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THE FRIEND WALKING TOWARD YOU

By

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A.B., San Diego State University, 1975

Presented in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Master of Fine Arts

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1979

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THE FRIEND WALKING TOWARD YOU

Some of these poems have appeared, or are scheduled to appear, in the following periodicals:

Borrowed Times: Resume; Photograph with the Fish: 1958; Whatever You Say, Wherever You Are

CutBank: Whatever You Say, Wherever You Are

Graham House Review: Photograph with the Fish, 1958

Intro 10: Silhouettes

The Nation: The Gift; Crossover

The North American Review: Coming Home

Pacific Poetry and Fiction Review: Leaflet Tour of Avalanche Lake

Poetry Northwest: The Patron of the Garden; The Well

Portland Review: Chronicle of Redemption at Lolo Pass; Crane in the Shade

Quarterly West: Report to a Friend North

Yakima: The Windmill

Uzzano: Toward New Weather

Several of these poems also appeared in Toward New Weather, a chapbook published by the Frontier Award Committee, and a selection was included in Where We Are: The Montana Poets Anthology.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1 Toward New Weather

Resume.....	1
Photograph with the Fish: 1958.....	2
Silhouettes.....	3
At Hoover Dam.....	5
Whatever You Say, Wherever You Are.....	7
The Windmill.....	8
Report to a Friend North.....	9
Self-Guided Tour of Moiese Bison Range.....	10
Leaflet Tour to Avalanche Lake.....	11
Elegy for a Stranger.....	12
Emory at the Curtain.....	13
On His Birthday.....	14
Christmas Eve.....	15
Toward New Weather.....	16

2 The Patron of the Garden

Museums.....	18
Topographical.....	19
What Should Not Matter.....	20
Bottom Sheet and Comforter.....	21
Four Times Round the Lake.....	22
Skin Diving.....	23
From a Far Balcony in Autumn.....	24
Beholding, The Trapper.....	25
A Horizon Between Them.....	26
For My Grandfather.....	29
Marriage in Winter.....	30
The Patron of the Garden.....	31
Leaping the Chasm at Stand Rock, Wisconsin Dells, 1887.....	32
Soda Lake, Carson Desert, Nevada.....	33
Sunlight in Winter.....	34
Coming Home.....	35
The Gift.....	36

3 Crossover

The Friend Walking Toward You.....	38
Chronicle of Redemption at Lolo Pass.....	39
Morning in Newfoundland: The Pastor Writes a Letter.....	40
The Well.....	41
Li.....	42
Reports to the Plateau.....	43
Sunday Mass at Mission Saint Ignatius.....	45
Holy Saturday.....	46
Crane in the Shade.....	47
African Proverb at the Crossing.....	48
Crossover.....	49

1 Toward New Weather

Resume

Born before sunrise, the moon still west
and waxing. Someone said Los Angeles
knew wind, the first light registered
in gray. I can't remember goals: that brown
house shrank nightly. A dead uncle,
his broken leg, these are in pictures
I recall, while the snows of hydrangea
remain.

My dog was a dog and school
meant nuns and Communion. A turtle dried out
in my window. I buried it
near the walk, in a box where I'd kept
my cuff links. This was my education:
books and the Chinese elm. Later I learned
that these two were cousins, that talk
was not king but you could listen for it.
Ambition then: to hear a snail sing,
the great hurrah in willows. Now, I wonder
at my ears. I would like to make
shells of them, lay the fluid curves down
and let them fill.

Activities: a sometimes
runner, photographer of black
and white. Honors: my trouble breathing,
where the air becomes more precious
to resist. Someday I would like to work in Spain,
and in that citrus-colored light
watch how the sun bulges and flattens. Call this
an aim. My ambition now: totemic.
Style: indirect. You may employ me
for any reasonable purpose. I will give you
the best of a life, its education.
You may phone. I am always home,
piecing my summary together.

Photograph with the Fish: 1958

There you are at five, all ribs
and crewcut, a Rainbow kicking one last time
for the shot. No shoes, and you remember
ground there: soft slide of trail
along the creek, the snakes
you dream in bush,
chalk head of a boulder
where you sit, turning brown, as you fish.

Grandpa spits on the egg
and baits your first hook. After this,
he teaches you the best way to knot, leaves
for his own special hole. Favorite smells now
are sage, creel.

 Promise now is everything--
And when your first catch swings to shore,
bread itself in the dried silt
and fragrance of weed, you take this odd
new thing in hand, and run to show him.

Eye level with the darkest
undersides in brush, you run faster.
Long grass sways and carries words
no farther than an arm. At last
you find him, cutting line
with his teeth...far down an even slimmer
creek, some gorge you never knew of.

It was your age that mattered,
the out-of-earshot fishing, and the long grass
waving you apart. This explains the crooked
smile, young teeth ready to go
so soon. Your first fish
could not have kicked then; this trout was one
that followed. Somewhere in the high reeds
another gill may have quivered, scales parted ground.

Silhouettes

Eddie Henning drew me in the first grade,
my ear pressed flat to black and one eye
straining to watch sideways out the window
where a robin flew. Eddie was never
good at outline. His hand shook. If he were
center during recess, he'd blow
our last ditch Statue of Liberty. He'd hike
into the shrub--they'd call a safety.
Here, his pencil tickled my ear, snagged
at hair on the long circuit of my head.
I didn't hate him. I hated explaining
my crooked shadow, glued over pink
and restless for the edge of a white
cardboard frame.

Grandma hung it in my room above the dresser.
Sometimes I surprised myself, another
me in the dusk of that room, looking
left and jittery toward a window
on a day when there were breezes and a bird
flew sideways and it was hot.
Sometime around then I felt the first
angel tap my shoulder as I fell asleep.
I told Sister, and the next week Jeannie
swore her family went to every Mass.
I hated her. She was a liar,
and she was rich. She was a Busy Bee
in reading, but with God's help Jeannie
flunked religion.

The Baldwin Dam cracked in spring. Frank Salazar,
house drowned in the basin, moved
away. We watched families on the news that night
crowd around their chimneys, the flare
a helicopter made on water
rushing over lawns. I noticed Eddie's house, his
Chinese elm slumped toward the driveway.
A dog whined in the leaves. It jumped
toward its shadow. I imagined Eddie then
on the second story, gathering in his arms
a jumpy ukulele, his rocking frog.
If he stuffed the silhouette I drew him
in his pocket, then I was there when he showed
at last at the window, flew calm as a wren

toward the fireman's raft, toward second grade,

what twins always know about themselves for good
past baptism. Shock of the ghost in each hand.

