite that it makes speaking difficult.
I toil to give birth to someone better
a person I will hollow out and climb inside of.

Renewal begins.
The planet catches up to where it should be
pulls up to the curb
people get on
people get off.
Some sort of dead-end culture will eventually set in
and we'll do it all over again.

The Sphinx and the Sprite

Grandpa's elder days
were days of presiding
with papal waves over waves of children
silver coins for each
rough experiment needing pity
mother's glowing bruises
carbuncles inside her belly
regularly erupting babies.

Slowly and ponderously
the great gray sphinx
gets up from his chair
cold drafts from little eyes
following
playing with cooties on the carpet
the furnace shudders on
and cracks open the air
he vanishes into.

Grandma departed a merry sprite
eating odd things
sneaking sweet wine
to the kindergarten
she joined them in the ground one day
being near to it
fists clotted with dirt
a nimbus of fine Dutch hair
sifting about her cold brain.

Stinger

From time to time
after a serious fall
the voodoo people come
and ask for advice.
I know that after I recover
they'll turn out to be
black guys, metal animals,
and lesbians with binoculars
but for now its nice
to remove my gadgets from the windows
slip outside
and hold forth:

*I cannot change
only pretend to change
and hope to dupe others
into changing.*

My father once scooped up wasps
in his baseball cap
and set it on his head.
Extreme behavior to be sure
but their venomous little daggers
have been known to fix the moment
and tack down scraps of memory.

Dream straddling

She's sleeping
when I come to get the cat.
She's lying like a cat
faint gauze of sweat
measured breath
past parted lips -
she sleeps
she speaks
eyes flutter
and I am a sea-mammal
on a drive through a canyon
never delved.
I turn to her
she's troubled by my trespass
straddling the gap.
I stroke her hair - go back now
there's no one here at all.
I leave the cat and go.

Suburban sewer pipes hidden away

Every house should have
a pit of bones beneath the floor,
a frame of cobwebs around a door,
a time of haunting
in faded lore.

Every person should have
a shameful memory to keep within,
a crooked leg, with mottled shin,
a secret waiting
in alley dim.

Why?...

To lend a sound humility,
to spark artistic empathy,
to give lawful due to entropy,
to keep it all above the board.

But most of all,
because perfection
is an open sore.

Tea bag toe tag

On a summer day
on a powder dry pillow,
on an easy concubine of an afternoon,
might be the weather,
might be the fine golden gauze of hair
on the arm of the green enamel chair
(please refrain from thinking there).

The soggy grocer's underwear dawn has stayed away.
All the sinews and entrails of the world
are in concordance,
and not a strident basement drill press note
can pierce it.

It's too nice for abstraction
too sweet for graveyard berries
too kind for napping
not a varicose vein in the sky!

A lop-sided grin in lieu of wit
today will do.

Theater of the mind

Be wary of the painted strangers
not seen for 10,000 years
but still lurking everywhere.

I'm where I don't belong
and stiff as hell
pass the popcorn
this could be interesting.

Sweating?
Too many teeth?
Then all is as it should be
life is unfolding
behind the scenes
take a seat in the back
rare company there.

Clever lads and ladies
watching the show
coaching the players
they've left in the front
just enough brainstem
to breathe the fickle air.

Scuttling home
credits rolling
curbstone critics
moonlight reviews.

Some ways of time passing

For some it is a hot comet
in the sky of night
one great bronze bell
in the tower.

Some live in burrows
filled with teacups hung on strings
chiming in the winds of chance.

Some recline in the belly of grace
suckling buttermilk thoughts
too languid to change the channel.

Some rail against
the little death of sleep.

Some hate falling anew into a day
of abrasive and clinging edges.

Some gaze at insects
as if to be among them.
The insects do not gaze back.

Some are free to pledge forever
some are bound to live it.

The unbirthing

(epilogue to "The Second Coming" by W.B. Yeats)

The beast is born.
It has eaten nearly all the guideless
and now withered falcons in a day.
The stunted chicks
plump with sweet green bile
ignore their obsolescent kin.

The universal dream is rocked to sleep
as the unsated monster
coils and devours itself yet again:
the outside becomes another inside.

Tiny shamblers,
tender little nightmares,
vexed to waking by two hundred years
of punching clocks,
march toward the monster's womb
to be unborn.

The vegetation that never sleeps

I'm thinking of the day
when we are visited
and I go to get the others
but everyone is gone.
There's nothing but streets
lined with judges.

So it's just the dandelions
up for citizenship in the great beyond.

Wind tunnels

The Valkyrie is pregnant
and turning into sweet mama-pie
juices flowing through passages
that do not mix with mine.

That's OK.
I have too many dull funky days
to be good company.
Happiness blows around these tunnels
in no reliable fashion.

To remember in winter

The chickory is out
the clover
and Queen Anne's lace.

Cracks in the cakey earth
are filled with spiders
aphids twist their beaks deep
gorging.

Rifts of warring ants
licked up by the wind
legs and gripping heads
blown into a mass grave
in a sidewalk crack.

As soon as things calm down
I'll excuse myself
and get out of this stuffy suit.

The worm in winter

The worm has been around
for a long time.
A cloistered tube
harboring a personal menagerie
it knows about rebirth
and the secrets of natural harmony.

Some wrap themselves
in slimy sacks
to prevent drying
or grow bony vaults
to guard against the blows
of bad fortune.

Twitching pylons protrude
on some species
for moving out of harm's way.
In rare cases
a throbbing bulb of electricity
serves to orchestrate the twitches.

In winter this ensemble is observed
squirming into fibrous casings
and ravenously burrowing
through vats of lasagna
and chocolate.