

A FINGER POINTING TO THE MOON



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August 2019 - August 2022

a finger pointing to the moon

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For Christopher & Kristy Olshan

“Fellow pilgrims, *The Teaching/Learning* is merely a vessel to find the truth. A finger pointing to the moon is not the moon. A finger is needed to know where to look for and how to point to the moon. But, if you mistake the finger for the moon itself, you will never know the real moon.

“*The Teaching/Learning* is a canoe that carries you to the other shore. The canoe is needed. But the canoe is not the other shore. No intelligent person would carry the canoe around on his head after crossing. The canoe can help you cross. Beyond birth, life and death. Use it. But don’t hang onto it. You must be able to let it go.”

Thich Nhat Hanh October 11 1926 – January 22 2022 *Old Path White Clouds: Walking in the Footsteps of the Buddha*

a finger pointing to the moon

best

best good mornings
best good moorings

best good evenings
best good eve wings

late evening late June

the feng shui of the season
as it rearranges the furniture
of the fields and open sky
lighting this room this late June
the racoons have pried open
the garbage can lid of night
letting the odorless stars spill out
their locked-in-randomness
their traveling calliope

the evanescence of the Geminid's
catapulting meteors large-and-small-tailed
streaking uninterrupted 'till dawn
silver pawns crossing the planets' tricks
a slice of moon melon-orange
welded to the umber blackness
of a sky shaped like a dog bowl
at the bottom of a deep well

the fireflies those small janitors
of the nightshift glimmering
as they make their rounds
taking on-off breaks as they attend
to hydrangea blossoms the bark of trees
and the million rapiers of grass
varnished by night's first dew fall

"who who are you" asks the barred owl
"you castaways you bewildered ones
have you lost your moorings
cut your sea anchors set yourselves adrift
try to savor the effortless tides
as they shrink the land
conjuring Night and Sea

those two mothers of all dreams”

yes God loves squirrels

yes
God loves squirrels
by Him they're blessed
that's why their tails curl
when from great heights falling
helpless as they hurl
they don't look down
and when they hit *terra firma*
they softly bounce
safe and squirrelly sound
no damage to their derma
all gentle and rubbery
good thing they're not blubbery
if they were fatter
they'd surely splatter
which would be appalling

small birds flying

how birds skyrocket
true to the blue canopy
why oh why not we

never self-conscious
the purity of their flight
proof that there is Right

if on shelf or branch
however weak or flimsy
robust is their whimsy

their fine silhouettes
an instant of perfection
a resurrection

gift to those who watch them
timeless in their insouciance
a notch in God's gun

can *you* dance in the air
they do with nary a care
inspired by the sun

Van Gogh's cow

Van Gogh's cow
was yellow and blue
wore a tattered straw hat
was color blind
gave milk and shat
Van Gogh knew how
to draw front and hind
she always mooed
when he did good
or sometimes blundered
with a guttural “! Van Gawff!”
she'd udder a cough

Roman Polanski's *Repulsion*

moaning in the bedroom
the sounds fade out and in
skinned rabbit on a plate
straight razor on a shelf
blond heroine in her special hell
a military drum a gun a lock tripped
a sickening flute gone mute

smells her sister's unwashed negligee
vomit sounds of running water
nuns play catch in courtyards
to the ringing of an old church bell
summoning them to the altar
silent cracks in sidewalks and walls
seem to become engorged
she stares in horror down the stairs

the traffic in her mind
the sounds of the ominous
make a certain promise
hallucinations in the broken mirror
open one last fatal door
until she becomes unhinged
the slaughter can't begin

a pool of blood runs dark-red
on the black and white tile floor
her golden hair frames her terror
and the dimple in her chin
the phone is off the hook
handprints in still-wet plaster
a graham cracker snaps

what she did she did
blood trickles from his ears
she has locked herself in
at last is free and finally
at home but hardly bored
used the razor to cut the cord
ironing alone by the dumb telephone

cymbals clash
strange hands clutch through walls
at peace she naps
the murderer like one dead
her pale arm reaching out
from under her empty bed

219 words
42 lines

sitting outside 33F

41.8299° N, 73.7631° W

on this December's last day
the moon rose with little wingbeats
to complement a cold wind's soft hiss
camera inside so I couldn't shoot
forced to look so failed to capture it
blue jays at the feeder scared the timid birds
attacked the sunflower seeds on the ground
to be milled in their crops gulped them down

juncos chickadees titmice cardinals and wrens
hopped in the light of a gibbous moon
which backlit a single feather in the snow
and turned the verticals of old maples below
blue as longest shadows of a shrinking year
looking due-north I am puzzled by it
which is Time's job and after all the job
of Truth and Beauty not to mention Love's

like 'primitive' peoples seeing photos of themselves
stunned by the soul-quake of first visions
we must stand ready to uncover who we are
which demands a self-effacing distancing
a tough and surgical humility that helps
us shuck the chrysalis of our former selves
find small happiness in our tiny totem nests
and give our tattered dreams a rest

janitor of emptiness

he sweeps the clutter of souls
the crystal shards of broken glass
he empties oceans of their dreck
brushes the husks of flies
off Time's window ledge
calculates the interest rates
of comedians and philosophers
carts off those who've leapt
the short-lived crumbs and crusts

recalls whatever little's left
he cannot speak his lips sewn shut
his ears sealed tight he cannot hear
the pleas of those who ask
those born or recently bereft
those torn who pray for faith
who marinate in dread and fear
skulls and bones his company
his home a cloakroom in the sky

october

oak leaves falling a well of tannin
early morning fog smoke on waters
squirrels drunk with Fall's abundance
crossing roads mindless risking fur and limb
scrambling gathering storing hoarding
nuts of shagbark hickory and black walnut
a few clueless crushed by cruel cars

waxing hunter's moon cricket choruses
singing hymns to season's rich haul
orange fungus on weeping willow stumps
duckweed sinking into ponds and bogs
Orion's meteors muted by full moon
all things on earth's axis reeling
crooning "so soon too soon"

what is this strange inflection?
this sadness that burns as season turns
this perplexing gravity which
sapiens feel rushing in their veins
that flows with Time's tectonic shift
that wild horse Change stampeding
borne on with what reason no reins?

heart attack

he was good soldier
shoes gleaming saluted took orders
returned home in one piece
leveled in a different battle
by a different weapon
a hand-grenade exploding
the heart inside his chest

vacuuming the living room
downstairs my mother heard him fall
hit the tub and bathroom floor
he made a sound a boy makes when
falling off his bike skinning knees
a cross between a sigh and groan
when she got there he was gone

did he have as he dropped down
a minute a second to think
a blank page drowning in black ink
that this was his end not a test
plummeting down this dark funnel
being reborn into nothingness
or some unknown form of peace?

being the first born

being the first born
warped in the warm chrysalis
of mother's best-only first-ever love

set sail like a dove
warmed like a hand in a glove
fearless in self-love

she advanced on the world
with her own vengeance and rage
and stood strong on the stage

though inherently shy
and prone to overthink and ask why
her "...is what it is..." helped her fly

looking back on U.S. of A.
her soul knew how to act
"Polish Not Foolish" a fact

like those born disenfranchised
she knew how to reach for the prize
hustle street sense humble wise

left the born-to-the-manor
in the dust most of them surprised
from the last to the first
a matter of hunger and thirst

old toad

old toad old toad
getting older
one thing worse than that

(few cars drive slowly)

bold toads flattened
no hearse for them
harsh road's amen

plover and gull

prints on the shore

how is it the delectation
of gull and plover prints
repeated perfectly on shore
as finest rotogravure
washed by tide-riven waves
share the same perfection?
retorno ever more

tiger

when we see you as a tiger
in your full-on tiger suit
with your full-bore smile
stirring sunbeams like the sun

like all grand uncles and grand aunts
we ooh and ah !such a creature!
no real tiger whiskers claws or paws
there's more to you than that

than meets our eyes' imagination
wannabe tiger how we love you
you are the future of our nations

your mom and dad's best creation

beyond prayers and incantations
in our hearts you'll always be
fondly not "The Lizard" or "Lizzy"
but Queen Elizabeth turned two
for Lizzy Olshan

two kinds of cows

smiley cows
give good milk
when they do
it's smooth as silk
nice and creamy

grumpy cows
don't deliver
when they do
their milk is chunky
tastes like liver

however
smiley or grumpy
both go "MOO!"

phoebes

such attentiveness
such relaxed intensity
such unity of purpose
hunt the live-long day
a miracle of you
phoebes phoebes two

flyfishing guide's tips counsel

slow down slow down
let the rod do the work
keep your rod tip up
follow the currents
don't let your line
get ahead of your fly
strip strip strip strip
watch what's hatching
what's living and dying
apple caddis spinners march browns
sailing before your very eyes
on the surface what's going on

below the surface what's going on
watch the river rush watch
pause breathe pause breathe
keep your eyes on the waters
don't be bullied by harsh winds
don't force it or horse it relax
switch flies experiment
feed line with the current feed
keep a sharp eye look to find
any subtle change of pace
in this river you're invading
becoming part of you

ode to aging

old age you
tick tock us all off
why don't *You*
just bend over
and just cough

reincarnation

old wooden milk box

i miss my milkman delivery days
and the clip clop of his horse
leaving full bottles neatly at each door
the clink of empties on the milk cart floor
now that i am no longer

now i have another role
a quaint and faded thing to neatly hold
splits of kindling cleanly chopped
my frame a beggar's wood compared
to royal maple cherry hickory beech and oak

soon-to-be-burned reborn into warmth
my only hope in my next time around
will be to match their joyous conflagrations
once rust and rot soon take their toll
when yet again i am no longer ?
the other voices of things

the paw

calm cairn of field stone
was guardian to his remembrance
hovel half sheltering what was him

from each season's shovel-knives
indifferent in elemental inconsideration

indifferent to us what was left of him
when the violation of him dawned
it first appeared a broken twig
then one mummy of a desiccate paw
fractured at first joint of wrist

dried muscle rawhide strip clinging
to bone paw pads shrunk yet still intact
clawed out from under tomb of stones
by instinct of some starving raider
what framed it was a sense of sacrilege

as if Nature swore some brutal swear
a fact not to be ignored
showed jurors horrors hidden there
as ravenous virtuosos played
their favored silly hymns
and scavengers danced their dance

anomie *

i am wild-will tired
too well trialed
tired of The Words
that like animal scat
or prideful brown birds
fly away in flocks
even when well written
they flutter off
they vanish faster
than missing socks
than new-primed varnish
on sanded planks of pine
no sooner brushed down
no sooner typed out
than they explode their locks
lose their luster start to fade
and like all tears disappear

*anomie : social instability resulting from
a breakdown of standards and values also:
personal unrest, alienation, and anxiety that
comes from a lack of purpose or ideals.

if ever whenever

if ever whenever

you think of mothers
yours mine best mothers
one might also think of bees
protective of the hive
wildly driven self-effacing
their motherly loving ways
when thinking of mothers
mothers or bees
eradicating their egos
never complaining
serving for free no fees
busy buzzing sacrificing
'till end of their days

once in Mendocino

in Mendocino hummingbirds
swooping down tree to eucalyptus tree
feathered Tarzans diaphanous
you might (sun reflecting yellow
turquoise on their gossamer wings)
follow their determined paths
predictable as the Pacific's tide
in their swooping arcs of flight
never distracted intensely attracted
driven by their aeronautical affections
a dive-bombing merry-go-round
a tryst to all flowers' cores
begging for their dazzling attentions

bees late fall

in late fall or early winter
if you are a keeper of bees
or a lover of their industry
and look closely
you will see their husks piled-up
near their beehive floors
you cannot forget
thousands on thousands of them
doing their diligent duty
paying their debt to their queen

beauty & love

beauty
is love

a shadow at first glance

a horse at the end
of a curved black path
sun day or no-sun day

love is
beauty

the moon

the moon the moon
a brown sugar cube
on a bright silver spoon
in the coffee cup of night
a coffee light-cream cartoon

cheep chirp

cheep cheep chirp chirp
never know'd a bird to burp

record buck

a shotgun shot rang out
gut-punched the deer mid leap
and startled by the sound
a covey of mountain quail
exploded from the underbrush

a fifteen-point record
dead before he hit the ground
his eyes still open halo of blood
in the snow around its head
his one and only crown

in no rush to confirm his kill
the old hunter all in camo
takes his time climbing down
from his well-built hidden stand
in his rifle loads another round

the ax

i am the heart
of ultimate power
at the appointed hour
sharp without heart

at a stroke
i fall

mercy mercy
cry those called
as i put them down
to open that final door
to darkness ever more

sunday sunrise

busy old fool
unruly sun
galaxies' small jewel

no clock no phone
left to his own
precise devices

old sun rises
not so boldly
in cold January

busy old fool
unruly sun
galaxies' small jewel

slowly slowly
not so wise
wins no prize

has many guises
horizon to horizon
opposite of cool

angel tale

an angel sings
"God all mighty
all Devils' own

each solitary
each alone

goods or evils
in your vanity
looking down

on us and all things
like mountainous weevils

or cathedrals of bones

the mop

i am the go-to guy that rolls along on demand
with my boss The Janitor and my squeeze-me bucket
full of hot water Pine-Sol or Mr. Clean
i swab vile messes with a sloshy song
in school halls bars or hospital wards

when kids of all ages vomit throw up wretch
upchuck puke heave hurl barf and chunder
i clean the catapulted spurts of sickos
their half-digested stomach contents
flooding linoleum old-pine or tiled floors

no prob for me nose-less mops can't smell
the many strains of stinks from hell
sawdust sometimes kitty litter are my mates
we do our best to restore order to a space
soaking up booze or half-digested bits

whatever was ingested before spew time hit
it's my mission to restore a clean freshness
as if no one was ill or drank too many a drop
nothing makes me gladder after the slop
is all washed away and mopped

than to head back to my calm cozy closet
where wrung out to dry out i stand ready
to serve as the institution's perfect solution
provide quickest most fragrant ablution
to sick or drunken fools' reeking messes

one request for janitors who used my services:
please avoid straight ammonia or bleach
(they leave an after smell that lingers
in corners and crevices) saving
those with alert noses from a fetid day
the other voices of things

some leaves

some leaves
as they drift down and return
to the all-consuming earth
before they disappear
hold a near transparency

that like a microscope
magnifies the moment

and

in that instant
with startling clarity
after fall and winter in spring
their stubborn return to green
year after year after year
the nature of their burn

the arts

just a ball of wool
of many colors
woven round and round
a soft warm skein

at the start
and when we part
as all the others

such are the arts
made to console
made to heal or fool
the hungry soul

at the start
and when we part
as all the others

sewn in most
a muted pain
like burnt toast
an ace in the hole

SILLY SONGS

I really need
my pickle sandwich
with pickled knees of happy bees
with roasted toad toes thank you please
with powdered parts of well-dried fleas
and perhaps some smell-less farts

refrain (spelled out)