At Hoover Dam

A boy is as young as ten feathers
that wouldn't burn,
as the chopping of wood
spring mornings, the gaze five miles
out of Boulder City falling
long and down. Over drowned sage,
over hill cuts tracking
the dream of hands--the secret den
already filled--water there
backed up far to the north,
and in the scream of gorge, in desert blue
lifting, a river went on
changed though still the motion
of a century's snow,
what the mountain chose to lay down.

Though he died there, though that storm
on another lake turned owls
loose at noon, the heart draws in
its flurry of doves, its black fire.
Draws, though a hill sags
at the marriage of waters in all places
raining, though a woman closes
on her garden of flint,
though earth, fern, the split rock
of green lines, though the boy
saw stars with his name,
wakes to find the city gone.

You do not dream the passion of trout,
short breaths of cedar.
The woman who loves counts lines in the eyes
of another, and you are
the one familiar to a sunken road,
to bad light honest for its fault.
If trees blow away,
folded ground. If elk vanish, whistles
gone the way of song
and those who brought you here. Nothing
matters like a road. No one cares
the sky died overnight
responsible for sin. Here,
a blast of magpies. Grin of concrete
four wars out of tune. Out that spillway

the tumble rush a boy
heard faintly, the wailing now, a praise
of things about to disappear.

Whatever You Say, Wherever You Are
for Rick Heilman

Birch and maple bow, giving themselves back
to the ground this autumn, and every walk
through leaves begins the clatter of all
that lies detached. Something from a river
in that noise: the voice calls, coming at you
in water bending speech around the rock.

I hear you tonight in the scuff of heels.
Whatever you say, I risk believing:
the room you sit in now, the gold decor
and light, children, a young wife, anything.
Whatever you say follows like a bell
ringing itself. Bell of autumn walking,

bell of incense and our First Communion,
bells of longing--the bell these fourteen years.
I sit down at the bank and your words
catch current in the stream. My feet stalled,
I wonder at my trust of shoes,
their ever-walking toward, a dream of meeting you

some Sunday at the store. You'd buy your smokes,
turn, walk out, and there we would be, agape:
longest gone of friends. But all the leaves
are fire now, candles burning low and rising
as our voices rise. The prayer of priests here
drowns out whispers in the fresco, breath

of saints. This Mass they celebrate for children
lost at night, carried with the fish to sea.

The Windmill
for John Bangeman, M.D.

Forty winters on its side
in North Dakota, fish tail crimped and gears
locked into rust-- Now we hoist
the windmill to its legs, bolt it
to a slab. Blades tick in the long arm
of new wind that can't, at last, blow it down.

Your health keeps long enough
for this, and gardens maintain you
while the spring blooms open
on your wait. The lake
freezes and thaws. Your child grows up.
And always that space
left bare at the pier's weathered end, your heart
always worse than before.

Lisa tells me years
you dreamed the customs-house, Alaska,
the Stikine River draining
toward the strait, and you alone for seasons
with that wind. You'd set up practice there,
guide your flatboat to the upstream
villages. And there were always gales
to your return,
standing straight, balance sure.

You bury dahlia bulbs in pots
around each leg. Dream yourself young enough
to sail. Pine are tuning up for one more
gust before the lake turns gray
and pulls the moon above the hill. You recall
your age in her rising, the slowing
down wheel of blades.
A fish jumps up for the last wafted fly.

Report to a Friend North

In Ocotillo Wells, wind
comes down the slope
with trains. Mail is all
we get here, the uncoupling
of a car. You ask if we
grow tired of the orange groves
far as our horizon. Friend,
we die for their
blossoming. We shiver nights
to keep the smudge
pots lit, curse the devil
frost that burns
this valley scent away.

A spiny shrub, tangle of
wooden bone, names
this town. Pheasant
brood there, far from
dogs or the stone of a boy.
The day I came back, Emory
died before my eyes. Fog
burned off near
dawn, heat went over
ninety while Mother cried
there are no children
who return only for a death.

I am staying here, her last
son, until the fruit
rots or she comes away
of her own. These
clouds make no promise
for rain. Coyotes range
our grove at the edge of hills.
And you, friend-- From you
I need more news
than I could send. Stars
here trail smoke
this cooling night between
the ridges. They decide
with me an hour, then go.

Self-Guided Tour of Moiese Bison Range
for Allan Anderson

It's hazy here, nothing in sight
but the bluebunch wheat: our state grass,
the pamphlet tells us. Where
are the buffalo? Where are the horns
stampeding a failing sun? They've all been
rounded up, we read. Shot with vaccine,
culled.

A slim cloud bends like an arrow
and halves October sky. Larkspur droop,
Elk Creek is drying. I "watch carefully
for antelope"--and deer crop up on the ridge
like homes, straight out of a fog.

So this is a Saturday, day of metal
and the smiling lake. Grouse and dove
call from somewhere in the fir. I keep
driving. Slow.

There's a marsh hawk circling
in air glaring with lint. Memory turns south,
recalling stories of the wide wing. The man there
blinded us with knowing, talk of fish
that rise into the wind like birds. Clues
in a caterpillar moving toward cocoon.
Where? he asked us once. Where have we hidden
our eyes? And he left it at that.

Now we drive alone. I drive alone. Out even
of the comfort of film, the caught ray
in a curve of pinions. Two of them falling
into the palms of the gorge, the horns and tuft
of my first bison, spotted--survivors--at last.

Leaflet Tour to Avalanche Lake

The first hard frost, varied thrush song, ground
cracking in the green light of noon
and cedar bowing. Goatsbeard sways from a limb,
a face in that jagged face where a trunk
broke--stump of its body, crown far back

of its brain. There are no eyes here but yours.
The trail you walk on leads to bird call, trees
you've never heard of. The tips of hemlock
praising east, dwarf yew and the mild clutch
of roots halving a stone. Swirling of rock

grinds out potholes in the creek bed
falling down a gorge. The bridge you watch from
trembles. Water ouzel dip for insects
in the spray. And this is where the leaflet ends,
where name-stakes end, and wood that rises

to your right begins an unmarked climb.
At first, you know your way by the furrowed
bark of cottonwood. A snowshoe rabbit track
points up. But then the five-pointed bract,
nine-note humming from a branch. And now

this darker walking, through the brittle white
on each leaf and chip. The trees thinning,
the air thinner and cold up there
where wild goats graze, you come at last upon
the lake, the high curved wall of glaciers

sliding down. The shallow water here
froze weeks ago. Logs from unknown trees
glow gray under the ice, leaves held up
in their sinking. You choose a rock,
skip it across the freeze. The sound now

of a bow let loose, quiver of air going out
in a strain for name that comes back on itself.

