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## Something from Nothing

Poke your pen into your brow, and ponder  
how to teach what they don't know they need,  
or you know they need, or you know you know.  
Some gaps are bridged through luck or love;  
some never are. Sincere effort is helpful.

The deer come and go from the old back yard,  
depending how many the State lets us shoot  
for their own good; this, we understand.  
That I want to believe my mom's lilacs grow better  
with her ashes in their roots, we also understand.

I suppose my eyelid's twitching, notwithstanding  
that I've just visited Dad and so, for a bit,  
am off the hook, must relate to the prospect of his death,  
not to mention what may lie between that and now,  
or the other unsolved matters my gray mere is heir to.

The deep ebbs and flows from behind the eyes,  
depending how close the moon pulls us  
for our own good; this, we disregard.  
That I want nothing more than to seize the moon's back  
and plunge with her into the sea, we also disregard.

(2003)



## Paper Heart

Something is changing, changing.  
Does it turn like a worm: twist, and twist,  
And twist a rope; suddenly it writhes,  
The cat bolts; “It’s only a rope,” I say.  
How long worked the serpent to earn that bite;  
How long tongues the sea, before the cliff falls;  
How long beam the stars, before the eye’s strike?

A

LONG

HARD

TIME

SAY

I.

But change, it will come; change or death.  
Each day a brick’s move; in a year, thousands shift.  
My lids never seal the same secrets.  
My heart never wraps the same blood.

Something is changing, changing,  
However, whenever it may;  
Blue is the color of my ink; white, the paper of day.  
My nails will grow when my brain is dead; is it me that’s here today?  
For many a while I’ve fallen asleep  
And roamed the night away.



Meet me in the back yard. I'll slip out somehow.  
I left my prints there before dawn,  
To point my next-dreamed soul toward you.  
Grapes swell and shape each other. There's always the ground below.

Last night, the house gave a great, groaning creak.  
"The foundation," I said. A light that had never worked  
Blasted on, then off; then would not light again.

"A dead detector," the electrician said.  
Resurrected itself, temporarily. *Or, the light worked without it.*

Three weeks ago, three ravens stood in my drive,  
Picking dead termites from bait stations dug up by the gardener.  
The ravens stared at my car imperviously,  
Their hunger for poisoned meat stronger than fear of me.

(1997)



**Itself**

This thing that  
Fears want  
Is itself for  
Its wants.

This thing told  
By each breath  
Cannot state  
Itself.

This thing that  
Thinks itself  
An “I” is but  
An eye.

For all we say, more truth’s still lain  
In what’s unsaid; and shall, at least  
Halfway to time’s end, there remain.

And yet, through words’ slim pipe, still stream  
More than we’ve heard, more than we’ve meant,  
More than less than all of us can dream.

(2001)



## Digging to China

I'm tense. I'm to do something  
Of course I am to do something I am to work  
I'm not sure what I'm to do I'm to do what I can't  
I don't know if I'm to do what I think I should do  
I don't want to do what I think I'm to do Do I have to do anything  
Do you know what I'm to do Am I really to do what I think I'm to do  
Do you know how I'm to do it I'm not sure I know how  
I think I should be able to do it but I'm not sure  
Maybe I can't Maybe I can but I don't want to  
Maybe I can't because I don't want to  
If I can but I just don't want to maybe I'm bad  
Am I just bad Maybe but I don't really know if I'm really to do it  
What if I only think I'm supposed to do it I'm not even sure what I think it is  
How can I know what it is What if I'm wrong  
How would I know I might never find out I might do something wrong  
What am I to do What if it matters What if I can't figure it out or can't do it or won't do it  
and it matters--  
Because everything matters, every act or omission--  
I can't let that happen I have to try to figure it out as best I can and I have to try to do it  
But what if I don't want to do it Why do I have to do it  
(damn you don't tell me I'm trying too hard unless you're going to take care of everything *(right)*;  
Because something has to be done; because things cannot go on as they are;  
I mean I cannot bear for things to go on as they are, because things are getting worse;  
But even if you said you'd do it and I could believe you meant it,  
I can't afford to believe you could; because what if you are wrong;  
What if you can't do it, just don't do it, do the wrong thing, or do it wrong.)