P-I-C-K-L-E
S-A-N-D-W-I-C-H
for my deli-belly

I just want
my pickle sandwich
with fried whiskers of elephants (pronounced ELLE-ay-fonts)
with fresh ant farts from Vermont
with lizard cookies from my aunts

refrain

P-I-C-K-L-E
S-A-N-D-W-I-C-H
for my deli-belly

I truly desire
my pickle sandwich
with baked bugs fat as friars
with chubby slugs grilled on fires
with slimy worms cooked quite firm

refrain

P-I-C-K-L-E
S-A-N-D-W-I-C-H
for my deli-belly

Note: The refrain – to be sung - in the steady
beat of B-I-N-G-O B-I-N-G-O BINGO WAS HIS NAME -
- or – or the Disney version of M-I-C-K-E-Y M-O-U-S-E
FOR NATALIE

Once Upon a Time...

there was a mouse who chased a cat
a cat who chased a dog
a cheese that chased a rat

a fish who fished for fisherman
a worm who ate a robin
a deer who shot a hunter

folly-follow diddle-ee dee
by golly rasto blasto skinny ma lee
stumpy grumpy how lucky jolly are we

there was an egg that fried a pan
a shadow that lit the sun
a bullet that fired a gun

a bean that canned a can
a prisoner who jailed a jail
a hair that combed a comb

folly-follow diddle-ee dee
by golly rasto blasto skinny ma lee
stumpy grumpy how lucky jolly are we

there was a war that made a peace
a wrong that made it right
a loose turned really tight

a fat that made it skinny
a Santa who was a chimney
a witch who was a beauty

folly-follow diddle-ee dee
by golly rasto blasto skinny ma lee
stumpy grumpy how lucky jolly are we

there was an egg that laid a hen
a paper that drew a pen
a room that lit a candle

an ax that chopped its handle
a pipe that smoked a man
a lion that became a lamb

folly-follow diddle-ee dee
by golly rasto blasto skinny ma lee
stumpy grumpy how lucky jolly are we

there was a nail that nailed a hammer
a mother who was a father
a father who was a mother

there was a swing that never swung
an ice cream cone that licked a tongue
a cigarette that smoked a lung

folly-follow diddle-ee dee
by golly rasto blasto skinny ma lee
stumpy grumpy how lucky jolly are we

there was a ditch that dug a digger

a homeless crowd that got richer
a crooked line turned straight

a boy who was a girl
a girl who was a boy
a whisker that shaved a razor

folly-follow diddle-ee dee
by golly rasto blasto skinny ma lee
stumpy grumpy how lucky jolly are we

there was a wound that healed a cut
a palace that was a hut
an open that got shut

a castle that crossed a moat
a log that sawed a saw
a crow that didn't caw

folly-follow diddle-ee dee
by golly rasto blasto skinny ma lee
stumpy grumpy how lucky jolly are we

there was a nut that found a squirrel
a song that found a bird
a sentence that found a word

a pearl that found a girl
a straightened that got curled
a whisper that was heard

folly-follow diddle-ee dee
by golly rasto blasto skinny ma lee
stumpy grumpy how lucky jolly are we

there was a tooth that drilled a dentist
a punch that became a kiss
a flower that broke a fist

a lace that tied a shoe
a magician found inside a rabbit's hat
a square turned into circles

folly-follow diddle-ee dee
by golly rasto blasto skinny ma lee
stumpy grumpy how lucky jolly are we
FOR GENEVIEVE

A Frog Who Wanted To Know

there was a frog who wanted to know
what makes things stop and go
how to take a thing all apart
part by part and put it back just so
part by part again as good as new

there were two giant dogs near where he lived
who told the frog the best way to start
was to visit the dogs' smart family lived
to camp out in their fountain pond
keep his froggy eyes peeled and learn their art

this is what the frog did do
he kept his spy-frog eyes wide open
everything they did he watched
until froggy found their magic wand
so here's this story's catch:

one day the son almost broke his daddy's nose
no fault no blame not with a garden hose
but with a laptop he wanted to play
these things the student frog took in
figured how a business he might start

he called it Froggy Bottom's Repair Shop
"just a hop away - we make your day"
he fixed frog washer-dryers and frog i-phones
robot vacuum cleaners frog cars tractors and frog drones
and thanked his dogs for leading the way
FOR CJ

A Bunny Who Brought Bunnies Joy

There was a baby bunny, who knows why,
all the other bunnies in her warren
called her Lizzy (a bunny not forgotten)
since she was anything but dizzy,
her paws planted firmly on the ground,
her eyes blue as skies or blueberry pies.
She hopped quicker, loped faster, jumped higher
than any bunny in her bunny tribe.
When things went right, she'd jump for joy.

"My way of having fun is like the sun.
Every day is a brand-new day to me.

I'll spill your coffees, eat your toffees.
Out to be the best bunny I can be.
I'm sure my bunny family's proud of me."

When things went wrong, boy o boy!
She'd jump higher to bring sad bunnies joy.
always a jolly jumper,
a leaping leaper on her trampoline,
the happiest bunny girl worldwide,
she'd hop and whirl in loops and swoops
with every bounce she loved to sing:
"Poops and poops farts and farts and poops,
please stay away from our ice cream scoops."

"My way of having fun is like the sun.
Every day is a brand-new day to me.
I'll spill your coffees, eat your toffees.
Out to be the best bunny I can be.
I'm sure my bunny family's proud of me."
FOR LIZZY

Anthony Angus

there was an Angus named Anthony
who worried about his patrimony
McDonald's liked his tasty marbling

when he found out he changed his moo
decided he'd better take up warbling
hoping he'd be mistook for a bird

and escape culling from his herd
slid on a griddle by some pimpled 'cook'
what else could a two-ton Angus do

Fog

out of night's raven sky
the great gray cat Fog
softly paws and lumbers
the orange sun his eye

the landscape of the face

the landscape of the face
as in portraits of the land
always leaves a truthful trace

and a most important AND...
its memories in skin un-erased

Osmo

we never had a cat named Osmo
but if we did he would come and go
in such fine manner fit and trim
in such a splendid way
that all who saw him would go “oh!
it must be Osmo
whose fame has preceded him.”

what the uvula said

i rest in the last row
in the back of the mouth
closest to the drop box of the throat
spoken words a boxer’s punch to me
pug-a-dah pug-a-dah pug-a-dah
a hip shake of a dancer’s hula
until one night cause unknown
i woke paralyzed glued to the roof
of the cave of my mouth

warm saltwater did not suffice
nor cubes of well-sucked ice
can’t be too soon to loosen me
like a tiny fleshy punching bag
where my job of moistening
the throat’s saliva flow and swallow
can enthusiastically begin
just for the record anatomically
i wish they didn’t name me ‘uvula’
the other voices of things

the sun

my rays and beams burn silently
i fall clean through glass
pierce all clear and opaque things
shine new through open doors
through windows bright on floors
i am the root cause of shadows
(those trailing ghosts of solid things)
baptized in my solar fires
tree limbs fences towers valleys hills
buildings birds bugs and bicycles
move or stand synchronized by me

in the compass my of days
when blocked by crowds of clouds
when i fade fail or almost disappear
i cling to hope lose no faith
true to my furnace and silent flames
true to my many mythic names
knowing my brightness will return
the other voices of things

moonlight

child of Luna's phases
i cast shades of blue gray-blue

when i shine fully
i am most joyful

jealous of the palest light of day
i fall more darkly

than the dullest rays of sun
in the same crowded marathon

of planets constellations and stars
reflections of their royalty i run

to huntress Dianna i owe all praise
Night has no hope without me
the other voices of things

when my cat rolls over

when my cat rolls over
and stretches his tiger paws out

chocolate and black
on his ample Persian back

belly-up the color of ashes
as the Italians precisely say

mi souvien l'eterno

in this for him a simple act
i suspect he knows how

when i say "Oh!"
his Italianate simplicity

gives me a moment of eternity
in him in his oceanic eyes

mi souvien l'eterno
for Andy

geese late fall

to see them hurtling southbound
in hundreds their ragged V's to hear
their honking in-flight encouragements
their winged choruses of exhortations
heartening their flocks on
loudest on quiet dull days
their formations' ragged lettering
looking down on us looking up

who alive at Autumn's end
in awe of their air-bound genius
seasons on seasons on centuries
guided by some cyclic appetite
can fail to feel a pilgrim kinship
a kind gratitude for all creatures
that swim squirm crawl gallop or fly
and utter a humble *gracias*

the window

clean or dirty
i'm seen through
i let daylight in
cast light out at night
on crooked shadows
on twisted limbs of trees
on nocturnal blades of grass
on strangers passing by
all eyes see through me
as i see through their transparencies

outside worlds beyond me
beyond the white of frost
beyond the tears of rain
in the corners of my panes
spiders weave their webs
the best builders place me
facing due east true west
to greet sun and moon
as they brightly wax and wane
the other voices of things

a man in paris

black hat black coat alone in Paris
a man climbs up a flight of stairs
enters an elevator on highest floor
adjusts the scope on his rifle
gets out strides down the hall
through an unlocked door
hears a telephone ring and ring
he knows not what to say
no one's there a mistaken call
or some game of play to pay
outside it's pouring rain
his black Mercedes purrs on idle
silent clock relentless on the dash
proves it's all about the cash
every raindrop falls suicidal
paid well to kill the heiress
in one shot to blow her away
or snap her neck like a chicken wing

medusa in autumn

her venomous snaking
her branches' power now exposed
in the shedding of her mask of green
which bleeds out in blood-rust reds
orange-yellows scarlets and fool's golds
she freezes all living as they fall
from her paralyzing gaze
into an open october grave
of decomposing earth and stone

mid October

this season is a dying god's toy

still as a feather afloat
porcelain on a calm pond
long curved necks
tucked under cream-white wings
bed of waters a looking glass
of obsidian and harlequin blue
eight swans asleep save one
the awake one an alert centurion

not a breeze disturbs the cattails

as the geese and their brethren rest
they marshal energy forces marsh side
as hundreds on hundreds in fields
gorge on kernels from new-cut corn
everything poised to be blown south
catapulted south to The Ecstasy
to the magnet of their winter home

their honking not noise but Anthem
far below them far below
air on fire waters on fire leaves on fire
earth on fire in their every gene
a route a map an ancient dream
their direction inherited wing beat by wing beat
the determined metronome of the flock
in the dangerous labor of their flight
in the compass setting or rising sun
incandescent lives Light diamond-adamant
in their stubborn "Yes!"
the brightest cry of Joy

this season is a dying god's toy

233 new & improved imaginary birds

the geriatric grease-trap gander
the aluminum-crested ant actuary
the bilious bubble builder
the mangy cocka-roo-boozer
the incarnadine pucker-mocker
the rusty-squiggled trout-plucker
the symphonic fructose swan
Hedda Hopper's helacious bellicose bunker-billed blizzard buzzard
the blasphemous broad-billed shout-lout
the common creepy-eyed bushtit
the bullshite-tufted too-loose tern
the snarky weird-whistle warbler
Sugar Pop's scooty snout diver
the cantankerous covid canary
the orange-clawed clod duck
Hemingway's hemorrhoid heron
Charles Schultze's bubble-headed small-bodied burp
Uncle Constantine's cockatiel
the uranus anus auk
the figurative figureless stub-feathered finch
the trusty-true-snatch tick titmouse
the intransigent mite itcher

the wanton wiggle warbler
the cribbage crank crow
the belligerent bezel bunting
the jalopy jerk jay
Jiminy Cricket's cooties coot
the susurrus slime-slug swallower
the oblivious outré oystercatcher
the bongo oriole
Punchy's pistachio pulpit pipit
the victorious varicose-veined veery
the rumpus-bummed redstart
the scurrilous scooter-scooter
the trash-talking garden tern
the cadaver crane
the studious sclerotic bush snoggle
the blue-collared wallow-wallow
the anti-allergic abacus albatross
the giggle-giggle grosbeak
the crumpled candy-coated kittiwake
the gnarly gnat catcher
the grump delirious gnat snatcher
the singular snatch-averse gnat snatcher
the fulminous fuck flicker
the ersatz equestrian egret
Miss Doodle's dunking duck
the flammulated funky fire owl
the over-the-rainbow razorbill
the philanthropic putz phoebe
the sandwich shearwater
the deli-pickle-breasted pigeon
the total liar lark
the bibulous bully bunting
the non-stop ever-questioning quail
the lubricious laughing lark
the wonky world-weary wood peck
the dopey-dope dove
the lackluster lucky loon
Mr. Gulpleeze's glue goose
the surreptitious skullduggery sparrow
up Mike's millpond merganser
the enormous eglantine egret
the adventurous aardvark auk
the overtly pusillanimous pucker dove
Winston Churchill's willy-wanking willet
the hypercautious hermaphrodite hen
happy Henry's hump hawk

the disingenuous draped duck
the pestiferous purple parakeet
the pugnacious plump-boned bittern
the cretinous black carp kingfisher
the vivacious vim-and-vigor vulture
Quentin Tarantino's tripe titmouse
the colloquial cud condor
the goggle-eyed grosbeak
the fastidious frog falcon
the penurious plow pelican
the wax-eloquent wool widgeon
the hazardous huckleberry hawk
the odiferous blunt-billed bee blaster
the freebie phoebe
the lackluster libretto lark
the rumple-bumpered bum bunting
Theodora's terrible test taker
the winking willet
the Albanian aleatory albatross
Dapper Dinga's anhinga
Whipper Snapper's whippoorwill
Larry's last audacious auklet
the cautionary cormorant
Claude Clapper's creeper
the cross crossbill
the cluck-ticking clock cuckoo
Curley's clonk-clunking curlew
the tempestuous dump dowitcher
the flappy-beaked flycatcher
the rampant rootzee-tootzer
the go-along-to-get-along grebe
Stewie Stanwich's stew swan
the well-wishing wallop wigeon
the good-golly grebe
the isotope ibis
the nocturnal kink kite
the pudgy petrol petrel
the golden-eyed sunset gnatcatcher
the dogged godwit
the why-o-why wren
the late-day trash thrasher
the cantankerous salvage swallow
good gog's goggle godwit
Sister Silly's sullen sapsucker
the dyke shrike
the loving spoonful spoonbill