Elegy for a Stranger
Cynthia Herbig, d. 1979

It's twenty miles to that scare of mountain,
the trail you walked the only June
I knew you. It's white now, snowed-in for the third
month of winters like here. I remember
the heat wave and Hubbard, long evening
near the second story rail. We talked about jazz
and trees, about the East you knew--
how the sun, after hours of dust, finally set,
letting the breeze come in.

That breeze comes now, and snow
trails off the peak into thin air, marking
a way to nothing. Is that what the hills mean?
Did the bitterroot you find mean a trap
of loveliness, their pushing up surrender
to blue and only blue, to a high road
dead-ending in sky? I think you'd say no.
The little I knew you, I think you'd say the air
is another sort of home, ground floor
to stars and what hides the dream of larch,
what we're always growing into.
Forgive me if I'm wrong. Forgive me
presuming. Stranger, Sister, I haven't bled
in the rear of a cheap flat, miles from family
and the land I left to come home to.

Me, I read of you dead and I remember
others, absence I didn't feel for uncles
older and closer than you, others
I never knew. Here, two stories above the snow,
that mountain, that sun rise more glaring
than this dark--and what we said,
what we are always saying, is the grave
I look into, the song I barely recall.
Friend, you let me trust jazz and now it's jazz
that stabs you, your walk
down streets where a dime rattles hard and someone's
dead inside to rob you. Stranger,
we shared this house. We shared a same July,
same August. Let me speak to you
as to the casualty I might have been,
the dead I am. The stranger in me
climbs on for us both, never looks back, but climbs.

Emory at the Curtain

A daily jogger passes into blue
while bare trees bow in zero-nearing air.
The home maintains its own shade, fire, and you

may not forget. Cold's a lack, memory a new
room waiting for a desk, that leather chair
to watch the daily joggers pass in blue.

Days into fall, your knee gone wrong last June,
you cross the slow river drifting green. And where
the home shores up a lame shade, fire, it's you

who always walks now. Gray light, ice, that hue
of berries on her skin: your runner there,
a daily jogger passing into blue.

Helen is dead. Your breath's mainly out. Soon,
maps of burning leaves may fall beyond the chair.
The home puts on its fall shade, fire, and you

give in to waving. If those hands were new
you might raise them high, like a gift, to air.
A daily jogger passes into blue.
The home creates its own shade, fire, and you.

On His Birthday

Had a belly eyes, he'd stop consulting
elms as to their dying, town as to the roads
that led him here. It's hope

against hope, that's for sure: skin moves out
along the body and his old friends
keep a belly in their eyes. Comfort

means little. Vineyards at dusk are enough.
In leaf light settled near the ground, a dark
hope blazes, disappears, and what was there

can never be remembered, nor could death
in smaller moments--when the mind is turned,
distracted by a sound--give the belly eyes.

He wishes himself well. He can't do more
without the graves he carries in him
vanishing. If it's hope the day requires

something's lost. If it simply means
the rain's come, a trout strikes hard and sirens
always pass, then eyes anywhere open
lavish gifts of hopelessness he'll trust.

Christmas Eve

Began blue over the near hill, cold
from the clear night storms had left them.
They brought mums to Holy Cross, and in their steam
they knelt at the Mullica graves, last
leaves of poplar rusted beside them.
It was clouding. Began to snow on the way
back to fasting and the midnight Mass.
Grandma rubbed and rubbed her bad hands.

South always came blue, even in rain.
Even if the ocean turned winter
for a morning, south came always blue, better
late than never. We were a family
by then. Los Angeles our dead uncles, a green home
left behind. That new house on the hill
kept quiet about the history of grass--
the field we filled--and some of us

could hear it, rolled on without knowing
toward the wave-sliced cliff where the story
told itself. Christmas Eve we spent alone
without cousins. It darkened early.
When I was young I looked for the comet,
but I only saw stars, and each one
was brighter, each one red and blue
if you stared. I never knew to ask

about Pocatello. They might not have talked.
After all, it was the future coming: my loud
cousins, the immortal ham,
what was left of us for beginning again.

Toward New Weather

Bad times: drought, Egil's dog had mange, the white
lilies fell like hair around our house. Crows
gave us up, let the corn dwarfs holler
on their own for hail, dull wind. It's the kitchen,
midnight, Father says Leave it all and feels
the last scotch burn. Lost calves low far away.
The mountain cries for snow, drawing sheets

of lightning to its back. Father dreams the green
of moss on northern shingles, coiling dust
between his fingers. The rest of us
wonder from our corners of the evening, this
table. The next thing he says will be Move,
and it will be Pocatello then, bench land
and always rain, alfalfa that swallows the cows.

This is our second pestilence.
When Mother died the dying lilac bloomed
for days before a hot wind browned
the flowers, spread them over the field.
Everything goes wrong then. For some reason
Kansas burns, a well bottoms out. Father
laughs, leaves the sky to itself. We drive west,

and now he is singing. Now he is singing
If a person don't have but two teeth
they look better if they're close together.

2 The Patron of the Garden

...as of a single world
In which he is and as and is are one.

Wallace Stevens

When the time comes to you at which you will be forced at last to utter the speech which has lain at the center of your soul for years, which you have, all that time, idiot-like, been saying over and over, you'll not talk about joy of words. I saw well why the gods do not speak to us openly, nor let us answer. Till that word can be dug out of us, why should they hear the babble that we think we mean? How can they meet us face to face till we have faces?

C.S. Lewis

Museums

After jade the color of my eyes, stone
elephants and medieval prayer
in wood and oil, we step outside,
hunch our backs through the Japanese garden
blooming something all the time, rest
on an arched bridge above
lily and carp, the faces we own today
giving themselves back to water.
On the way to Natural History
you stop. Down a lane the chalk
body of a man on pavement, the crime
we don't reconstruct. We walk on instead.
The ocean's not far, and its wind
comes with us, through eucalyptus, over lawn
the color of someone else's
envy. Everyone's guilty but the orchestra.
They haven't played since June.

It's a scene from our past: the wattled
hut and clay jug, fire handed down
since you or I was born. In the tanks
our same dream under glass. The lantern fish,
blinded from its own light,
moves green, dark, moves green and away.
Five miles down, we'd leave too,
swim to be always leaving, pass what we found
out our gills.
It's dark after the blue whale.
We drive south toward where those lights
thin. Down the coast without
moon or star, down a line
of breath between what rises,
what falls down into sea. Sculpture
hasn't failed us. This night,
endlessly autumn, opens up.
That voice we hear is water. Your heart
is what came this far.

Topographical
for Kathy Roch

Not tricks of flesh, nor blue-bellied
laughter in the sky. Prairie rather, ten
below and all of us move crossways
over ice. If the creeks jam, say they die.
Say a hill could always melt--but this is
winter and that won't do. When the landscape's
violent, we won't do: the worst memories
become our life.