I sort frantically through leaves on the ground,  
As if playing cards by myself: I could cheat if I wanted; ludicrous thought, since that wouldn't help;  
For I need something beyond leaves or cards.  
I expose the ground, dark brown and damp.  
That's not what I wanted; I need to look somewhere else.



At a party.  
Bright greetings; brief wellings of love, lust, envy, malice, glee;  
Too many rote recitals; cigarettes outside; the bathroom lock;  
Knowing glances that know nothing. Sweaty handlings, etc.  
I make do with what's here.  
Then at once I've had enough of too little. A door is, as always, at hand;  
I step through and close it behind me, walk into emptiness:  
Away from distractions, can I find it?  
I only see baked clay, red rock, a darting skink,  
Unspeaking stars.

At one end of the desert, I approach the godhead.  
(Ridiculous, but there it appears.)  
I am terrified, yet I thrust pins into the giant face.  
I am angry, but I do not want just to hurt it.  
I want it to wake up.

A thousand doors that lead all to the same room  
This is not the place  
This is not what I was supposed to be  
This is not what I was supposed to do  
There were supposed to be choices  
I was not supposed to be so alone

What were the temptations. By magic to make bread of rock.  
To believe you can afford to fall.  
On all the tragic scene to stare from high on a mountain top.  
To believe in love, unless you can keep hold of the fact  
That love isn't being able to rely on someone to care for you  
Or do for you what you should do or tell you what you should do or how to do it  
Or forgive you when you do the wrong thing or you do it wrong; then what is it,

Only to rely on others to do what they want to do and to let you do what you want to do--

And maybe sometimes they will;  
And that should be enough; is that it?



Where, then, is China?  
Where is the world I want. A world that's really different;  
Where other kinds of failure can happen, if not attainment;  
Full of strange people who see differently,  
Through whom I can discern strange, beautiful things,  
That I can desire.

(1997)



## A Postmodern Prayer

A chorus of angels is calling, a host of souls is singing;  
They do not know all life is but know something must be born;  
The mass of voices is rising, my voice rises with theirs;  
Can I no longer stop my throat, the sound wells up and out,  
Gutters flood, termites swarm from the wall seeking light,  
We all are calling; we all want to live but can't just for ourselves;  
We all are the dead we must raise, because time is waning, and being and beauty are calling.

Destiny is not fate,  
But that which results from desire that will not be stanchd.

With this light I go mining; with this light late I read;  
With this light I cross borders; or fail, yet still proceed;  
Though dark and cold grow nearer, and succor still recede,  
I only see more clearly how far remains to go.

The crenelation of bricks, the arcs of lirioppe,  
The harmonies of rain: these never would become  
Without desire.

I am so tired, my words can hardly tell.  
So frail, skin and flesh crumble; I fail.  
My eyes pour tears when I have strength to wail.  
How shall my stiff hands mold what I know into anything useful,  
When it took all I am to survive it, and I still don't understand it,  
And I don't understand my strength, and every day exceed it,  
And know soon it will be finally gone?

Am I only an artist of grief?  
Every day a thousand souls are born, and nine hundred ninety-nine die.



Cars driving shinily through the night, bring me words  
From the thousand souls that drive you, and all they see in your headlit paths:  
Your grilles and windshields, dark ditches by the roadside, the flash of others' eyes.

How do you see through coffee with milk in it?  
Drink it.

(1997)



### **I Don't Recall**

Did smiling lips once brush my cheek  
Or tongue-tip tickle my eye?  
Did my tongue see like a mole smooth teeth  
Or trace a mouth's arched roof?  
Did I ever smell hair, skin, and sweat  
In the places between legs?  
I don't recall.