Opra ork's pork stork
the fizzle-crested farting phalarope
the rambunctious rail
the residue raven
Teddy Truehart's teenage tool tanager
the warp-woofing rag wren
Gustave's grouchy gallinule
the gregarious gallinule
the grandiose gnarly gnatcatcher
the stumbling star starling
the moon-eyed blue-winged uh oh
the only-in-October drowsy owl
the hairy-feathered headache heron
the stiletto-beaked mice shrike
the google-me chickadee
the startled stump stomper
the vivacious vacuum veery
the dung-nesting drizzle swift
the hellish hall hollerer
the temperamental twitch tanager
Verizon's vainglorious dull-brained disconnect
the cumulus cloud swallower
the floppy-toed roach stomper
the silver-tailed silly-silly
the star-crushing bush starling
the numismatic nibble-nibble
Mary Magadene's mustard merganser
the blushing bush boaster
Orion's sword swallow
Cassiopeia's cloud canary
the worried wander-wonder
the stubby stump-stomp
the freckled pimple popper
the indeterminate full stop
the decorative death duck
Dumbo's dithering blue-beak
Dracula's bad-blood bittern
Frankenstein's flatulent flame-throwing fantail
the antediluvian squamous skull-crusher
the cheesy chuckle chicken
the rambunctious raunch rooster
mister mister's three-toed tortellini twister
the artful fifty-percent-off auk
the two-hundred kilo watt what
the willow-pillow pigeon
the silver sturgeon slurper

the snaggle-beaked barn brawler
the someday Sunday some day
the parenthetical pie catcher
the surly soother
the unanimous mouse magpie
the clueless long-clawed macaw
the ergonomic eel egret
Petrosian's pool petrel
the bombastic bully bulbul
the two-toed tweezer thrush
the sturdy suck-up shoveler
the too-late tomorrow swallow
the day-after duck 170
the whooping boop-boop-a-doop
the stunk stink skunk gull
Snoopy's fruit coot
the bald bummer bunting
the long-legged larkspur limpkin
the jello-jiggle wagtail
the speechless chubby chat
the pixelated poke parrot
the merry mammoth meadowlark
the private stuff puffin
the white-collared desk warbler
Liberace's jewel-hued longspur
the dark alley thrasher
the where's-the-mike shrike
the red wheel-barrow sparrow
the placid pygmy pigeon
the last lost least-least tern
the fiddle-footed flycatcher
Captain Crunch's condo condor
the pine scented tenting waxwing
Tonto's towing towhee
Toonerville's too-long-gone trogon
tricky Dicky's slick bee-dickcissel
the dapper mud-beaked swamp clapper
Peewee's little wood-pewee
the camping canvasback
the dun-dotted doddering dotterel
the nougatine-necked nuthatch
the grandiose gourmand gulp-goose
the extra-large lettuce lark
the !whoohoo! blues-tooting booger buzzard
the pie-eyed pickle ptarmigan
the odiferous codicil owl

the good eve-wing warbler

slugs

slugs are not bugs
but viscous mollusks
if found floating
in a pint of lager
a slimy bother

do not glug or chug
(leads to bloating)
those that tried
spewed while moaning
“mucilaginous bollocks!”

soup ladle

today the soup ladle
gave up its ghost
cup broke off from stem

things too can
betray a trust

of all cooking tools
the one used most
best loved of all

things too can
betray a trust

monarch

don't cry don't worry butterfly
when autumn winds bring the cold
you know it's time for you to go
south on the wing thousands of miles

few know how skillfully you fly
when you land all flowers will smile
colors aglow you'll understand why
you'll live and shine a monarch king

do birds worry

a small yet haunting question
the chickadee finch and crow
nuthatch cardinal all sparrows
oriole grosbeak starling titmice towhee

bluebird hawk turkeys and their poults
thrush nor jay not one's obsessed or in a rush
majorities of those that sing or cheep
trust what the others have to say
when feeder's full they seem to know
they gather faster than a barn owl hoots

though they sow not nor do they reap
nor do they store foods in barns or silos
they have no web sites no hyperlinks
they surely talk to one another
they get the word out in fluent bird
they flock to what another finds
they eat in peace peck in harmony
not one seems to care or mind
proof positive not one bird worries
they boast no cases of indigestion
bring joy to us preface to eternity

older now

older now
living peripatetically
in both present and the past

in utter disbelief
that the two keep moving
forward back and back so fast

way too swiftly
birdlike still rooting
for some undiscovered equity

the blast furnace of faith

the blast furnace of faith
burns away every doubt
until even our ashes will pray

talking to myself

move these black socks here
to a more organized there for laundry
search for that vagrant felt-tipped pen
realize it can't help you think or write
scoop out poop from the cat litter
listen to the house sparrows twitter
better yet go to You Tube find Avro Par
think about the true meanings

of cats poetry laundry and art
chop onions for tonight's dinner

consider the Catholic definition of sin
all these things heading entropically
headlong perhaps to some fickle garbage bin
dice some sweet pickles for the tuna salad
answer the impudent unrelenting phone
order Marie Howe's *Magdalene*
try to keep top of mind
the hackneyed well-worn wisdom
that perhaps the tiniest glimmer
into the scrim you've been given

might just be the exploding ticket
that will take you through the end of time
remember to try and remember
that change doesn't hurt half as badly
as always stubbornly trying to resist
pray for a friend whose cancerous cyst
right now is being cut out of his jaw
stop over thinking take a few deep breaths
all that's left continue to savor
how luck and chance two golden fish
have been mostly kind still are so far

a boy of seven

as a boy of seven in my flannel PJs
before falling asleep with eagle scout flashlight
ghost light shining under a white army tent of sheets
i'd slaughter battalions of lead and plastic soldiers
the nips the japs the nazi-krauts the fascist enemies
merciless and tired out made sleepy by marshalling
so much imaginary carnage that i'd drift off
only to be sharply wakened by a kneeling sniper
his tiny carbine stabbing the small of my back
then i'd imagine that still unthinkable thing

the future (when?) deaths of my mother and my father
i'd choke on the breath of my own breaths
like a patient trapped in an anaerobic chamber
would hear my nerves whining shrill in my brain
the surge of heart-central sending runnels of blood
rushing through black estuaries of arteries and veins
sometimes when gripped by that old fear and terror
in deep of night in the wee hours of loon and wolf

mom and dad mere memories a century long gone
now and then i see it new as all about the boy in me

ode to tutu

tutu
good morning
you're better
than a flower
drink more water
need no vases
have lasted longer
even softer
smell as good
a big talker
make amusing noises

purr a lot sit by us
always nights or days
so much warmer
that's why
as years fly by
you might make it
to twenty-two
even when you fuss
we'll keep our eyes
on you
tutu

the stars

do stars gaze back at us
not likely as we look up
into night black as pitch
unless we are delusional
blocking the fact of funerals

why the mighty fuss
trapped in the grand confusional

like poets striving to be hacks
good tea searching for a pot
hot water cucumber sandwiches
or an antique porcelain cup
breugel's blindmen in a ditch

why the mighty fuss
trapped in the grand confusional

funhouse

just a bad joke after all
after lost maps misplaced keys
lost socks bad raps lost wallets
winding corridors burst seams
lost notes from important deals
lost in dying suburban malls
disturbing days haunted dreams

forget the vanities of art
the fact of our mortality
we're cooked before we start
a sickly sickle moon marooned
an old unstitched wound
that takes forever to heal
on oak leaves the stubborn galls

the toothpick of hope

poke between the broken
the cracked the yellowed teeth
press the slightly bleeding gums
to find and finally dislodge
the undigested crumb
the beating of each heart's drum
mere tokens of god's esteem
our prom King's red corsage

the barbed hook of charity

the barbed hook of charity
baited with lures of love
and bread balls of good deeds
catches and harries
all evils damns all devils
iron fist in a satin glove

the Duck poems

for Mary Agnes, Edward and Timothy
august 8 2020 – august 22 2020
the outer banks

benches in a courtyard

gray benches in a courtyard
waiting for what or who or when
one by one in rows each alone

save dry leaves on a pea-gravel square
might be a playhouse for poets
local mimes or musicians
who storm this place to perform
for groups of thirty or few as two

what if benches could think back on
and remember days at dusk or dawn
when it thundered rained and poured
when a clever sun shone smartly there

the times they gave needed rest
to pilgrims with troubles all their own
when snows fly it's their time then
to think or dream or just be bored

ocean sunrise last day

the sun has serious intentions
first rays shy as mourning doves
dye the waves from gray to blue
as waking birds queue up to sing
and clouds flock white above

sunlight peeks under each closed door
falling on the all-inspiring shore
Life begins to stir once more
rabble rouser of reinventions
flaming engine of the new

land and sea

in that rare and hidden thing
when ocean shore and sky
where vastness of land
embraces vastness of sea
gray gulls wheeling on high
in that rare and hidden thing
like a few good marriages
one comes to know true power
of opposites that attract

terrible beauties

the gracious changing of the light
blue white and green striped folding chairs
new weather rolling in as days follow nights
the smell of iodine and kelp in the air

the way the seagulls dip and veer
swimmer's red swimsuits and big black dogs
sandpiper tracks erased in the agreeing sand
fat clouds a cheerful kite of an afternoon
the metronome of rising seas setting moons
these small occurrences are followed by
a certain sadness that shows up at the end
of all these things we hold so close
waits patient always eager to say goodbye
hides mysterious in loved ones' eyes
terrible beauties borne out on the tides

like muted car lights speeding in the dark
their windshield wipers flicking back and forth
(he thought of his actors and his plays)
in the rain roads slick and black before sun's rise
on the way back home after two weeks' rest
(she thought of her spunky kids with special needs)
there will always be this untouchable thing
the worm in the core of all rare passing
when it stirs you'll hear some troll-voice sing
"sadness is but one closing of a thousand doors
like a favorite white horse who trots slowly by
every fine morning to greet you until one day
you realize he won't be there anymore"
thinking about it all then safe at home
terrible beauties borne out on the tides

what the plover said

i'm proud to be a piping plover
feathered lunatic sprinting in and out
fleet feet ahead of every surge
unlike sandpipers my beak is small
i must work harder for what i get
i dance with the ocean and the land
i have no fear of monster tides
fat waves to me pose no threat
as the sea explodes the sand
i hate to get my orange feet wet

early walker

all alone she walks
to a place of blue brightness

the way the gray horizon
far ahead curves around

the unfolding span of beach
before the simple sun can wake
the still-sleeping day
in the lightening darkness
white gulls wheel in the bay

all alone she walks
to a place of blue brightness

applauded by gentle waves
and a modest cooling breeze
her dark tracks in the wet sand
are almost silently erased
one shy bird makes
a sweet self-effacing sound
a ghost moon's horizon bound

all alone she walks
to a place of blue brightness

the room within

sunrise surprises endless highways
books on tape CDs coffee stops
donuts Kentucky fried filling up
anticipation of arrival
a large portion of the joy
for that assembly worker within
a fully paid two-week coffee break

we all know it takes vacation three days
to get used to a new place new ways
once you settle in feel more at home
accept the odd wobble of your new clock
like a honey covered rubber band
like clocks that melt contract expand
on Dali time tick tock tick tock
with little reason little rhyme

good God does smile
the sun rises the sun sets
the tide comes in the tide goes out
floating loose-limbed happy as water
rocking on the ocean's dip and lift

the manic plovers
black stripes between their eyes

day-glow orange feet and beaks
playing chicken with the waves
the laughing gulls all laughing
the pelicans plummeting like rocks

on bare feet cold ocean's bright shocks
the open room of sea and sky and beach
and that other room beyond the ocean rental
far beyond the pull of ocean's reach

the room within that centers and restores
how glorious to refresh redecorate
refurnish that room within forever yours
exactly as you choose exactly as you need
the room we love to migrate to
books leaping off the shelf a gift
where imagining behind closed doors

two clouds

a Jacob's rainbow of a cloud
solitary as an exclamation point
high above a big blue bay
white sails of sailing ships below
(my sister's photo from her morning walk)
a cloud of Armageddon or The Rapture
against a sky duller than a baking pan
a floating irradiated cloud a lion
purples pinks lemon-yellows tangerines
(when asked if she missed teaching
she said forty years was enough)

once upon a time way back when
another cloud bold and white as salt
graced a blackboard in grade-school chalk
its center wild with squiggles and curlicues
my mother's sketch of her favorite cloud
long lost stamp in her memory book
i see her walking on her way to school
and wonder was she happy with her cloud
i see her taking wooden clothespins off the line
looking over our backyard lost in thought
the old girl's hair shining-white as Zion

ant at sunrise

the shadow of the ant
on the rim of the white kitchen sink

proclaims that things go on and on
proceed move ahead quite quietly
the rippling path of moonlight
the spectacle of Atlantic waters
night's horizons reaching out

the hide-and-seek of speeding stars
the ever-optimistic nomad clouds
the climb and bloom of morning glories
the banalities of small shore birds
their delicate tracks erased
by the pink-pearl eraser of high tide
insist this just this is the miracle

toes in the sand

white gulls flying high
low tide arrives

as each wave dies
new ones come alive

our toes in the sand
our promised land

nothing

“nothing” is the place where
the heavy stone Time
lies flat on Duck pond's bottom
to be soon forgotten

looking up do you see
as if for first time ever
light years miles away
the sun how clever

you hear a psalm
an angel singing
throw away
bosses all fears of losses

throw away
the racing robot timer
throw away
the past and future

see how dust mote dances

through windows on limbs of trees
see how sun's falling lances
greet this day of days

and as you do now find You
for Mary Agnes and Edward and Timothy
'the Duck poems'
the outer banks
august 8 2020 – august 22 2020

tutu girl

Oh, Tutu girl, the mice, the mice are calling
From room to room, and on the screened-in porch.
The cheese is gone and all the crumbs all falling,
It's you, it's you from whom the mice must hide.

And they'll be caught in traps well peanut-buttered,
In hidden spots, in traps you cannot find.
I hope you catch a few and help erase them
And meow a "Thanks and thanks again. Amen."

But then in spring when sunshine warms all meadows
in mouse-mob droves they flee so joyfully outside.
And then and then with lonely feline longings
You'll pray for winter when they'll scurry home again.