Rest, though. How little we've
earned it. An all-week fast, the sweats
at dawn, maybe men walk sideways to be sure
of air. Maybe it's the stiff spine, lodgepole
straight, that scares us. While a hawk hunts,
mediate and high above the land turned
toward itself for warmth, we see only
snow. Something might die in the white. Something
grows strong as that bull.

You said it: Long for
what you never had. You were right. Fishing
marries evening and the day. On a line
dropped down to fluid wind, among peoples
of the reed-sway, we keep sending
the bodies home. With fish, a return.
And with returning, a sky we might go home
to walk through.

Forgive my details. You see,
I'm crazy enough to want what is
nothing here. I'd offer fields of corn
if they were mine to give, fields of pure
sashay and green going on, going yellow
on and on. To you, to anyone,
the silk-dusk, safe harbor. If I could give
anything, it is this. Let a ship bulge
and glide across the swells. Let a prairie
schooner straighten its ragged course, drive west
beyond all coulees, always west.

What Should Not Matter

The bee at impact
on your windshield, its stinger
left a good three inches
behind it, and the bee's
flying, held back by ligaments
of gut that trail the bee
in its plunge to leave the glass.
Somewhere near the wiper blade
it dies, wings in a windy
hallelujah. It finds
a lean-to there. Emptied
of itself, an ugly road
behind it, the whole life's exposed
at fifty-five.

It shouldn't matter either
that you killed two pheasant,
November, 1965. Or that a cow
sings, homes break down, or that you lose
your voice one Sunday
when your head is wrong, and a
mirror you look in
gives away the world. What matters
is your mattering,
the state of the state of
this heart. You let a cat come in,
let it live until it
leaves you, name it with a word
that still means gone.

When you die, let there be
questions: Did the wood speak. Did
a cottonwood bow down
in the deepest dream and walk.
Was an owl there. Would a river trust you.
Driving, you let
the world come clean. What should
not matter: that it dies. In the best
of times you can remember
this, follow
your own deaths back
along the road you've dragged them.
Your voice
will have not been lost.

Bottom Sheet and Comforter

When you dream you dream the jungle floor
you lie on, the tiptoeing flamingo
and giraffes paired up to make the long
browse across a torrid Serengeti.
Sometimes you hear tigers and the one
lion, whispering. It's not you they want.
They plan the kingdom for a night, jackal
cries and orchids breaking open,
while spiders (spiders being the worst
gossips in the jungle) carry their rulings
abroad.

It's home here.
But sometimes, if the beasts aren't talking
or the weather's bad, your dream goes airborne.
You fly like these quilt-birds, exotically
and fast. Green as a parrot, tropical,
the sun never bothers you, and all you breathe in
is air and the speed of air
and the vertical sweep of diving, climbing,
toward what is always next, always
never sure.

In the dream, you could
be Adam: you name what you do not own, own it,
and give it back again. You are of
the jungle, and, flying, you are
of the sky. In the morning, you lie between
these worlds, blurred into their wrinkles.
If the snow's gone, you dream yourself on that
hill's ridge out of town,
looking across fields of ruined
grass, looking up, walking, looking out
like any hiker once the home ground's
turned foreign and a footprint says, I'm here,
I am not here. I have left myself behind.

Four Times Round the Lake

There are goldfish, yes. And the edible trout
loud children catch, jerking a life, one
by writhing one, to shore. We walk
around the lake, that's all. Four times--
I won't forget the number--pass the pintail duck
snatching weed, geese in their slow curve
toward a middle calm.

It's a children's park, Las Chollas.
Even the name says summer, and my first year
of necessary drought. I am leaving,
we are talking my leaving over. Eucalyptus
shave away their bark, drop the aromatic
seed as a boy casts out the best worm,
searching his limit.

Maybe trout don't fight as hard for the young.
Maybe there's surrender to the gray voyage
into sunlight, air, the sure winding of what goes on
above them. Ten fish lay in a row,
slough off their oil to new heat, the mud
they'll soon leave for the odd vocation
in a meal.

We are like them, you say.
I am like the ten, a creel full of old selves
I'll be dying to, there in that place
toward where I'm moving. The geese
fly north: there's no autumn turning here. I leave
for north tomorrow. Let's walk more. The child,
that child is bearing me home.

Skin Diving

Fingerling sturgeon in the cove around
Angel Point, all day swimming naked, friends
and you, the listening near dark
for those propellers out of tune inside three miles
of the water's ear. You know about thunder
then, its lake-rest scaring the trout
shallow. The moon, if there comes a moon,

rises yellow from the Swan Range
that never flies away. At dusk, a swallow
and its thousand flies. Your back the island
rising bare of shrub or goose nest, diving
at a glint, the skin all yours
and flooded. If air were the only rescue, promise
of breath, you would stay among snagged

lures and die without that savior. Your chest
swelling, the heart-quiet of the ear
goes out to water. Gravel darkens
under insects wandering home. Inside
this dim room, bauble fish and light always
failing, another man swims. A fogged mask,
a black suit coming closer, the air since

left you for a cloud. His hair waves upward
into black. The two of you surface
as one skin, breaking that interior
to sky. Rain then. Thunder comes from everywhere,
above and below. A part of you
breathes. In the darkness between friends,
you hear a swimming, a diving away.

From a Far Balcony in Autumn

I ask about the sky, but the answer
is about a rope.

Proverb

First the yellow, then the white house
breaking into open spaces once
the leaves go. There they are again, old friends
from another winter, mapped with the dark
limbs of a yard. Two hearths in fog. At home
with themselves, as always--maple leaves bare

flat as a hand at their doors. A man chops
kindling near the far shed. Nearby, it's Susan
in the berry shrub, filling a blue-stained
bowl. These might be anyone. Tomorrow,
when the courthouse clock strikes nine,
they may have traded jobs. For now, though,

there are the two of them, private
as fall could allow, the breaths
of a task escaping into small fogs,
rising in pair to the sky. From a far balcony
much is kept from you. Hear the wood split,
the shrub snapped back from a hand. But talking,

talking comes no clearer than a crow,
talking to itself in birch. I lean my ear
to the voices, my cold blurred eye
to their eyes meeting. We are neighbors only
under this dull sun, finally burning through.
Any day now, snow will break the patterns

on those far lawns, the grain of this birchen
porch my feet scuff. On borderless ground,
all of us walk one as winter-poor,
hedges dying back, the whole town our white
road leading everywhere but home, smoke
from the hundred flues joining in a cord.