Did I read veins on the back of a hand  
Or whisper a story of hope?  
Or loll in the shade of an Easter tree,  
My hair smooth across jeaned thighs?  
Were my breasts ever sucked tight and sweet?  
Did my mind fold in bliss?  
I don't recall.

When everything's gone but words on a page,  
And nobody knows my name,  
Will anyone care for so much dust,  
That once burned, yes, like flame?  
For the fathomless glass that once eyes shared  
Or the unison air once breathed?  
Or will they say like the fool I am:  
I don't recall.

(1996)



## The White Forest

Listen to the woman with the lipstick nipple,  
the man with the saw tooth head;  
listen to the woman in the black aspen dress, buzzing,  
hovering, and sticking like a funny bee;  
look at the grass corps, the straw heads; hear  
the washing machine, eat the wet pumpkin seeds, see the top  
hat, white  
gloves, black  
-netted  
veil, try to watch  
    where  
    the  
  
    rock  
  
    falls

Let the snow blow, you say;  
as if it were the season, or yours to choose.  
Do you go into the forest knowing what you will hear  
Do you go into the woods knowing who or what will go  
You do go in, among the dark trunks,  
when you think no one sees, even you;  
When moonlight seeps beneath the curtain's lid,  
You slip like a glove from a silk-lined sleeve  
Down the dark stairs, out the back door,  
'Cross the lawn, no time to count blades,  
Over boulders sunk in earth, the mended stone fence,  
Brush past forked paths, branches refracting sight,  
Into the wide field, here's the dim silver tray,  
Through tall dry grass, still you don't see clearly--



In daylight the grass would rasp 'round your calves  
And the forest ahead roar with tides of starlings,  
but not now; now, all is quite silent  
(the only noise from no prospect but from  
the screaming, groaning, rasping wheels in your head,  
nails in giant hands, on a giant chalkboard:  
work on what's already done)--

How did you slip so silently so far so far so far so far  
When merely to be is to be trapped in intolerable din?

Look:

You have crossed the field. So,

you enter the forest.

(1993)



### **The Fossil Queen**

I am the Fossil Queen.  
My skin is crusted lime;  
My hair descends in furrowed verdigris.

Behind the orange grate  
Of thin teeth rusted shut,  
My tongue coils in an endless, silent scream.

Of various inward parts,  
My entrails, lungs, and heart,  
Need nothing said, since all are long congealed.

Though wind and rain erode,  
An atom bomb explode,  
Nor less nor more can mar my stony frame.

(1992)



## Looking Glasses

Glasses, thrown, break.  
Shards spider light.  
Eyes light remake  
In birthing night.

Empty hands' prints  
Ring whole glasses.  
Sense lost reminds  
Old trespasses.

(1983)



## **My Wife**

Myself as a wife is mine.  
She stands apart from me,  
Alone on a deck with other hands.

She wears my colors, a sign  
To others that she stands there for me,  
While, here, I number sands.

(1983)



## **An Enchanted Evening**

Fuzzy white stars  
on a navy blue night;  
piano notes waltz  
wistfully a melody  
the ear can't quite make out  
but the mind thinks it knows  
a smooth lawn must roll  
through the darkness beyond  
a half-bright veranda;  
but only the silly ones run  
into the night, laughing  
(then the light changes;  
the notes quickly fade  
as a car drives away)

(1983)



### **Birth Traumas**

In springtime, little Ängste  
Sprink the lilac leaves and make the buds  
Cry out small purple fantasies.  
Little baby green spears  
Punct the skin from inside out  
And suck sun in, growing fat  
To hide the earth they pierced.  
The pine tree's almost immobile explosion continues, green.  
Household biles escape through open  
Windows to frighten neighbor children,  
Stamping grass back to earth,  
Who later remember the rancid kitchen smells  
Wafted on airs of unbearable potential--  
Too sweet (toute suite), the lilac-scented breezes.

(1976)