And when the snows, the snows start lightly falling
I'll hear you catch plump mice in wintertime.
And as you bite their crunchy heads and tiny tails off
I'll dream of you and all the mice we left behind.
To be sung to the melody of *Danny Boy*

smoke rings

The Father taught me
how to blow smoke rings
to watch them drift and vanish

The Son taught me
the sun will rise like a wish
no matter how many liars lie

The Holy Ghosts taught me
to raise the blinds of unseeing eyes
as days disappear into years

a Trinity of reasons

to stanch the tears of sons and daughters
to know why the goldfinch sings

hay bales

one day
in the last gasp of July
massive brown corks
on a sea of emerald green
old yet glad and hale
under Van Gogh's sun
sudden on the run

then it was August one
they had gone away
without a trace
spent and leaving
their field alone
to dream while growing
a new round of them
hay bales

scared and scarred

is it odd or not
that scared and scarred
are just
a letter apart

what the kept country horses said

you spoiled city slickers fancy-pants riders
who hardly take a breath to smell the day
the sweet smell of decomposing hay

after putting us thru our jumps and paces
the smell of our sweat on your fancy saddles
slaves in our paddocks you ignored us

from paddock to stable to paddock to stable
galloping across your privileged galloping years
from ranch to roundup to ranch to roundup

until by loss of memory or wishing to forget
their feeble seconds minutes and hours are robbed
by some bandit in the night with a red bandana

and six guns blazing in vintage black and white
who steels your saddle silver spurs and reins

Old Hopalong will ride you all away in a cloud of dust

your last sun setting mirrored in your eyes:
“get along little doggies get along say farewell
to wide green pastures and new mown hay

spoiled days of lazing on the range without a clue
clip clop clip clop yippie k’eye yoh k’eye yay
oh yippie k’eye yoh k’eye yay clip clop clip clop”

signed respectfully your truthful best horse
your faithful ride your comrade your best self
all of us horses you never really knew

with a kiss

how we’ve grown old
my dear one
lifelong muse

rub sleep away
and welcome the day
the new sun’s gold

this i offer
always true to you
our life together

your eyes still blue
well knowing
good things come in twos

sometimes remembering
fine forum can keep us
from being swept away

some days

some days the heart's all in
some days the heart is not
Broadway doesn't fear a flop
'fail' leads to 'try again'
tell the black dog go to hell
pretend all is well

flame

spring follows springs

day follows days
same again same
the uncaged bird sings
i do not know his name
but each time i hear him
red red his song
i become his flame

watching a fire

the way the eager flames lick
the dry and seasoned wood
cut to fit the hearth's dimensions

it's not difficult to see in nature
there's no such thing as half intentions
her crackling flames snap and spark

fly up the ever-drawing funnel
of the all-creative all-destroying flue
hard burning oak and cedar not immune

to the flares of fragrant memories
the hypnotic blaze of half remembering
the fading shapes of long-lost faces

in an all-consuming conflagration
which leads to white-hot pulsing coals
warm cinders ashes then an unforgiving cold

art's purpose

outers what's inner
pricks the eye
to dream new dreams
dares the mind to fly
through the air
sticks the trick
on life's trapeze

river

the Hudson's alive and restless
the nervous chop of a thousand waves
their frantic shades of blue shifting
darker close to shore lighter out farther
vibrant being charged by the sun
pointing to something larger

buckwheat's prayer

though I walk through the valley
of the shadow of death
!feets! don't fail me now

hillbilly's prayer

i is glad that you and we
and i is what we is
and i is what we be

evil Sven

dagnabbit! Sven
mostly a good deer
unless he gets upset
and turns real nasty
usually a vegetarian
sometimes a contrarian
he orders a dish
of roasted rabbit
and human flesh
here we all squeal

Arachne

such was the beauty
her beauty
the beauty of her weaving
so proud-eloquent the perfidy of her
the words of her woven songs
that Athena consumed with jealousy
of her prowess on the loom
turned her into an eight-legged thing
added a poison sting to her weaving
even after labyrinths of silk flowed
forever out of her lines hard as cable steel
lines that time itself could not steal
nor turn into dust lines that do not rust or rot
stronger than Time's harsh weather
which man's forgetfulness could not heal
nor find in the maze armor chariot or spear

in the world of toads

in the world of toads
in their dictionary

no word for 'goads'
in their thesaurus
no word for 'stress'
hopping freely
across roads they own

their dreams are evergreen
they sleep the sweetest sleep
toad fact that's little known:
their biggest test
playing Pictionary
with fat forest fairies
and hairy gnomes

nostalgia

buffalo nickels
with indian head
bought piggy pink
bazooka bubblegum
bubbles big as basketballs
my mother cutting it out
of my sister's hair
all of us laughing
it always grew back
these days hurts to think

pity and terror

that old people and artists
have a heightened sense
of pity and terror
as the juvenile squirrel
plump at the height of summer
ignorant of cars struck down hard
denying his inability to right himself
flopping like a trout out of water
not from want of courage or heart
on instinct alone kick and fail
in the rearview mirror
watching him tumble center road
with each attempt to right himself
to get back to his old self
his squirrel-ness soon to be forgotten

half moon

half moon high above
half in the heart

something like art
something like love

little hidey

his cold nose shiny as patent leather
still as stone save each shy and nervous breath
he peeks out from the stolid shield of his mom
an engine block of a beast a complacent wall
she unconcerned head in a wooden feed bucket
he Oreo cookie of a calf (a belted Galloway)

gussied up in black-and-white formal wear
a little lord Fauntleroy enjoying the order of clear skies
he stands firm on a ground of dung mud and straw
half frozen ready to hide or bolt intensely staring out
more curious than frightened fearful none the less
as if deciding whether to be seen or not be seen

late-day rising moon lighting our visit as friend or foe
he intrigued by camera and sing-song voices
of two two-legged interlopers in the growling car
he hides behind his mother's massive rump
then reappears peek-a-book brave shows half of him
all mischief-eyed thinking "...can always disappear

behind mom...can't see them, hence they can't see me..."
convinced of his invisibility confident in looking out
it's as if he knows he'll soon be an alpha bull
when fearless he will take his stand to chew his hay
to bawl to bellow to shake the nurturing valley's calm
and quake the cold hills with the bold echo of his moos

THREE PRAYERS

A Bird Hunter's *Hail Mary*

HAIL to a sweet German wire-haired pointer named **MARY** bounding joyfully down the steep slope, across the dry, straw-yellow field to the estuary **FULL** as any of Van Gogh's landscapes haystack tones **OF** reaping resonance against a sky of slate-dark **GRACE** moving with such pure and joyful intention that even the downed mallard and its phosphorescent teal breast praised **THE LORD** the bay's water still at the instant after the kill shot and just before **IS WITH THEE** most delicately, with a finality, an animal sadness, taken into your soft mouth the bird's soft breast **BLESSED ART** in which the pointer trained as a **THOU** eager student rewarded **AMONG WOMEN** of the canine species and loving the hunter your master **AND BLESSED IS THE FRUIT** of his patience and love **OF THY WOMB** and yours for breeding strong litters of hunters like you have always been **JESUS** your friend and **HOLY MARY MOTHER OF GOD** your friend too we **PRAY** that your loyal eyes are sharp and your canine will remain undaunted **FOR US** whose duty is to love and reward your loyalty and skill as

we **SINNERS NOW AND AT THE HOUR** of that miracle moment when you return the kill **OF OUR DEATH** thankful you and all God's creatures innocent and wonderful, large and small **AMEN**.

A FISHERMAN'S *OUR FATHER*

OUR lure **FATHER** a jitterbug with a cream belly and a camouflage of black and green spots **WHICH** plopped like an audible period near a bloom of lily pads like the **ART** of an accurate flick of the wrist as words **IN** a prayer a glimpse into **HEAVEN** rings moving ever so silently outward **HALLOWED** surface then calm as meant to be **BE** in a kind of anticipation **THY** fishermen feel which has no **NAME** but is graceful as the Shakespearean **THY** and is full of anticipation as when **KINGDOM COME THY WILL BE DONE ON EARTH AS IT IS IN HEAVEN** the lure landing softly **GIVE US THIS DAY OUR DAILY BREAD** stirring the smallmouth bass below **AND FORGIVE US OUR TRESPASSES AS WE FORGIVE THOSE WHO TRESPASS AGAINST US** causing a school of them to look up **AND LEAD US NOT INTO TEMPTATION** and one five pounder to strike **AND DELIVER US FROM EVIL FOR THINE IS THE KINGDOM AND THE POWER AND THE GLORY FOR EVER AND EVER** and be taken and released by the boy, his heart pounding **AMEN**

A BIRDWATCHER'S *GLORY BE*

GLORY BE to all birds of all shapes and colors and **TO THE FATHER SON AND HOLY SPIRIT** as they take flight defy gravity bring beauty and honor to our eyes **AS IT WAS IN THE BEGINNING IS NOW** kindred spirits to our earthbound souls and **ever shall be** companions in grace of flight and sweetness of song **Amen**.

It

If Love
is not **It**
all else is shit

occupation: house fly

we don't seem to draw the same vicious ire
as mr. roach who explodes in cartoon grenades
in fire storms of doom blown to smithereens
shrieking "RAID!" a dunce that mr. roach
we flies so much more intelligent
live to regurgitate our meals for a second course
just like cows methodically chew their cud
half-digested tasting better twice than once

our resume is scurrilous and infinitely replayed
no shame in being born to lay eggs on the dead
our maggots proudly eating all the rotten parts
which is from time begun how we've survived
we flourish in early spring when pardon us
your screen-less windows invite our tribe inside
for a bit of sweet a crumb or drop of bacon grease

we breed ninety for each one of us you slay

whoever said of the moon...

whoever said of the moon
that she was the most elegant celestial host
of the birthday party of childhood

whoever said the black sky-pointing fingers
of the graceful trees and their complex filigree
of branches were above-ground roots drinking air
their master sun susceptible to every silly breeze

whoever said the moon was sky's cuticle
a clipped fingernail aspiring to a thin lemon slice
a born-again porcelain bowl on the potter's wheel of night
until sacrificed to the slick unformed clay of day

whoever said ugly is required for beauty to be
as Queen Luna knights new stars that illuminate
the highland tweed of clouds in procession
as her high whiteness shines in proud ascension

whoever dumbstruck from darkness of barn looking up
through open star-shafts in the old timbered roof
witness to palomino clouds in parade formation
whoever said the sky's a black cup on a dark shelf
a design broken and re-broken that reassembles itself

and is it not most peaceful when night gently strikes
like the baritone ringing of soft Kyoto temple bells
or the urgent calls of red wings in the marsh
how sweetly they rest beleath the red planet mars

whoever said of the waving limbs of the weaving trees
an elegant ballet of dusk to starlight the stage well set
their unflagging stubbornness means ever more
as we open the books of our dreams each night

whoever said of the darkest craters of the moon
that she won "best-of-show" bird in an ancient pageant
defying the plucked grouse of senility and old age
governess of all ruler of stars and heaven fire

december

new moon
shines bright

through apples trees'
black branches

we take our chances
soon soon

new snow
on the few
fallen apples
shines white

we take our chances
soon soon

January

the zipper tracks
of the snowy plover
swept away made older
by the janitor waves

the disappearing years
the ocean's tears
few things colder
come back come back

February

strange month stray month
renegade fickle short month
as a child i thought of you
as a month that was crying

as one caught in the net
of a nasty trickling season
freezing rain in your gutters
how to sort your truth from lying

the sound of a harsh wind at night
gray in your duvet of slush or snow
tell us what any fool knows
wet February you rush you go

warmer than late autumn
colder than December's freeze
i never place a bet
on your tomorrows

snowdrops

galanthus nivalis wake us
wearing spring green
and round white hats
early april's first flowers
your small white heads
seconds minutes hours
born young are meaningless
in spring first to rise up
long asleep now robust
fed by cold showers
to the faithful deer unseen
to the awake among us
bright petals of hope and trust
spring's fleeting opening song

channeling robert frost

when it's my turning
to go older or old
shaking or bold
that day to answer
"...fire or ice?"
i'll choose ice
knowing full well
that gently falling

asleep in the cold
as my teeth chatter
is a snowman better
than crisply burning
rare medium to well
in the fires of hell
leaving who to pay
the cremation bill

walk with dogs

the male had a hitch in his giddy-up
the female was a fetching bitch
a sweet duo playing October
in their yellow bands of the sun
stenciling browning fields and lawns
two pals crazed by the brisk of Fall
picking up on pungent musk of deer
scat scent of fox racoon possum

mouse deer coyote hobo cat
as they read the air their passion became mine
their shadows umber on field's celandine

the powder blue of the blackberry branch
the blown casements of the milkweed pods
the fine filaments of wolf spiders weaving webs
the yellow maple leaves against surreal skies
their bliss and canine happiness
true genius with every animal breath
then in operatic finale to old October
dying sun leaves on fire clouds riding high
just before migration miles to go
a monarch butterfly drunk with joy swung by
as if to say *adios* to us *adieu* to Autumn too
for Pierre, Hank and Haley

frogs

most people like frogs
their big eyes all agog
their webbed feet
their sticky tongues
snatch flies so sweet
as toasters toast toast
not very well hung
(frogs don't care)
flies despise frogs
neither say much

frogs 'ribbit!' unlike rabbits
warm and furry to the touch
rabbits and slippery frogs
these two little dastards
share two top habits
annoyed by disasters
when startled or scared
their shy souls bared
they quickly hop and spring
from sprang to sprung

Unsung Epitaphs

I

he never listened
no matter how often
she told and over told
she never stopped telling

so mired were they
that when old and gray
instead of storming away
he undismayed
unplugged his hearing aid

II

she made Hitler's goose step
look merely querulous
never questioned why
as she looked to the sky
bent on racial purity shrieked
"what temperature should
we set the ovens at?"
made all neo-Nazis jealous

III

to say he was angry
(his rage had no borders)
was as if apples in orchards
could nuke bakeries

IV

she was so haunted
and paranoid
she even wanted
all bees destroyed

V

her way to pray
chicken or egg
was a display of leg
anyone's lay

VI

people would say
over his shroud
good luck on judgment day

VII

he loved his stuff
his high-priced toys
nothing ever enough
he never knew
good from bumf

and never grew
from to man from boy

VIII

he always thought
he was always right
(though mostly wrong)
in this web caught
his favorite song:
I'd Rather Fight
than learn or be taught

IX

the phantoms of his fears
turned his hair white as snow
clouded his powers to stop or go
well before his end of years

X

day by day by day
it was the petty stuff
that made him insane
the chinese water torture
of ifs ands ors and buts
dunce-capped and cornered
paralyzed no idea of bold
he hoped and prayed
the happy rope would hold

XII

ubermench of cheap
a catholic kike
hoarded all sorts of dreck
saved the gas from a fart
would take a spike
through the heart
rather than tip a dime
all his cashed checks
in his golden coffin
buried with him

XIII

she never truly
gave it up
her mirror revealed
truth concealed:

cold tea
in a very cold cup

XIV

he liked to drink
like Einstein liked to think
he was very loud
as pigs proud of pink

XV

she liked men
like squirrels like nuts
or ashtrays butts

XVI

he liked women
like witches run covens

XVI

he liked eating more
than masochists like beatings
a glutton as in days of yore
mired in his royal table's gore

XVII

shuffled to a boring end
stultified bureaucrat
shrinking balls in a vice
paralyzed at every bend
warier than rats or mice
institution-brained
terrified to act
had no opinions
took no stand
gave no advice
worried which way
which winds blew where
a man unmanned
timid 'till the end
never hoped to dare

XVIII

fired
and killed
as in a kiln
like St. Lawrence

grilled

XIX

once successful
now an unseen beggar
an unwashed bum
of the homeless just another one
in rags always hungry
stank of piss and shit
to those on their busy way
unseen unheard unloved invisible
his exit made total sense
just another cold and angry day
no prayers no candles no incense
he knew the meaning of 'risible'

XXI

loudest mouth in any group
his voice was herculean
when they closed his coffin
last to die his mouth still talking
when they lit the cremator
the flames cackling and coughing
cried "burial's for peons"

XXII

he lived by the motto
"the difference between men
and boys is the price of their toys"

as the years piled up year on year
from his overstuffed garage and grottos

so obsessed in his quest for things
he never once could hear
how hauntingly the free bird sings

XXIII

he took bitterness for granted
saw tragedy as a fact of life
swallowed the daily toad of disgust
embraced failure as a loyal friend
lived every second as enchanted
left us smiling at the end

XXIV

whore hooker trollop floozy
harlot strumpet hussy
slut *la pute putain* or tart

her *modus operandi*:
clients pay more for candy
more and more for less

virtuoso mistress of the art
raised three kids college grads
alone and proud did what she did