Beholding, The Trapper

As from a wide window, looking out on spines
returned to elms by snow. As snow, filling
the shoe-print, striking the ground blind. Once,
a sky fell. The air in dapper white,
you were five months digging the animals
out. Your face changed. One bird wouldn't
leave you or that window ledge, where the last thatch
shaped its circle out of wind.

An elegy is a sort of welcome
to the absence, addressed to the man always
putting on his coat, closing the door
behind him. That winter, it was wood that sang,
a brick hearth humming the space between
fire and cold. If you died, it was every morning
as you left to check your traps. Coming home,
the cabin rose before you from a drift
some wind dreamed, then had forgotten.

Now these elms. Now your face in this window,
beholding you, spreading itself out
across the snow. You could live between these
worlds. Turned on yourself, the snow falls
upon another: a face is never buried.

Once before, you were this immortal. Trappers found you
blind, eyelids frozen shut. You said
the trees were old men, resurrected,
hung your trap their for the bird, cold, that song
your welcome to a forest of stiffening coats.

A Horizon Between Them

1 The Contrary

Among many of the Plains tribes, if a person dreamed of thunder or lightning, he was obligated to live out the rest of his life in an antinatural manner.

William K. Powers

Not my mother, but I will hate you, friend,
because you knew me when I was dead
and older, and that was tomorrow, before
the dream. Black snow blazes from my heart to sky:
I look for vision larger than this earth
never answering back. When I run
naked to river ice, I ask the magpie
for its bonnet. This sun, why won't it dance
with me, or fit in my pocket like a dog?
I settle for hellos. Leave me, friend,
and as you walk away I'll finally greet
your face. Hello, eyes. Hello, Great Owl, climbing
that branch of light. Take care the thunder-wild
mice don't snatch you from their cloud.

2 Day of Silence in Bali

Once a year again, no temple dance or market,
no cockfight raising the dust of town.
If I sit quietly enough, a spur
passes, the rooster wind--dead voice snarled
in thatch--will pass and hell fill up again.
I was five on this day when we found
the old priest who dared chant his morning
prayers. He wore palm wings, soared naked
from a ledge into the river. He bribed me for
directions: I still wear this bell he had hoped,
in his madness, to trade for the knowledge of north.

3 Waiting for the Forester

Meadow-rue: stems slender, leaves 3 times compound, fruit an achene turning backward at maturity. Thickets, woods, meadows.

Wildlife of the Northern Rocky Mountains

I could begin now without him. A yellow dawn, meadow-rue sways fog away: deer might be feeding for the hunt. I wait, and the gun barrel beads with dew. A spruce is telling stories of how it dressed the sky. The last fog lifts. I am waiting, but I hear beyond a thicket first browse letting the ground go. For all my knowledge, my trust in this compass and the smell deer leave, I can't begin. Breeze through a stand of fir showers snow on the darkness beneath them. The forester knows his way there. On his own day, he guides.

4 Advent, Wind Storm in Bakersfield

Every tree will memorize its fall. In the sky, last blue leaving us this driven dust, a desert at our throats. Sirens, that candle behind curtains, fading. When were we young once, when the arm of Grandma gave the wind away? When did a cloud lack locusts of grit, and those four palms draw an ocean to its rest? This much is clear: the dust will survive us, valley fever visit in our blood come spring. Where birds went, we too would go, given half a chance. God, somewhere God composes questions for the poor and newly injured: if I answer, wind claps through that motel sign, flapping at its wrist.

5 At 10,000 Feet

You can't fly here, unless eagle.
You can't walk, unless the camas clears
a path, snow leaves, and air allows a space
to your walking. You probably won't breathe
easily, homeless for nearly a week.
From the circular rock you'll hear voices
that lack direction, the closed meadow opening
only up. You can eat here, sleep. Don't
be sad: dying is always like this. Thunder
in a high field silence. Larkspur
pushing upward at the stall in wind. Name this
"earth", and that, "heaven"--or simply sky.
You walk, a horizon, between them.

6 Spirit Meeting

Friend, say this and fill the pipe
Say, "I want to live with all my relatives"
If you do, it will be so
Siouan song

Willow stick and cloth, the black scrap stands
for west, where our ancestors live. Outside
is a darkness; in here, light blows out.
Under a quilt, in his own third night, the old
man sits: tied at the neck, hands, and feet.
Sage sprigs quiver in our ears. The drums
pound, women sing, and no one rattles gourds
but a black hand sparking blue through ceiling
and wall. Nothing then. Old Fox's voice,
asking each a question. We tell him
our sicknesses, all of them, and he delivers
our answer to the dead. He walks that ice, each
river crossed, the rope balled near him now in light.

For My Grandfather

Autumn light, light of afternoon, the crows
you blessed last winter cross the yellow
corn rows homes have made of air. Inside,
a wall, here and there your furniture
in company with leaves. You'd expect your rug
to turn, domestic lawn, to red and gold
October. The trout you're cooking, kitchen
yellow as the flame, gives off all memory
of weed, the lake in summer, a hard green
light down thirty feet where fish swim and swim.

Coming into the world, fraternal, your twin
left all his air to you. Paired up
for those months, you swam the first dark waters
mindful of another heart, the way of touching
men are born with. You never found him
again. Stars turned over
over London, Pocatello. Now, when you fish
you troll for green light left behind you, gone
down lines the sun gives water in supreme
control of itself. It's the light where autumn comes from,
filling up your home, where the twin still
turns your colors, year after yellow year.

Marriage in Winter

This is not sadness, it is a lake.
Holes in the ice are not
crying but the fish's eye on weather, an early
death. Sparrows love you
when you dump your trash. A cougar
seen three years before returns:
it doesn't love you, but loud summer's
gone and you're the only one
who draws the animals out. This is not friendship,
it is blood. Murder won't belong
while the tenth-year freeze
goes on and no one can drown until April.

Set-lines hedge against not sleeping. Snow blind
at a Z of shuffled boots, a path
leading north beyond the islands, you Our Father
the cutthroat, pray the whitefish smoked
before the animals know. Later,
come to table, this evening lifts from the same range
where winter rose, sent out
talk and breeze over the waves. You'll auger
new holes soon. You'll sadden other lives
for hunger and still remain
blameless as weed, a blameless fox,
crosser of the ice.

You will not be less alone. You won't be
lonely, because sadness
is not this lake, even if you are widowed,
even if you are matched. When your wife arrives
she finds you groom to more
than your simple wedding. You point out to her
the tracks of morning drinkers at the holes,
low-slung clouds on that irrelevant
peninsula. You tell her you could love each other.
By dinner, she believes. Both of you believe in
snapped air, the largest raven
of the season. Winter does not part,

it is a marriage.
This lake is not land, it is a going on and on.

The Patron of the Garden

what became of the sea's dream...
and the onion that died like a saint
from the head down

Philip Levine

There seemed always the fleas, Mister Dog's
maybe, come to lay eggs in his shirt.
He remembers pumping water, the chick chick
of a small bird, gliding to nest
in his pocket. Where this all started, he can't
be sure: the air steps aside when he walks now,
earth goes thanks-please-thanks which each new squeak
of a heel. Their green tips creased,
his onions salute him. Mushrooms bow down.
When neighbors call, they find him kneeling
in tomato vines, two worms inching up his arm.

Years ago, he thought he died. He woke to find
his wife gone, her half of sheet smoothed
down and pillow fluffed. In that purple light
he could not feel his thinking,
could only rise, forgetting everything
as it came: floor, light on wood, teeth along
his coated tongue. He ran through alders in the fog
toward where he thought
he left something. At the creek, a trout
still kicked. Leaves sang hallelujahs to its gutting,
fell and snagged their edges in his hair.

He can hear his thinking now. He can
recall. He can weed his rows of carrots
and feed the village children when they come.
One day, a prelate's carriage draws up, dusty
cassocks grow into their shadows. When they bless him
in a rain of holy water, make him saint,
he bows, turns back upon his onions, and spits
into a furrow. Until his death, he never tires
of the leaching salt, modesty of tubers,
or the three-sided wondering of crows.

Leaping the Chasm at Stand Rock,
Wisconsin Dells, 1887

No one dared you but the breeze said
century's-end, said what-the-hell, and you leaped
in your best clothes toward the sandstone
mushroom, giant rock. Midair, your new wife screamed,
an oriole ducked away. Somewhere in the brush
Bennet got the perfect shot, froze you
at that same apex where your mind blanked, stalled
between gone and future, everything but yourself
taking account of you--foolish hawk.

Only your arms blurred. Bennet joked about that
later, called it fisticuffs with sky,
with the jack pine you might have landed in.
You remembered different. Having jumped,
you split in two and saw your first half overshoot,
smash face-down in shale. The arms
remaining reached for this as much as for
the rock-pie target, the perfect lark.

Bennet got rich, we'll presume. And let's say
you got rich by 1900, not from royalties
nor leaping hoodoos, but from the mercantile
in Portage, from three kids who helped and that wife
who never screamed again. She never stopped
loving you. Even that Sunday when you told your oldest
to jump. He didn't, and she didn't
understand. It wasn't murder or the fun

you had in mind. It wasn't flying. You knew
your boy needed sky under him, push-
turned-to-pull in midair, that empty moment,
the grab of a moment for the man.

Soda Lake, Carson Desert, Nevada

Jacaranda, our favorite tree, means nowhere
to the ghosts with only one
desert tongue. They cracked a joke
at Sand Springs, and the Dutch came west
without laughing, saw the wild, immoral horses
stamp a ring of dust near Lovelock.
Sure, there were mountains. A railroad
ran dead-straight-without-looking from Ely
to Reno, from Searchlight to the black
rock Paradise became. What no one
expected were these borax plains,
a whole team lost. The Toquemas bore up
like an excuse for watershed, for not
becoming sink like the rest.

What sort of pair lived here, where pots
go white after a day, where helping
meant useless or dead
before your time? A day owl carved the lake
in half. The land agent kept them still
for his company photo. They stayed
that way, two lives in debt
to the fresh-killed rabbit that wasn't grain,
to water, still as themselves
and flowing up invisibly, up because
this was desert, this was the way the ghosts
should have it. Someone
never heard from them again.

Jacaranda never grew here. Never
our favorite bird, the nutcracker, nor
trout which also means nowhere
to the embassies of sage. If we hear words now
they're the same one. If talk, it's the view
refusing signatures. Let's
go walking. We've been alone for at least a century.
It doesn't matter nothing here
has anything to do with us. Boron means
coyote, love. The Kawich pile cinders into sky
of their own. Lost for a while,
we find why dead means always, our passing
just a way we sign our name.

Sunlight in Winter

It's Paradise, December, where four hours means all the day you're getting. Prairie grass ruins at a tilt. The trains have stopped. Hills, the hills proceed above you, steep as polestars pointing you toward ice.

This time of year, Dixon's fair. Light falls sideways through a valley running east to west. Where the Flathead bends water yields up its dark to all-day sun, as in Lonepine, as in Ronan, Niarada.

Driving, you are always blinded. What wheat there is throws off a glare, and last night's snow goes on. Come February, March, the heat returns: grouse molt back to tan and Paradise can wake. But even now

you see the shivered rising. Trees you thought exploded inside from the cold are swaying, swaying back. It's you they do not hail, here in the winter's weakest sun. It's you on this thin

forest road, driving through the struggle.

Coming Home

Something of a morning turns you pilgrim,
light rises from the gloss
off your desk. Out there, dawn is never
slow in coming: saws begin their see-saw whine
lifted to the ocean of the air.
A song you've never heard before, these limbs
scrubbing themselves in breeze,
hammering oil drums, that finch just back
from its nomad winter. Something comes with you
out of sleep, the weak hours--light
slants hard across your desk.

And the window opens when it warms.
And next door, the porch lamp goes out before
a woman parts her drapes. Even with the first
passing siren, those near or finally dead,
you are drawn out to the conference
of it all: a shadow on the lawn, high blue
washed across with clouds.

Your home becomes the house
of a day's first steps. When you walk out, take on
the cold--still in the air--like a jacket
you might buy, you make this pilgrimage
to whatever comes next. Your saint
lies at the far end of shrubbery, a shrine
in the web. At its edge spins the patron
of your morning, preparing
the death of a fly.

Walking away, something is left
behind you, wind through the lines of that home.
In the long weave toward evening
you have made a thousand journeys, and at the inn
where you are lodged, a waiting room
to once more make your own. Wind
through an opening in glass, shuffled
papers on the desk where light fails--
letters bearing home like ships
that script you're never sure belongs to you.

The Gift

Praise the snail, sailing across the walk
on her own sea, bobbing. The tenth part
of a blossom in her jaw, she fans
her head, sweeping in this rain
while the shell deflects like a prow.
Genuflecting before cracks, she then moves
on: to the new stalk of begonia, smooth
enough to climb, to the kinked neck
of her mate, to their sea-fight consuming them
both in foam, to the slowest navy setting forth...

The moon sets early with its tide, and I have
no place here. The leaves rattle like gulls
preening at once. My walk becomes wind-swept:
I am the giant here, reeling among those
slower than me, surer than the march
of my locked knees in the lines they draw
and leave. Stooping, I offer a finger
to the snail. When it hesitates, I lay
a leaf-carpet down for it to mount,
a wax ocean to sail. I raise her then,
high into first light, buoyed on her rainbow,
the green host. Later, the blood shakes with its gift.