XXV

blessed with talent and flair
did the very least he could do
managed to muddle through
never worked too hard
never truly dared

XXVI

she was unrecognized
her labors never known
will one day be canonized

abide

what else
for all of us
but a winding road

abide abide

heavens or hells
just a short ride
to trust or not to trust

abide abide

thinking of my youngest sister

thinking of my youngest sister
imagining her on a Jersey beach
watching horizon-bound dog walkers
fetching dogs padding idly by
gulls flying black against a retiring sky
all things defined by light as time unwinds

in mind's eye seeing her on the shore

our parents gone yet somehow near
past the over-reaching of it all
sea of past sea of now sea of future
souls' migrations on tides of souls
rivers Jordan valleys all must cross

sun diamonds on waves spark and flow
runners dogs gulls sandpipers
a janitor wind sweeping up the shore
a waking harvest moon begins to rise
night begins to close ocean's eyes
miles away holding hands i say hello
For Mary Agnes – Christmas 2019

the reassurance of cedar waxwings

they're back they're back from long ago
like the colors turning or last flowers of fall
year after year it's possible to almost forget
that brief reassuring thing so magnificent
their hungry flocks stopping for a brief snack
to fuel their journey back to another continent
drawn to the berries of the wild crabapple
(sometimes they get tipsy on overripe berries)
the trees stripped naked save some holdout leaves
apparitions unannounced feathered ornaments
singular the painter's palette they hold:
crested like their cousins the cardinals
rusty heads with white-lined racoon masks
their suede breasts tapering up to soft-rust crests

the yellow horizontal that ends their tails
black wings offset by 'sand' or 'powder of daffodil'
as they rest in exclamations mellow medleys all
triangles of Ferrari red just above tip of wing
the unprecedented softness of their breasts
their high-pitched whistles and buzzy trills
as autumn deepens one of autumn's gentle thrills
with rare predictability theirs a special clock
that keeps a kind of time that transcends time
before and beyond silly watches like yours or mine
(*bombycilla cedrorum*) known as passerines
they appear on cue priceless as feathered gold
and as the ornithologists and avid birders know
the toughest surviving to eight years two months old

last call

that great locomotive
by the swelling river
that all living must board
track one last call

the garage

uh oh! like a heavy snow
plastics metals toys tools mildew
stink of papers books and magazines
countered by the cleansing smell
of motor oil and gasoline
and up the stairs from the kitchen
the memory of burnt toast and bacon
all reveling in revealing what?

saved jumbles of childhoods' griefs
old laments for boring broken toys:
cast-lead soldiers (a sniper on his knees
headless dolls marines with flame throwers)
forgotten scraps affection's orphans
far removed from what's of interest now
as if on waking we're left with no recall
of why these things meant anything at all

The Garage of Dumb Such
stacks of stuff that mostly sucks
crammed with narratives and plots
forgotten things now just happy bits
shelved ignored liberated to dust and rust
a meaningless claustrophobic maze
husks of old must-haves yesterday's shit
freed at last from consuming all of it

wind bag's drivel

after more than forty years
your voice on the spectral phone
took on a skeletal tone
your voice an echo of whom?
voice of an imprisoned crone
Nazi koan of Daddy dear

googled earth map of your home
shows a dust-deviled bowl of a yard
dry rage of cacti envy-green specters
like the homeless stumbling year
you called at dawn Vegas time

birds not singing to you alone

fence needs repair dead trees wait
to be cut down no clue to life
in your voice i once thought I knew
whatever became of you
your fine face your mind your grace
what trace of splendor deserted you?

memory of your sad scar thanks to
your mother's Christ Science radiation
your picked thumb cuticle bleeding red
miser father's 'love' and name rhyme with dead
for sad us after all no little relief merely
a still-shared useless pill of grief
yours an emptiness a hole never filled

autumn

this new season
but one leaf torn
from an ancient book
we but many leaves
even the most literate
have yet to fully read
as sailing high above
one solo crow flies

his silent friends
the caravans of clouds
his wings singing
how batallions blazing
these autumn skies
as if reborn
his faint calls echo
mine all mine

pianissimo

pianissimo
purple loosestrife
early autumn aster
yellow goldenrod
black-eyed Susans
all abound
now fewer birds
do warble and sing
each dawn quieter

two birds heralding
end of yet another
gone summer's life
so fast the flying
that as time wheels by
in the mind of god
eternity does ring

the pumpkin

the pumpkin
that once sat proud
on our highest step
autumn orange
lit from within
beacon eyes and teeth
avatar of eerie nights
its bright toothy grin
outlived tricks and treats
outlived October's leaves
outlived the harvest moon

this ghost of Halloween
braved winter snows and sleet
in February soon will be
but a sallow memory
a waxen flattened sack
of mold and slimy seeds
its otherworldly skin
a sickly burst baloon
no turning back
no difference now
between its out and in

mixing metaphors

once in a while
it's god-good to add
to your warp or woof
a golden stich
when stacking words
like lacquered Chinese boxes
in full dress military file
to scratch that itch
on a stage that's rickety

even necessary
to pull an ostrich

out of a hat
or in gym sorts
wearing spats
a brightly colored bird
all jewelers beguiled
a diamond crocodile
like the word persnickety

skunks in moonlight

there there you all are
a mother with her kits in a column
at once shy yet bold in their disarray
black and white somehow solemn
fearless in the blue shadows of moonlight
caring not a jot for the judgments of others
by instinct full knowing it's not the sight
of you that frightens it's your scent
perfuming summer's fields and country roads
a reticent troupe a traveling circus

meek hobos quiet dominoes of the night
a motley crew big-to-small of 'troubadours'
leaving a crooked trail all in a queue
parting tall grass soaked in early morning dew
on every blade a diamond a tear drop
each holding a miniature crystal moon cut
by some invisible master of the craft
innocent gypsies you vanish through night's door
hordes of fireflies rising up from your narrow path
your moonstruck eyes hold the moon's white fire

I Mortician

now that i've joined my clients
Budhists Christians Muslims Jews
Catholics atheists agnostics all old news
the newly dead my only source of revenues

i'll miss them an undying profit center
their receding hairlines false teeth unseeing
eyes wide shut faces pale as powder puffs
their quietude waiting to be prettified

now nothing distinguishes me from them
can't suit them up for their final walk
(always wished that they could talk)
a casque worms i too an Amen like them an Amen

i miss embalming fluids tickling my nose
burning in the corners of my eyes
my joy in seeing clients all dressed up
good and ready for their last goodbyes

at end of day as my hearse drives away
the business of death undaunted still thrives
same as when I Mortician was once alive
and readied the dead for the great archive in the sky

saran and foil

whose dream
whose small wish
of man's inventions
among the least
yet these two distinguish
man from beast

REEL AMBULANCE OF DREAMS

June 14

A rabid land. Murders. Red in tooth and claw. Red rum. A murderous, apoplectic uprising of the genocidal underprivileged, 'lowest' classes. The Real People! The salt of the earth. Are out for blood revolution, lusting to gorge on the estates of the soon-to-be-powerless, already impotent privileged. Sheer terror. Ungoverned, unstoppable Strategic Chaos. Francisco Goya *Disasters of War* style, owning the streets. The astutely panicked wealthy, having turned a blind eye and been conspirators to power, fleeing to the country and, for the richest, other countries that could be bought.

As a journalist, covering the exodus, for a suburban tabloid (the kind always read but bought only by a few of the unlucky voyeuristic few at supermarket checkouts), accompanying a small group: two families, six adults (once the powerful elite), five children in all. We have taken shelter in a deserted mansion on an old Hudson valley estate. From the mansion's one watchtower we can see the rebels' boats landing, plumes of smoke of the two burning homes below, from a distance hear muted screams and the sharp staccato of AK17s and M16s. A nightmare within a dream infused with a nauseatingly deep sense of fear and physical dread; having heard of the torturing, the dismembering, the decapitations, their intent to mercilessly exterminate the ruling class and their spawn. The mansion looks down on a vast manicured lawn Hudson river-facing to a small creek which opens on to a manicured wood of century-old maples, oaks, azalea and lush stands of cedars.

They are coming. Will soon be upon us. Our only defense: collector handguns, civil war sabers taken down from the walls of the great room, some Ginsu knives and two pathetic pitchforks pulled in panic from the stable walls. It has begun. They are here.

Magically, unaccountably we are invisible. As they advance, we fire our pistols at them to no avail. Our swords and knives go through them but draw no blood. They are ransacking the mansion. Searching hungrily for us. Our fear is that whatever power keeps us from being seen will wear out, diminish and fail. Leaving us exposed and at the mercy of their sadistic whims. Our greatest fear, the fear that leaves us cold and shaking is knowing that we are living a nightmare. Buried in this awful dream. The smell of blood and cordite. A nightmare within a dream, a murderous horror from which we will not awake.

July 4

A ramshackle shack, a two-hour drive between Trench Town and Montego Bay, Jamaica. The flaking turquoise (cryptocrystalline) of the walls a mere echo of the brilliant turquoise of the bay. Pristine beaches, whiter than sea salt, curve out into the far-away. Far as the eye can see. Sun diamonds flashing on and off the waters, sweet antiphons to the leisurely parade of a bestiary of shapeshifting clouds. It's July 4, not celebrated in Jamaica, but a kind of independence day, none the less.

I'm the guest of one of Bob Marley's sons, introduced by a British friend who handled his father's marketing and public relations. For dinner there's fresh-caught lobster, red snapper, barracuda, Caribbean reef squid and conch, all cleaned, ready for the grill. The menu: a Jamaican bouillabaisse, conch fritters, grilled snapper.

Inside the shack: a large, round, hand-sanded table; chairs hand-crafted from driftwood, found roadside or reclaimed from shantytown dumps and scrapheaps. One wall is papered with faded color pages from old travel magazines. Two walls are bare. Driftwood gray. Unframed and tacked to the fourth wall, ocean facing (with large open window, no screen, no glass) are pages torn from outdated calendars: flower photographs, images of snow-capped mountains, three seascapes, a flock of white birds against a dark sky. In a rusted coffee can, a medley of Caribbean flowers: Bougainville, hibiscus, orchids and one lily.

An old fashioned, wood-fueled stove. One electric outlet. Powering an old, dented refrigerator, now cracked and peeling, painted long ago, a dull attempt at cobalt blue. The noise of the fridge is almost as loud as the sound of the incoming waves pounding the beach half a football field beyond the shack. In the fridge are two red onions, a few sad potatoes, a large mason jar filled with brown rice, two split coconuts, what looks like a grayish block of unwrapped lard, some wrinkled tomatoes and unidentifiable greens – parsley or other cooking herbs? This, I'm thinking, will be enough, more than enough. I pour a shot of rum from a line of unlabeled bottles on a makeshift bar. Trying to recall when I've ever felt so deeply and deliriously happy, I look forward to fully savoring, as guest chef, the pleasure of every aspect of preparing and serving our meal. Through the open window, soft bay breeze pushing the burlap curtains into the room, in the distance I can see a single, red-hulled trawler, gentle apostrophe, somehow owning the entire sea and sky.

August 7

A family camping trip (“...could only happen in a dream,” I think to myself in the dream). Northern Ontario, Algonquin Park. A flotilla of long war canoes, birchbark and Kevlar, twelve in all. Brothers, sisters, nephews, nieces, grand kids, moms and dads, grandpas and grandmas. From a bird’s eye view, a scraggly line, haltingly making its crooked way to Lake Manitou. Even my mother and father have miraculously completed the last and most difficult portage. (thinking again to myself in the dream, “...this could only happen in a dream...”) Happy, one, that they’ve come back to life. Two, they’re capably paddling their own canoe. And, three, as we approach the campsite, they’re in the lead.

Experiencing this unadulterated, astonishingly exhilarating sense of wonder, happiness and awe, I have to stop paddling to wipe the tears of joy from my eyes. Two loons, hunting for small trout, emerge from the lake depths, like large champagne bubbles, in the low-rising early morning sun, gold against the long black-saw silhouette of balsam and white pine forest on the shore’s horizon behind them.

We reach the big island, Bird Island, which, like an asymmetric birthday cake has a number of plateaus and rises affording ample room for all to pitch their tents with views over the entire bay looking out on a camouflage of islands against sparking blue waters playing out to the vanishing point.

Climbing to the highest point, a heavy knapsack on my back, tent in one hand, ax and bow saw in the other, sweating profusely, plagued by high-whining, very fat mosquitoes, I stop to catch my breath. In front of me extending a full twenty yards up the rocky path is a Magritte-like faux-fur throw, brown-bear dark, that, covers slick rocks and makes a strange carpet for an easier climb. More surreally, on either side of the throw, are the two gargantuan ears of fresh-shucked corn, canary-yellow kernels the size of baseballs. Each cob, each ear straight and long as the masts of a brigantine, that, like low bannisters border the throw. I’m thinking, “If we all decide to stay and live here till the big freeze comes, the kernels will dry out and make for amazing popcorn on those crisp nights by the fire in the Fall.”

Come end of day and dusk. A new moon rises over the serene waters of Manitou. A solitary loon serenades his mate and their chicks safe in their nest in the reed beds behind him. A light breeze brings us the calming offering of the fragrance of balsam and burning cedar.

August 10

A monumentally enclosed, worlds-fair-like space filled chock-a-block with art, antiques, furniture and, in some mysterious way, disenfranchised, deracinated, curiosities and collectables, fitfully orphaned oddities and bespoke one-offs discarded and dumped in near-boundless disarray in this bizarre bazaar the scale of Walmart’s largest parking lot. And, in spite of its weatherproof, industrial glass dome, even at midday, dark and darker. An hour-of-the-wolf refuge for sleeping wanderers occupying every chair, bed, couch, mattress, settee, table and very few open floor spaces in this Himalayas of arcane clutter. A dumping ground for forgotten things, human migrants, the homeless, itinerant rovers, the displaced, the uprooted, the despondent, the hopeful, the rich, the poor, the destitute, the clueless.

Looking up through the dirty glass dome at the scythe of a sickly moon and trove

of depressed clouds, I am gathering dirty pillows, comforters, cardboard for a makeshift bed and, at the same time, searching for an open space so I, delirious with exhaustion, can, at long last, sleep. Hopefully dreamlessly. Little more than a football field away I can see in the gloom the silhouettes of a few other sleep-starved souls like myself also feverishly searching. Just as I find a spot and begin to settle in, I see them, desperate for rest, slowly lurching toward me. I can almost smell their fetid breathing and feel the envy of their eyes on me as I drift off to a painfully fitful sleep. One eye half-open, on the way to plunging into deepest dreamland, I wonder what brought us here and why and what can the new day possibly bring. Even in my sleep I can hear, just barely, in the distance from the far side of this strange coliseum, the acapella voice of a lone troubadour singing a Mississippi John Hurt song— *Make Me A Pallet On Thy Floor* – in a haunting foreign tongue.