3 Crossover

He brought hem thurgh a quyke sand
and so in to an Ile.

Caxton's Chronicles of England

And there was no one watching,
Neither did Aminadab appear,
The siege was being raised,
And the horsemen,
At the sight of the waters, were
riding down.

Juan de la Cruz

The Friend Walking Toward You

There is a friend that sticketh
closer than a brother.

Proverbs

In the first spring heat, birch limbs flare
behind their sash of old deaths. Even the fattening
raven, roost nearer to sky, takes on
the white of sun in new, unwinding bark.
Like a root spray around the corner
of the house, the friend comes at you
from afar. The click of heels bends
over homes, closer now than chattering jays.

A young moth pads tracks along your window:
dust comes back to cross itself
with the wings' unsure returns. The friend,
you know, has always lived here, closer
than a brother, walked with you your half
billion steps toward this tree, sashes
waving. In the second breeze of April
wooden arms claim green and sweep the air.

And you walk with your friend, even as
you await your friend's return. A field
flattens between you--see your old friend
come to meet himself. Someday, you'll be
arm in arm. Word for word you'll talk
of the fellowship in blood, the family
of bones in each body walking. The root spray
tells you of this same tree, doubled,

sprouting its kingdom of leaves underground.

Chronicle of Redemption at Lolo Pass

...the principal spring is about the temperature of the Warmest baths used at the Hot Springs in Virginia. two other...are much warmer, their heat being so great as to make the hand of a person Smart extreemly when immerced.

The Journals of Lewis and Clark

There are histories of snow here, a lake inside the mountain, scalding hands from Clark's to mine upon its rise in scalding mineral baths. The Indians trained jays to trace this ridge and find some sign of it from sky. Wise men, white and red, dug their deepest holes, planted fir and lodgepole upside down, to course through rock and make wide passage to the lake.

The history of failure here gave rise to new religion. Crested jays became old souls unwilling to yield. As totems of the chiefs and colonels--long dead but with a never dying urge to swim that lake, that inner eye awash in mountain wisdom--these birds fly forever singly. Their side-eyes look out for a cloud of steam, the cave it rises from, the at last dark passage out of light

toward marriage of the fire and lake. We know the score of the living. We know the number of the men who stopped here, stayed, and died in trying. As for the gray-headed jays, we can never tell. Is that one there the same I saw yesterday, skirting a band of fog? Or does this one hear the tree code rumoring some sage ancestor's find? The likeness between birds confuses us.

We would rather not waste our time with the forever dead and wandering. If more than my hand were scalded, I would not waste my time at this lookout, those pairs of wings like a fixture to the eye. I would not say, I came here for a day, will leave soon, and as the heat of earth flared higher in my boots, pretend that blood could thicken, that this is running fever through the snow.

Morning in Newfoundland: The Pastor Writes a Letter

Awake before the continent, through a gale-scored
window you can barely see icebergs
crowding the dark off St. John's. This time of year,
even fishermen sleep late. Twenty-six
degrees and fog, their wives
dream calmly--salters of cod, makers of excursion
biscuit--the idle nets ice over
bankers until spring. Behind you, Harbour Grace
and Brigus, where no gales blow
like the ones that meet you here. Easternmost,
awake before the rest
of the continent, you sight first the dories
rowing a sunken crew home.

You mean in the letter
to recall rhodora, scabiosa, the green
of a month past. First, though, here's the gray light
rising out of Europe. Here's a morning
petrel, crossing this selvage
of rock. Yesterday, a goat lost its footing
on the cliff. For hours, white fur breaking over
white, the waves full of new
polishing.

Sunrise. At the shore, cod flakes
throw the first sure line of shadow.
Three weeks from now, the Terra Nova steams north
to ice floes where the seals birth. You,
as always, will stay home, writing these eulogies
in advance. And your letters,
when you finish them, always go
to those behind you, towns of the interior
where horizons bear unevenly, become the land's rugged
interview of sky:
St. Jones Without, St. Jones Within, Holyrood.

The Well

The more we draw from it, the more red silt comes up suspended in our drink. The sun, soon enough, will not shine through our water, and as light catches, turns onto itself by the inner swirling of flecks, we know this lies in the nature of something else, some failing we have overlooked.

Our birds leave us, circle for an entire morning before heading north, toward rain. Expecting calamity in their departure-- movement of earth, a seven year drought-- the young ones whisper among themselves about escape to the mountain, living high at the snow line, in caves.

Each day crust grows thicker inside the bucket, until at last a woman draws her full issue of mud, skeleton, and the purple eye of carp. Some take then to packing the ooze in presses reserved for wine. Drops fall slow and blue with lead. Others, knowing their task, tie rope, carve blocks, climb down into the well.

All winter we line the earthen walls, drink what little snow heaven sends us. By spring the level rising pure from thaw, and those who have not died from poison flesh or lead sing orisons of thanks--draw freely from the well. Some still blame demons, though we know better: as birds return, dip wings, they too seem changed.

Li

Leaf rollers cling to the tree, their spun silk
the death of an orchard. With a dog
it's bones, it's the man or grass dogs scratch
their backs with. Birds cling best because they hold
to what is airy. Over years and years
they hollowed out themselves, clung more
to what was hardly there, flying higher,
still bound to the earth for food.

Water clings to itself. You watch the hesitation
at a tap, its rise past the rim of a bowl.
Should the rivers dry out, you'd find water
clinging elsewhere: in a lake, a cloud, in these
veins. Fire, likewise, to its wood. To its
oxygen, to the fire that came before.
If a man is full of fire, we say his temper
is from the past and knows no end. If a man
is gloomy, he has the moon inside him,
and like all satellites, all moons
cling to their sun.

Thus the green shade to shrubbery,
thereby the twist of smoke out chimneys, pipes,
the orbit of a trout and angler: focused
in the fly. Thus men to women,
and back again, and both of them to a family,
sanctified or not by the quality
with which they cling. So the ship over crest
and trough. So the man to his troubles,
the cling of cancer to its source.
There is even interchange in wind,
wind which blows always toward some particular
somewhere, which like time passing clings to nothing
but what is put in front of it, which is
everything, really: like a sail, like a tree.

Reports to the Plateau

1

Wood is what sways and creaks,
what arches in the hand. Rushes save
the pond from ignorance,
marking its bank. When I first
came, birds weaved crazily
over a field. Not one
landed. Passing them
I felt the earth shift for an instant,
and I was frightened.
Water here is the same we know,
clinging and pouring. People
talk like us but use
forgotten words. I am not homesick.
I'm learning what the valley
takes for granted, this air
yields to. There are names
for each thing.