August 13

It's Thanksgiving. Little did we know then that it would be the last Thanksgiving our entire family would share together before my mother died. The holiday smells of roasting turkey, coleslaw, mashed potatoes, cinnamon candied yams, butter browning for the green beans fills every room of the smiling house. Other than my mother, who's cooking like one possessed, and tolerates neither interference nor any living being in her kitchen, we're all sitting in the living room sipping beverages of choice – sparkling cider, wine, Bloody Marys or Boilermakers patiently anticipating the big meal.

My mother summons me to the kitchen. She's wearing an apron with the grinning Campbell Soups kids stenciled on it. A promotional freebie: her reward for saving 27 months of mushroom and tomato soup can labels. She asks me to pour her a ginger ale, no ice. I go to the kitchen fridge and as I open the door a very large bottle of Diet Coke explodes and begins to flood the kitchen and gush out in waves (like those, I'm thinking, in Disney's *Sorcerer's Apprentice*) driving everyone outside to the backyard and the good company of old cedars and evergreen azaleas. Confounded and upset, I am furiously wondering why this has become my problem to solve and my problem only.

I don't know where my mother keeps the giant rolls of double-duty *Bounty Enormous Rolls* (two-ply, select A-size paper, 147 sheets per roll). Or, for that matter, a bucket to stem the tide of the still-flowing – how is this possible?! – seemingly endless flowing fountain of Diet Coke. I'm in charge of flood control and cleanup. My strategy: find a mop or the paper towels, or, failing that, bathroom towels (can do a laundry later), a bucket, stem the geyser, mop the soda and then, go back over it all with a Mr. Clean-soaked sponge and clean-water rinse. All this, hopefully, before the ever-alert, voracious ant colony gets wind of what's happened (a bona fide ant *lagniappe*). Through the storm windows, I hear the voice of my mother. In the backyard. Screaming as if there were no tomorrow. The turkey, oven roasting to perfection, biding its time, waits patiently to be devoured. To become us.

August 28

Friend in early stages of dementia hiking north with me to The Central Park Dream Gym and Fitness Center. Then, suddenly, we're in an old Model T driving against traffic on 5th Avenue. Then as suddenly going in the right direction but – why?! - not accelerating in traffic after the light change. I shout, "Step on it, already, Flat One (my friend's nickname)!" We arrive to find

our fitness coach holding forth on why children's toys make great workout aids. I have to pee. The guy next to my urinal is trying to keep me from peeing. On his muscular arm, a tattoo of the baby Jesus, the head of a baboon and a bleeding heart pierced by a sword. It quickly turns into a wrestling match on the floor of the men's room which is wet and slick and smelling of that stale urine smell in all Manhattan coin-operated telephone booths before they became extinct. Worse yet, asdfis the stench of his breath and his bloodshot eyes bulging out, as I strangle him.

August 31

Vertical climbing, no safety gear, a steep rockface. Violent vertigo when looking down. At top diving into Caribbean-turquoise tide pool. Holding breath, swimming down and down emerging into lap pool in a bowery garage specializing in stolen vehicles. There I buy a fresh-caught pompano, silver and black, yellow fins, red gills still pumping. Had them gut and scale it. Entrails on floor in puddles of drained motor oil flowing over nuts, bolts and rusted car parts. The proprietors guarantee a tasty, firm, white fish when grilled. Watching them wrap it in brown, waxed butcher's paper, was thinking how odd that a garage/chop shop should also be a fish monger.

September 3

The hairy, rabid zombie of the latest apocalypse was stark naked, spitting blood and a viscous sputum-yellow secretion that looked like butterscotch pudding. He was riding a giant phallus with razor hooves slicing the bodies of those in panic trying to exit the cavernous coliseum. Their decapitated, lollygagging heads, like multi-colored M&M's, were rolling in leisurely unison from the bleachers onto the playing field. From on high looking like so many commas, periods and colons. The fleeing event organizers had failed to shut down the sound system which was stuck on one line of the star-spangled banner.... And the land of the free and the land of the free and the land of the free and the land of the free....

September 5

A family get-together and party. Celebrating who knows what. Not at our Roselle, New Jersey home. But in the heart of a ramshackle community of huts with corrugated iron roofing know as 'The Mud.' Like the *favelas* of Rio de Janeiro. Taking my nephew, two years of age, oldest son of my middle sister for a harbor walk. Oil slicks; dead and mangy, skeletal cats; bent exhaust pipes; piles of used auto parts and rusted metal debris; all half-sunk and rocking in a polluted soup of a tide. Then to and through a labyrinth of Venice-like alleyways and cul-de-sacs with only a strip of blue and cloud above to offset a suffocating claustrophobia. No sun. He, not I, knows where we're going. Confident. Leading.

We come upon a gigantic circular canyon like those left by megaton bombs or asteroids in the remote deserts of the American west. Filled with crumpled hurricane fences, crushed cars and steaming bags of rotting garbage. Angry mobs of black-backed gulls screeching and wheeling overhead. The little guy is talking and talking. Non-stop. Shockingly coherent and for a two-year old about algorithms and sophisticated investment strategies. It's like he's speaking in tongues. "Take a breath already," I'm thinking. The only word recurring like a heartbeat that I understand in his fevered diatribe is "Commodities, commodities, commodities!"

Why, why am thinking to myself, "Armageddon, Apocalypse and Plastics"?

We find our way back to ‘The Mud.’ I say to his mother, “He’s a genius. How does he know this stuff?!” She says, “He reads *Barrons*, *The Kiplinger Report*, *Forbes* and *The Wall Street Journal* every day.”

Guests start to arrive. Among the first, a young couple with two gray-in-the-muzzle beagles, one shy and softly growling, the other all merry-go-lightly. My sister is afraid the shy one will bite. I assure her they’re both friendly. My nephew, unafraid, looks up and says with great enthusiasm, “Beagles!!” And, in the robotic voice of automated phone solicitations, continues: “The Beagle is a breed of small-sized scent hounds. Taxonomically named *Canis familiaris*; common name: beagle; phylum: *chordata*; class: *mammalia*; order: *carnivora*; family: *canidae*; genus: *canis*.” All the while smiling a slightly demented, beacon-like smile. As if he just learned he won the lottery.

September 10

Upper East side. Manhattan. Early evening. Late Fall. Smell of leaves’ tannin in the air. Walking down 80th street to the local pizza place. Hear a shuffle and what I recognize as dog toenails clicking on the sidewalk just behind me. Then a soft panting as a large female collie (native Scotland breed and diligent herder), dragging her leash, looking just like Lassie, determined to protect me, briefly sticks her nose in my groin and gently herds me away from the street and closer to an old brownstone’s stairwell. Clearly smiling. As all dogs do when they’re doing things they love to do. Meticulously groomed. Happiness incarnate. I pet her and pet her. We have a nice chat.

A pretty teenage girl walking toward us calls out her name, “Lassie! Here girl...here...” She smiles and says, “We were wondering where she went.”

I resume my pizza walk. As I turn to watch them walk away, I notice that Lassie’s neck (how I missed it when petting her?) is wrapped from chin to chest in a wide, leather strap. Waving good-bye the girl says, “She just had surgery. The strap keeps her from scratching the stitches. We hate those *lampshades!”

* also called Elizabethan collar, E-Collar, Buster collar, pet cone, cone of shame, dog saver, radar dish or, euphemistically, comfy collar.

September 10

Cocktail hour, preface to a super swank dinner, celebrating completion of a three-day strategy offsite (my fee: \$30k) I’m running for a private bank; CEO, CMO and 25 top producers with corporate portfolio of \$1.25 trillion. I’m responsible for the closing dinner. Weeks ago made reservations (one of the most sought-after spots in Manhattan – \$500 a person). I call to confirm. No record. Fully booked.

Before leaving for dinner, as happy hour merrily snowballs to happiest hour, I’m online, sickness in pit of stomach churning with paranoia, frantically trying to find a new venue. Realizing full well no matter how great the place, dinner will be served to disappointed, even resentful clients.

I picture them, heavy hitters all, obsessively (arrogantly?) checking their \$50,000+ timepieces: a collector's gallery of *Patek Phillipe*, *Vacheron Constantin*, *Cartier*, *Audemars Piguet*, *A. Langhe & Sohne* - that ilk. Dreading that a very successful engagement will be ruined by an anemic close. Even worse, that the new spot, a four-star 'substitute,' can, instead of 6:30, only do an 8:30 seating. Of course, our entitled clients will be well served and fed. The condescending maître d' in that often-used Phone Tone, says, "No tables 'till then, sorry, sir. But they're more than welcome to sit at the bar." A wound no quantities of alcohol can staunch.

September 12

Training for a marathon, running through 1970s Harlem. People on stoops. Stevie Wonder blasting from a boom box. Smell of marijuana and grilling burgers. Early rappers on folding chairs and milkcrates drinking their 40s outside bodegas. White pit bull off leash padding toward me. Friendly? Relieved, he is. I pick up the pace.

After run, in central park sitting around a picnic table with the Puerto Rican family of a friend of mine. Celebrating Puerto Rican Day. After the parade. After, their barbecue, we're all having flan de queso made with condensed milk and coconut milk. Puts crème brûlée to shame.

At the table, like small people, are two whippets (each have their own bowl of flan de queso) sitting politely except for their muzzles, noses, brows and chins covered with it. I'm thinking: One – didn't know whippets liked desert, and, two, lucky for them they're rescue whippets, spared the ASPCA. (at 2 a.m., once, coming home from a long flight back from Shanghai, saw a shovel-loader dumping the limp bodies of cats and dogs into large garbage bins). And, three, with all that racing in their past. They act like they know they were spared.

September 15

Board meeting at the Neiman Marcus headquarters in Dallas. Attended only by fashion luminaries including Stanley Marcus and Ira Neimark who back from the dead returned to discuss future trends and marketing strategies. Among the living, the top executive team, their ad and PR agencies, two futurists and me facilitating.

To inspire creativity, everyone had to wear sweat suits or pajamas. To break the ice, each guest was paired with a young orangutan or chimpanzee to care for. First two hours of the morning dedicated to a finger painting contest. First prize: lifetime admission for family and friends to the Fort Worth Zoo which included visitation and petting privileges with the only pygmy chimps in captivity in North America.

September 15

Weird, sinister weird. Sometimes what goes around actually comes around. In the dream I knew the dream I was in was about closure, about my life awake (?) at the

New York Stock Exchange, June 1982 to November 1987.

Other than the Ontario Ministry of Education, where I worked as speech writer for the Minister of 'Education' (sic). This, these memories, in the dream and awake, burdens I knew I was carrying for too long. Both rats' nests of the most kiss-ass politics and tattle-tale, sycophant-ism imaginable. Ruled by a chairman, prone to public, apoplectic rages, whose father was a marine and beat him, his son, like a desperate-to-please dog, to a troubled, resentful success. Hired bullies who replayed his own script. The entire organization fell into line, shut up mostly, kowtowed and silently worked around it, Him. This the sub-text.

In the dream I was in control. Top management of The NYSE, sensing the demise of the specialist system driven by new technology, needed help and called on me. The stock exchange floor, once a roaring bustle and hustle traffic jam of bodies trading, confirming trades, was soon to be a ghost town. An empty edifice with an American flag covering its Broad Street wall. Lit bright at night. Stars and stripes forever.

I was now, confidently, a consultant engaged by the same viper I used to work for who had been re-hired in a last-ditch attempt to save a dinosaur, already dead, not knowing it had stopped breathing and was a fossil. A monstrous, disease bearing tsetse fly in trapped amber. Preserved like an infecting botulism, a poisonous jam.

I was running the resurrection meeting. Could name my price. Facing them in the historic, since 1792, luxurious boardroom, told them no price would do. I was not, ever again, their man, but a mere spectator, enjoying the sickle-wielding of Father Time's execution of a brutal, Wall Street monopoly, what goes around comes around karmic cycle. A long-overdue cycle of bullying arrogance and bureaucratic insolence, the complicit media didn't see. Or, powerless, governed by powers that be, went unreporting, buried, dark as the empty executive offices in the early Autumn after daylight saving, which used to shine bright until the wee hours. Run now by some company with a techno name based in Atlanta.

Thinking about this, standing before the desperate executive team, experiencing a sense of beautiful calm. Waking, resisted, tried to resist waking, resisting waking up, I felt a once-in-a-lifetime, rarest sense of just closure and exhilaration. In the dream and, wide awake, eyes wide open, now writing this

September 22

Underground, London. Realizing at the bottom of an endless escalator that I've left my briefcase at the top main floor of the station. Going upstairs hoping it will still be there. It's not. Gone. With all my credit cards, license, passport and important papers. Late for a business meeting. Coming back down the escalator knowing not only will I be late but will have to wing it with the client's top executive team. Major delays. Rather than wait I decide to walk the tracks to the next station. In front of me the light of the station ahead, several football fields away and through the dense tunnel of dark behind me seeing light of an oncoming train.

The fetid, damp dirt stink and smell of steel on steel and filthy wet near suffocating, as I, trying to avoid being crushed by the oncoming train, climb up a small mountain of piles of crushed metal and auto parts. I get to the top of sliding, smelly hills of soot, oily and rotting debros, looking down on a barren cityscape and smoking slums. at the top, in the putrid mix are congregations of whores taking cigarette breaks between ever-eager Johns. Saying nothing. Staring blankly. Sliding down the hill and back into the tunnel, finally getting to station and then waiting, waiting for a train that doesn't arrive. Gangs of hoodlums, mugging people, taking their wallets computers and watches, kicking even the terrified children.

Wind up at the men's department a Bergdorf Goodman in the company of a bunch of arrogant salesmen, all better dressed than their clueless clients.

Realizing I needed pick up a winter coat that I had put on hold, was approached by a salesman who disdainfully told me they sold my coat – a three quarter length number with embroidered by old Italian seamstresses with vines and blooming wisteria. One of a kind. And when a seventy year old member of a British rock band had to have it, sold it for three times the price I had paid. Furious I say I know the president and Mr. Stanley (Stanley Marcus) himself. And that I'm going to complain and he is going to lose his job. He says retail doesn't work that way anymore. They're all dead. But we have a beautiful, full length herringbone which will fit you perfectly and now full length is back in style.