2

I want you to know
how this tree surrenders, what
its crow says, the way
of young green. An elm commands
the westerly, and storms,
if they come, rain loud.
Let fire take that hillside, crack open
seed. Let this town's
father be a wind
those east snows promise
never leaves. We will live here
anyway. Mountains half our sky, vision
warped, let the tributaries
join, sinking this deep valley more.

3

God was not Christian
when the river drew Maggie
down. At a shallow bend
that horse found her--nosed the hair,
arms like real sponge--
until the farm girl found them both,
there in a late sun.
No one prays to the dead
here. Friend, I am like them. If you ever
read this, know that all the streams
lead in, gathering the sound
of a name. Crows are
what is foreign to you,
speak to you for once, then soar
like a dark breath
lifting beyond your sky.

4

Think of me there when it snows.
On the coldest night, tie a sapling
to a stake and let it
burn away. Remember that fire,
open to our stars.
If its light
thumbs the lake, remember
the color there, that I am
coming back, like trapped air
eventually rising. And know this:
their smoke is what we call gone.

Sunday Mass at Mission Saint Ignatius
for Ralph Burns

During sermon, the epileptic girl
who couldn't hold her tongue, thanks her mother
for the quick slaps. Saint Paul rides
across our dome, a window laid between the dawn
and us, that one flat palm and God. Your hand
is a fish, leafing through the missal.
Saint Ignatius is a town where mountain grays
collide, where glaciers on the backs of Appaloosa
snow up, when heads turn down to browse.

Why is it so bad, she says. The damned bird--
dirt in my mouth--to die? Snow fields
on their backs, and hail moves over the Missions
like a hare, mowing down the lawns. Today
you saw an egret fly, shadow widening
on swamp grass, that confusion of turns
to its dive. A small bass bled to surface,
and you saw sunlight slapping, red as horses.

Father lifts the Body to a clay glow.
Our windows lighten, wine going up, wind
around the hollow edge of bells. The girl
strikes her breast, and a whispering begins:
Bad. The grass is badder than a gray rock.
The girl's mother holds her,
shaking her back again. Here.

Our windows never leave us. In high air,
beneath his telescope, a man traces light
back far as just beyond creation, just this side
of gas, the big bang. A rain starts. The dome
is closing. On his radio,
long waves of the first star dwindle
to the longest, lowest hum. Our hands close
at benediction. The girl: exhausted.
In the highest window, Latin's lost its edge
from years of light. A blue robe
bleeds on a phrase, and through this dyed, falling
air we turn, walk into a strange outdoors,
where spotted horses turn.

Holy Saturday

Down to the city under the earth,
past well bed, walls shored against earth,
down into coal sky and quartz rose, to the dead-end
alley full of shoes. Down darkly
into catacombs, a saint's breath burned over
and over again on the torch, down the silent tower
under wide rivers moving, down bones
below this compass of birds, a wide sky
settling in the ribs.

No one dreams a country
under earth, rock in perpetual rain.
In a last hour, where wind leaves, where the bed
we lie in hardens from its headboard down, light
may draw us onward, into trees. Weight we carry
falls there, wide sky closing over us
like storm. Ears and blood down fossil come to root
in a bee-reed candle, thumbed with fire.

Where in that cave
did the ash we threw there rise? Where south
or north the swaddled robe, heart-cage broken, feet
and belly-side templed with our oil?
In this city under earth, down thunder cloud
and valley, our hands are giving us away.
Down stiff wrist comes earth
quaking, the black of olive in our palms.

All morning, low sky and half
light, the quartz raining. Come midnight freeze
or seed pod breaking open into heat, we go waiting
under dark. Down to the city in the country
under earth, forsaking our shoes,
bathing the feet of old strangers, down
a season always doubt. Tomorrow, when the someday fire
down well shaft falls, the tongue will come upon
a word, that tower speak
our silence one within my city skin, a raw stem
cut suddenly to air.

Crane in the Shade

The superior man abides
in his room.

Confucius

The crane calls its young to nest.
Her brooding here, close to a low bridge, the nine
pipes of wind humming in weed and dusk.

On weeds, they call it hoarfrost: spikes of ice
that add onto themselves in some deliberate
rise to break or fall. And never a moon here,

or whatever the moon would mean--fall of something
in her light, falling on the marsh.
These pipes are nothing, really. A hard wind

down heavy on these limits to the shore.
Shore receding into season. The pipes
invented, as the limits were

invented: call of someone that could not
be waited for--as a crane waits
for its young, return, the swelling of her nest

at the end where it began. This arch of ice,
weed-flower and light, its fire in the egg,
in cramp of wings abiding in their room.

African Proverb at the Crossing

The path has crossed the river,
and here, where a flaxen garden sways
the way the water sways, each side
a tilted bank of blue star-flowers,

the river has crossed the path.
Every thing grows up or away. July sun
burning at your wrist, the damp ground
steaming, neither you nor a fern could ask

Which is the elder
and hope to know. In the cedar live
the first voices, fashioned after crow sound,
wild dog. If you hear the wind say

We made the path and found the river,
believe it, believe that they live still
in the memory of bark, a sky always
leaving to return. If your heart closes

the river is from long ago,
and you can learn, if you wait here longer,
the time of your only mind.
Rest, then. Nothing has ever been written. At night,

from the center of the universe,
stars arc down to join you. Listen
to the beasts: you don't concern them.
They might as easily stare you down as run.

Crossover

In the year of the comet, light
fell through our windows blue
as the palest sky, shafts of light
all our wondering had
turned toward: those disappearances
of dust and smoke
finally made clear, columns of white
two flies would angle through, the grace
light brought in which invisible
wishes, lost objects found themselves,
were seen for the first time
as real, able to
reflect, breathable as air.

All those years we slept
with curtains open to a sky
revolving in our dream.
In the midst of downed stars, a crowd
scene unlike anything
we would have ever imagined,
the comet--the idea
of it fixed as perennial
blooming--slept with us too,
and we were alone with ourselves
and with what comes
from far away to touch us. Dying
or alive, we'd be touched.

That first night, caskets
opened at a trace
of the comet's tail. We saw graveyards
shift the angle of
their slopes as bodies, new dead
and old, rose
in single acts of upheaval.
The year the comet
crossed our sky, lilies closed,
evening and morning. We
burned candles hoping night
would bring in all its fears, this
one fear, to join us in the world.

We were not denied. Stars
went away, returned with weather.
Years of horse or dragon
turned and we grew timely, old as
animals we'd passed through.
If none of us would ever again see
the comet, we thought that
fitting. Once in our lives, afraid
for the world, for ourselves
and the life we'd made, we had
had our chance to be human.