September 23

Plane crash in northern British Columbia. Salt water, islands extending far as the eye can see . All survive. Soaked and near hypothermic from the swim to shore. Watching plane sink into dark waters. The travelers spread out to explore what seen from the falling plane was a large forested island with great cliffs dropping down to rocky shoreline. An autumn storm on The horizon dark clouds forecasting freezing rain or even snow. The priorities: Finding shelter And getting a fire going. Wondering if anyone had a lighter or Pocket knife and whether bent pin and something bright would catch us a trout Or two. Where oh where fresh water if any on this island and what animals and plants To gather, hunt and eat The feeling of dread that comes dfrom knowing the forest cover was so Dense that rescue planes would not likely not see us while searching the forest floor for deer or rabbit scat edible mushrooms wondering if there were animals how we'd trap or kill them overcome by a deep sense of dread bordering on despair, a rock temple total cover from the elements room to sleep and for a courageous fire. And then and then... walking to the shore seeing the fins of orcas hunting silver salmon in the bay and on the fine sand shore a bottle washes up – an antique corked green bottle with a message – plane gone down little fresh water no food help us please help us and then a longitude and latitude that was exactly the same as ours

September 27

There they were. Playing on the floor of our playroom. A scrum and scramble of them, all around us. Small, scurrying, black and white, furry leaves. A rolling, rumped, wrestling pride of them. Mewling, purring, unashamed embodiments of Disney's most finely observed, furiously CUTE. Chip and dale times eight. Kittens. Full of beans. Or whatever it is they're full

of that animates their essential kittenness. And he, though in life the runt of the litter, now king-size. Pink paw pads, pink barometer nose. Cloud white, short haired, a toupee of black, black tail, one large black marking on his back that looked rhymingly like a curled-up cat. Tippy.

He, in the dream, the size of a bobcat. Paws as large as my hands, stretching out. Totally relaxed. Claws like talons. Upside down, happy in my lap. Stretching out and reaching gently down to nudge one or two of the most rambunctious rascals or break up a hissing duo or crash pile of three or four. He, larger than life, purring a sonic-boom purr. Returned to me in the dream, my dream, this dream I had last night.

The sweet prodigal returned. As if saying to me. As Bob Marley, in *Three Little Birds* sang: “Don’t worry about a thing. ‘Cause every little thing gonna be alright. Singing, Don’t worry ‘cause every little thing gonna be alright. Rise up this morning. Smile with the rising sun. Three little birds perch inside my doorstep. Singing sweet songs. And a melody pure and true. Saying, This is my message to you-ou-ou. Singing, Don’t worry, about a thing, worry about nothing, ‘cause every little thing is gonna be alright. Singing, don’t worry about a thing...”

October 4

Visiting a friend who’s invited me to an afternoon’s traditional British tea. Just the two of us and her twin daughters. At either end of the dining room are two toilets which her daughters have used and failed to flush. Nauseated, as the smells of Twinings Earl Gray, just-baked scones mingle with the twins’ doings, I get up to flush the two toilets. In each are Guinness world-record-breaking turds. Of a width and length inconceivably disproportionate to the age and size of the diminutive twins. I say to their mother as I flush the second toilet, “What in God’s holy name are you feeding them?!”

October 8

Seminary classroom, one of several classrooms on both sides of a long corridor. A strategy session. My business partner, totally bored and disengaged, is sleeping. Head on desktop. An unidentified woman also asleep. Our Arab Emirates partner holding forth on someone named Gibson. Not Gibbons of *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* fame. But Gibbon (bigbobgibbon.com) of barbecue fame. Frustrated. Partner’s rant going nowhere. I realize the strategy session was a terrible idea and going nowhere fast. I step out into the corridor.

Surprised to find myself completely naked, I’m sitting on the floor, peeling away a crusty lace of dead skin in strips from my arms and legs. The aftermath of an eczema episode. My skin is a mottled, dark and light, albino white and milk chocolate dark, a condition known as vitiligo. I’m repulsed, having googled it, knowing it cannot be cured.

The walls of the corridor are completely covered from floor to ceiling with stencils of strange calligraphies and African tribal masks. Taped with blue masking tape. Workmen wearing astronaut-like space suits and oxygen masks are spraying the walls with toxic paint. A thick fog bank of it is rapidly filling the corridor making it impossible to see anything. I’m making my way up the stairs to the next floor hoping to find an exit. And air. And light. The stairs and the

railings are all covered in brown wrapping paper making it impossible to run without slipping and falling.

The toxic fog is gaining on me. Now totally engulfing me. I can not breath. I cannot see. I'm desperately feeling my way up the stairs looking for any way out. A window. A door. Another corridor. Another room. Worse yet, to my horror, behind me and getting closer I hear the sounds of a battle, the ringing of medieval broad swords and battle-axes. Hand to hand combat. The soft thuds of severed limbs. The garden-hose hiss slashed carotids. The shrieks and groans of men killing, maiming and being killed and maimed. Totally blind now, and, suffocating, I realize there's no way out.

October 11

Canoe and trout fishing trip. Pristine camp. Tall pines, smell of cedar in the warm breeze, a golden light casting long shadows on the carpet of pine needles that is the forest floor and on the calm lake waters sparkling closest to shore. Everything set, all in order, anticipating dusk and pitch dark: tent up, air mattresses and bags, firewood stacked near the circular stone campfire ready to be lit with a strike anywhere match. That snug feeling of all being ordered, all is well, deep within this remote part of the world, far away from the 'civilized' world. A kid of simple order. The kind of order that lives on eternally in a happy biosphere with no concern for man.

Paddling out to a far peninsula, a mile or so away, with the idea that I can fish the shore at dusk for big, hard-fighting smallmouth before losing daylight. Something about the light at close of day. Light like how drug lord film characters talk about the experience of heroin: "...take the best orgasm and multiply it by a thousand." That kind of light. A light that you wish you could bottle and hold close for dark days.

Many casts. No takers. The injured minnow action of the lure failing to inspire. Thin moon rising, a lemon slice in the tea-colored waters of Beggar Lake. Heading back. Quarter mile to go. Twenty minutes or so, max. Canoe begins to rapidly take on water. I attempt to bail with my hands. No good. I've lost both canoe paddles. Watch them drifting away. Move to bow of canoe. Butterfly stroking my sinking way to shore. Hoping I can turn the canoe over, get rid of the water and make it back to camp before the canoe fills up again. The unacceptable alternative being a hypothermic night without a fire and no shelter. And, it's clouding over. A raw rain on the way.

I make it to the shallows. Get the canoe on shore, tip it and find a hole the size of a golf ball caused by who knows what. I make a stopgap compress, a mesh of grass and fresh balsam sap hoping it will hold. Having lost both paddles, I realize I've also lost rod, reel and box with lures and fishing gear. My cellphone is soaked but magically still working. I get a text message from my corporate client saying our wilderness offsite (in planning and eagerly anticipated for a full year) has been canceled. Am expected back tomorrow. Important. They're re-evaluating our consulting contract. Sixty percent of my business.

Then, gut punch, there's that sinking, hollow feeling of things rarely turning out as expected, hoped for. And, more troubling, how will I make the six-hour paddle back without paddles and a canoe with a hole in it. In a state, half joy, in reaching the site, half misery. A tornado of gnats at water's edge roiling and rolling back lit by sun in the dim lake light. And, why now, why, I wonder, recalling the words of an old gospel song: "...where shall I be when the first trumpet sounds, where shall I be when it sounds so loud, it sounds so loud, that it wakes up the dead, where shall I be when it sounds?"

October 18

I've hired a translator to transcribe a love poem written in Italian and given to me by my wife for our fortieth anniversary. About how much she loves me. Strange, since I thought she had no interest in literature and less in writing. No judgment here. I know nothing about home design and styling. Her expertise. No idea she knew Italian. How, after forty years could I have missed this.

To my astonishment, shock and delight, it's a wonderful, touching poem. Think Elizabeth Barrett Browning's Sonnet 43 "*How do I Love Thee.*" Go figure. Turns out she typed it on an old Remington typewriter on a pristine white sheet of highest quality bond, Southworth 20 pound 100 brightness. Who could have imagined it: a simple sheet of top-of-the-line paper (like butter), a beautiful object in itself. Where, seeing the texture of each letter typewriter-struck, leaving a chiseled imprint on the paper is a phenomenon we (of a certain age) all took for granted. This now extinct. A rarity. A sculpture. A beautiful anachronism. As I watch the translator transcribe the poem on his computer, everything shifts into slow motion. My vision worsens and each phrase, then each letter takes longer and longer to decipher. His fingers appear to be retarded (can this word be used anymore) and are stumbling over the laptop keyboard. I feel like I'm going blind. Losing my motor functions. The paper on which the poem is type-written is slowly turning into an illuminated flat screen. What was once paper is now an eerily glowing screen. As its halo of light illuminates the dark room, the text of the poem vanishes.

I'm overcome with the saddest feeling of relentless loss and terrifying powerlessness. Knowing full well it was one of a kind. A one and only. That there is no going back. No possible way to recover this rare gift of heartfelt intent. And !?WHY!?! in the dream I ask myself before waking. Still in the dream, I find myself standing on the corner of 56th and 6th in Manhattan looking up at Robert Indiana's sculpture: LOVE. Formerly known as "love red blue."

October 19

After a low-ceilinged tunnel walk. Claustrophobic catacombs lined with the skulls and skeletons of thousands. Opening out unto to a Great Room. Vast amphitheater. Easily holding three rock-concert stadiums. A small city. A two-storied Louvre-like metropolis of a gallery with vast, arching cathedral ceilings and long, winding valley-like bone-white corridors stretching our far as the human eye can accommodate. Winding out almost endlessly. Like a great Mediterranean vista.

Huge paintings and murals line the walls. Like those by the great Mexican muralists. Diego Rivera, Clemente Orozco, David Alfaro Siqueiros. Or Turner, Miro, Picasso, Pollock, Schnabel.

Some abstract. Some hyper-realistic. Landscapes, seascapes, battle scenes, monumental abstracts like those by Motherwell, Newman, Still, the great Chinese scroll painters. Sculpture after sculpture like Michael Angelo's *David* or Richard Serra's steel labyrinths, *Titled Arc*.

Feeling dwarfed, overwhelmed by the epic power of the space. What the hand of man has wrought in the pride of his eye. Overwhelmed and lost at the same time. As one would be by the first encounter with any of the world's great museums. But this place, this metropolis dwarfs them all. Overwhelmed by the impossibility, the futility of taking it all in, I stumble into yet another vast gallery. Lifted in every detail from the African Congo or Amazonian rain forests, is a lakeside jungle, a vast expanse of green with towering waterfalls and running streams.

Lakeside see an old man in an ornately carved throne looking out on jungle congregations of exotic animals, reptiles and birds all living in harmony. An ark of predators and prey. Lion and lamb, cobra and camel bobcat and hare, eagle and squirrel. In complete equipoise. Astonished, I begin to speak. He motions me silent. As he does, I see a crocodile and water moccasin swimming ominously toward us. Sun rays shining down on his grizzled face and this Edenic scene, he says, "Don't worry. Be at peace with the peace of all of this. A peace you will never experience until after you die. We all shall overcome." And then in a haunting baritone he chants from a book with a golden cover: "And the lion and the lamb shall lie down together. And every man shall sit under his own vine and fig tree. And none shall be afraid."

October 20,

The barber who used to cut my hair speeding on the East side highway jams on his breaks to narrowly miss a motor boat which has jumped the banks of the Hudson and landed in front of his Bentley hitting but not killing a squirrel which stunned makes its way across the road heading straight for his usual spot near Bethesda Fountain in Central Park where he knows tourists to be particularly generous in their peanut handouts and while shelling one happens to sit on a lost cell phone causing it to loudly ring a number that doesn't pick up startling a father and his two identical twin daughters (straight out of Diane Arbus) as they pass the bronze sculpture of Alice in Wonderland and her kitten on their way to the Metropolitan Museum of Art to see *The Moon in the Age of Photography*.

October 21

In an open gymnasium. No bleachers. Great glass dome casting beams of sunlight down onto two desks, two armchairs side by side in the center of the gleaming space. A young intern brings coffee and a cherry crumble tart on a plaid napkin. He puts the coffee on the one arm of the chairs and the tart on the other. We're making a major pitch for a multi-million dollar account.

The intern bumps me and shifting in my seat I knock the coffee onto the chair soaking my suit jacket, shirt and pants. My business partner starts swearing at the intern who takes the tart, wraps it in a napkin and throws it with quarterback accuracy, a Hail Mary pass if ever there was one, into a waste paper basket at the far end of the gym. Now I'm also swearing at the intern, demanding that he bring the tart back.

He refuses. I cross the gym, get the tart and tell the intern to bring another coffee. He refuses. "My father's your biggest client." he blurts. "I'm telling him to pull his business. You'll be

ruined.” It’s then I realize that the intern’s father and entire management team are watching this from the bleachers. Ominously silent.

My suit is soaked. We have another important business meeting later. I have no change of clothes. On our way out, the security guards refuse to give us our cell phones back. They’re insisting on keeping our wallets and shoes. I’m still hanging on to the coffee-soaked tart. My partners says, “This is gonna be a very expensive tart. You’d better enjoy it.”

October 23

In a suffocatingly hot underground prison. Hundreds of sleeping bodies side by side, enfolded in the stink of urine and excrement. Hardly room to turn around. Landlocked galley slaves. At the end of the long, dungeon-like room, moonlight falling in smokey blue bars on the sweating, naked bodies of the prisoners. In each of the four corners of the room are four, ornately carved tables, butcher blocks, twenty-by-forty feet, the legs of which are mahogany eagles. Dominating the space is a totem of The Empress, an enraged female cyclops, human heads for her belt, and headless bodies for her robes. The tables each have six holes which allow guards on platforms below to present the heads of six squirming prisoners through the holes to two executioners above, one with an ax and one with a sledge hammer, who systematically decapitate or crush the skulls of the sacrificial victims. This accompanied by the thunderous blasting of huge trumpet-like Tibetan kanglings and the incessant drumming of massive ceremonial drums. The heads pile up in bloody pyramids. The horrified prisoners await their turns. A single temple gong rings out for every kill. If a single blow of the ax or sledge fails to separate the head from the body below, heavily-tattooed strongmen dwarfs armed with swordlike scalpels complete the job. I am one of the prisoners in the center of the room, one of the ?lucky? ones that will be among the last to be chosen. Isn’t it better to be among the first? Is there no way to halt the carnage? The victims all have no choice but to meet their ends silently; their tongues having been severed before their executions. The rolling of their despairing eyes says it all. The same way the slaughtered ox anticipating the stun gun to the brain knows his time has come.

October 26

Big auditorium. People square dancing. In one corner of the crowded music hall, a drunk is peeing against the wall. No one seems to notice or care as the cadmium-yellow stream slowly gravitates to the center of the room.

I alone recognize the drunk as The Container Killer (leaves the body parts in empty gallon milk containers). I knock him out with a baseball bat, tape his mouth shut, put a hood over his head and start dragging him outside. It’s as if I’m invisible. No one seems to notice or care. They all keep dancing. I’m outside now. It’s starting to rain. I dump him into the trunk of my car.

Lakeside picnic table. With cleaver, hack saw and ax, I’m dismembering him. Feeling nothing but sheer goodness. Totally justified. Self-righteous, even. Could just as well be dicing carrots or cubing chicken. I’m throwing his assortment of pieces into the lake, watching most of them sink, feeling goodness knowing I’m doing my part to rid the world of murdering invaders, genocidal maniacs, raping weirdos like this mental mutant. I’m stemming a rising tide. And this is not my first time. But no one must know.

Schools of happy little fish are rising and nibbling at his floating bits as I clean the table with my supply of *Brawny Paper Towels*. My confident choice for large clean ups, big messes and spills. I know they're built to customize my clean. [Brawny® Paper Towels - To Handle Large Clean Ups](#)

It's getting lighter now. Except for the ever-widening, concentric circles of the occasional rain drop the lake is completely calm. The white and gray of a single gull above is reflected in the surface not far offshore.

November 1

In a rented bungalow on Lake Simcoe, Ontario. Side by side a series of bungalows in various stages of repair right at water's edge. Inside each a few small rooms, small kitchen with folding chairs and rickety card table 50s style. Oddly-shaped paintings, no squares rectangles, only rounds, ellipses sharp-cut curves as if cut with aid of a protractor. All painted in acrylic: A man looking over a prison wall capped in razor wire; a magnification of the pupa of a butterfly; a howling baby in diapers spitting up on cheering crowds of people at a circus parade; a poorly rendered smallmouth bass hitting a jitterbug exploding the surface of a pond. All painted by the same local artist, who apparently has been hired to do more work. He's here now. Walks into the kitchen, like he owns the place, carrying a leaking bucket of dirty water, some brushes and several large canvasses. He begins hurling handfuls of red, white and blue paint on the canvasses. Then throwing red, white and blue paint on the walls, the floors and the furniture. Then with his index finger he's inscribing primitive bird forms on everything.

Horrified, I'm thinking the owners will be back soon. Holding me responsible. I can't afford to pay for the damages. I run for my car. I can't find the keys. They know how to find me. The painter is howling, singing and laughing maniacally. I can't get away fast enough. I'm running down the deserted gravel road. No moon. It's so dark, pitch dark, you can hardly see your hand in front of your face and the tops of the trees and the stars. Roadside the elder berries are in bloom. Their flowers tiny and ghostly. I'm thinking, "Everything will work out. Everything will be all right. At least it's not oil paint."

November 17

I was driving down the Taconic from upstate New York through a blizzard to see my mother and father who, to my astonishment, were, in the dream, still living at our childhood home 143 West 8th Avenue in Roselle, New Jersey. I couldn't wait to see them.

Close to home now. The snow had turned to freezing rain. Barreling down Locust Street, slick with slush and black ice. Barely made the turn skidding and spinning down Eighth Avenue almost to Chestnut Street. Then sliding and skidding back to a white-knuckle stop. Someone had cleared a path in two feet of snow from front porch to sidewalk to driveway with just enough room for a car. It was getting dark. The porch lights shone brightly on the red porch and the large black and white antique jug that they had acquired, and, who knows why, were so fond of. A cap of snow on its massive cork giving it the appearance of a pin-headed, pot-bellied lawn troll.

We went upstairs. The landing, the stairs, the banisters, all the bedrooms and bathroom were painted in fuchsia purple and a nasty psychedelic day-glow orange. To add insult to injury the painters insisted on stencils of Casper The Friendly Ghost and Daisy The Cow on all the walls. As a finishing touch, they covered the eighteen-inch, plaster-of-paris bust of Jesus crowned with thorns (the words THY WILL BE DONE at the base) all in gold leaf.

This was what the nuns and priests prayed for. Exactly this. I was desperate to get back to the country. As I was leaving. My father said, "We think this will really add to the retail value." And my mother, "I really hope you like it."

I kissed them goodbye. Bumper to bumper traffic. From the turnpike, in the distance, against the backdrop of Manhattan skyscrapers, you could see snowblowers and immense plumes of snow flying in every direction. The next day when I checked my messages, friends who lived in New Jersey said, "Last night driving home in the blizzard we recognized your car. We beeped and beeped. But you didn't hear us."

Strangest of all. The next day I realized my mother and father were the same ages as I was. When I was with them, I never noticed.

haiku walking III

three ketchup bottles
in the refrigerator
each almost empty

four hard-boiled eggs
smooth jigsaw-puzzle shells
on a cutting board

half remembering
the many things gone before
less pain free than more

now black-eyed susans
tiger lilies abounding
their oranges roaring

roadside chicory
the eyes of my first love blue
as chicory rays

the broken windows
washed by the sudden downpour
like ice in July

sun's in the treetops

chain sawing the downed limbs
raking the sawdust

cruel persecution
to be ghetto/third-world born
whose child sheltered

was this a lie
or unfolding painful truth
truest form of love

since Adam and Eve
the need to feel *not* guilty
the compass of pain

i can smell a bluff
like hot dog awaits mustard
anticipating

to shoulder the dream
with no hope of any gain
vision and honor

an eye for an eye
blood flows as the days the sun
how centuries run

McLuhan was right
but he couldn't hold his own
with Yeats Frost or Pound

the critic's mirror
his own face his serpent's eyes
safer from on high r

accidents happen
powerful source of progress
for those who say *!yes!*

walking down the road
best if you keep on marching
to your own drumbeat

never been shot at

never feared it as a kid
as some poor kids did

some things cost a lot
art is useless on purpose
that's why the rich pay

avoid the ego
the trap of self-expression
make a new meaning

Charles Bukowski said
anyone can be sober
takes strength to stay drunk

all writers must have
a machine gun in their hearts
to keep firing

to see is to feel
one must paint the loneliness
that lives in landscapes

to create without fear
the action of mind to hand
requires courage

shaped like a meatloaf
a cat dreaming on a rug
dreaming of meatloaf

heart-breaking beauty
will live on and long after
no more hearts to break

style is the mind skiing
down the mountain of its dreams
its own gravity

with a light snowfall
the truth of things can be changed
so too opinions

anger and righteousness
true barometers that tell

how liars hide lies

hurl your shibboleths
your wise saws against closed doors
which open when clawed

books' natural friends
a most holy trinity of
reader eye and mind

the oyster-gray fog
appears to disappear
ghosts of silent trees

love sex death and time
we repress mortality
wanting to live blind

PICTURES OF CATS

puddy tummy down

once we let you roll us over,
or once we present you with our precious underside,
it means we're friends for life, fast and true,
not token buddies or polite, passing acquaintances,
but ancient soul pals through and through
sharing our vulnerability is our ultimate token of love.
so once we let you roll us over.
or once we present you with our precious underside,
you'll see to your exclamation and delight
our secret best kept from mostly all,
save those who've seen the puddy tummy down light:
our luxurious puddy underbellies
and the little known, less exploded joys of puddy tummy down.
totally ignored! in all cat books and vast literature of our species!
how come this our most precious phenomenon
did not sooner come into its own and our renown?
no one's figured it out.

it's just not on the radar screen
of cat lovers and cat loving kings, princes, princesses or queens.
but once you've seen and felt us,

you'll want to twist and shout!
you'll sweetly join the cognoscenti and enlightened.
one touch, one pet, one stroke,
and you're a convert for life, no joke,
to the inestimable, exquisite joys of puddy tummy down.
soft now we know plato's essential soft.
the quintessential soft for softies.
of all softs the softest.
softer, yes, softer than to name a few,
the soft stencil of winter's first snowflake
on your favorite black wool sweater,
the soft green of willow leaf on calm dark stream,
the soft of first light of venus before dawn,
the soft smell of cedar in cedar woods,
the soft of gabardine sliding across a polished church pew,
the soft of silver minnows dimpling shallows in an adirondack lake.

you get our drift. we're real soft, real real soft.
soft, so soft you'll say or maybe softly squeal, "oh! oh! oh!"
more variously colored, more finely and subtle hued,
more 'tops' in texture than our topsides,
bold in pattern yet pleasingly subdued,
perhaps because our flip side gets less wear and tear,
perhaps because we choose to show it less,
or generally are modest
and avoid the whole intimacy mess,
with all but friends who've passed our test.
when it comes to puddy tummy down
our displays of gentility and surrender are surely rare.
and since we so seldom and never too freely reveal
our glorious uproarious, sensual adventurous
puddy tummy down,
we classify ourselves as a luxury item,
a take one 'live-forever' vitamin.

if puddy tummy down were sound,
it would be the quietest Mozart quartet,
an understated, musical rarity,
softer than the melody of living earth,
softer than the music of mushrooms growing,
gentler than the softest morning rower rowing,
sweet as sleeping babies' sleeping laughs,
or simple as the sound of wind in trees.
we tummy hairs, like finest gosling down,
are "it" in softness,
the softest of the soft.

like a winter hare's ear,
your baby's breath,
whispers of burning cedar voices coming from your hearth
or any happy child's secret happiest thought.

for my wanda - discoverer of puddy tummy down
new york city, february 11 1997

talking to cats

**(In memoriam: mewky meramus, little, scribble-dee-hobble aka the bible, gray boy,
the hissing sprout, andy, squeaky, tippy, tutu and puddy too.)**

With apologies to W.H. Auden

From us, of course, you want not much at all
save routine and frequent changes of your litter,
in the most cataleptic of homes a carpeted wall
and the can opening function of many very smelly foods:
ground up salmon, tuna bones, eyes and brains,
their shades, shades of the dead.
to you sweet meats some phony, too-red dyed ofal.
If it were paint, it would be labeled "heart mush junction."
No matter. your predilection to gorge and sleep
has a certain implacable and quite relentless quiet charm.
At least incarnations of enlightened beings.
little buddhas, hush!

You bring purring compassion to us human sods
who haven't figured out the magic of relaxing in full fall
or landing on our feet, we hope, (only with much cognition,
premeditation and our feet, we hope,(only with much cognition,
premeditation and some convoluted plan), we wish.
You are nowhere near as flatulent as dogs.
No home smells the worse for your inhabitation.
Your luck is linked to you uncompromising independence
coming when you damn well please, going when you choose.
Not sycophantic like those woofing "arse sniffers" whose
greatest happiness and joy is to give you chase.
You do, the two of you,
as buddies-good bets, have a couple things in common:
four legs and fur coverings
just about covering any major similarities.

Once we put your love of nature distance
and your disdain for too-soon familiarities aside,
we respect your ability to take a stand.
Unlike gerbils, hamsters, rabbits or fish
you're unquestionable "people" not pets."
You have a radar ear for exactly for what you prefer to hear:

the pop of the ocean white fish or tuna and liver in cans;
the patterns of our footprints well before we reach the stair;
the pace of our gestures or the pitch of our voices;
our cooing admiration when you deign to visit;
our silence when we fall occasionally into our own despair
or into the comfortable dark of your cave-like eyes.
We wonder, foolishly perhaps, if it really is a push
to say you smile or wink back at us one generation to the next.

There's a new millennium quality to you and your kind.
And, yes, a sense of subtlety, humor and wile,
in the way you read olfactory messages, short stories in the air.
Unless we're anthropomorphizing' wretches,
which, given the evidence, we're really not, are we?
There's understanding, knowledge, sagacity in your stare.
We're not just meal tickets, are we, or fillers of your dish?
How else, when all is said, to explain the haunting feeling
that there's so much more to all your non-verbal cues
than fur and bone, glisten of eye,
tooth and tartar, claws and paws and other clues.
Something fine spirited and rare but free of dogma.
Not unlike the deepest, coolest, spring fed well.
A most refreshing mystery.

The list of those who've achieved greatness and fame
and truly loved you is too lengthy to mention by name.
So, in homage to your style, let's skip it, what the hell...
Save Elliot, of course, and your endless pouncings on Broadway.
eight days a week, "break a leg," as they say, "mr. nine lives."
Your presence is relished by us as much as your relish
ours and your own finely calibrated sense of smell.
Your nonchalant ability to roll over, paws up, and stretch
remains an evolutionary miracle of unselfconscious charm.
Some of us even pray for the confidence
of your ability to instantly pass through sleep's door
or for your sincere and utter fascination with the smallest joys:
a dust ball, crumpled paper, tea towel on the floor,
patch of sunlight or any empty box at all.

And, yes, we unreservedly admire
your adamant refusal to come on call.
Your silence unlike your nemesis the dog's
is unquestionably nest balm and comforter
to those in need of warmth or shelter from
some hyper, convoluted human storm.
That the Egyptians were inspired by you

and prayed to you to calm, as gods,
comes as no surprise,
no more than the companionship of your eyes.
For you do really look at us and you do look most directly,
and in that curious and deeply knowing gaze and guise,
we get to share our days with some other one who's
silent, preternaturally warm and wholly wise.
Montauk, august 5, 1996

cat listening to catbird cry

squeaky - part mahogany striped tiger,
part leopard spotted bengal
hears the catbird cry
his attention is to a nearness
voice of gray mimic
enough to make him pause
and listen in his tracks so keenly
it's as if he asks himself
why would a quaker bird
with a rusty rump
make a sound so close to mine
that it stops me in my field walk
distracts me from musk of mice and voles
and under the cloud of dusk
forces me to wonder what and why
and an uninterrupted furnace
in spring summer and fall foods
that won't inflate or worm us

oliver so far

he was albino snow
a pastel of marmalade
a light cotton candy orange
orange set adrift in a softness
playful as a kid at a country fair
big ears foreshadowing
a cabbage head big paws
promising a big cat
he escaped a humane prison
of runny-nosed hyper cats
found thelma as thelma found him
just like that just like that
he won courage from her love
from his tiny love she won him
he was comically unflappable
and deaf as granite

tap on the screened porch floor
and he'd come to the vibrations
vacuum the floor and he'd sit
unperturbed on the engine warmed
not hearing the motor's roar
slam a door and he'd lick a paw
he'd obsessively bring
his pet teddy bear downstairs
meaning he had a sense of order
a sense of what he preferred
styrofoam packing peanuts for toys
he'd pop them in the empty tub
with his blanket and his bear
and when the tub began to fill
he'd watch the water rise
and rush to get them out of there
he was very affectionate
loved the company of people
welcomed other cats
was down rarely
save the time he was 'fixed'
when he tended to less exuberance
and walked funny for a few days
but forgot and forgave
and put his chips
on luck and fate and love
just like maybe you and me
he believed in life and loyalty
he had a sense of when and where
he'd seemed to know each day's a toy
like cotton candy at a country fair

for Thelma and Oliver

February 2006

gene splice

oh goaty dogs
oh doggy goats
if goats ate bones
if dogs ate oats

oh toady cats
oh catty toads
if cats ate worms
if toads ate rats

tippy's jaw biopsy

and teeth removal

after all his life an ideal cat
he gets jammed into a cage
with some catnip his master's shirt

poor comfort scent as he's wheeled
to a saintly vet used to animals'
outrage and master's fears and tears

he's thrown into another cage
knocked out cut open teeth yanked
as thanks for all treated like a rat

cat dream

black toupee white face
nose that goes pale pink to rose
his severed paw smelling like decay
impossible to screw it back
as against the dark one may
a new light bulb in a socket
lies severed in my hand
i pick him up a beaten boxer
flecks of blood on his face
he limps away undaunted
when i awake horror haunted
i feel that dreams are in a race
to demonstrate mere waking up
is preferred to the nightmare cakes
the dreaming mind keeps baking
i pour some coffee in my cup
and steel myself against the day

listening to a fat cat snore

outside it's freezing rain and snow
other than watching those you love
sleeping children husbands wives
few things as joyful seen from above
make most cat lovers feel more alive
than hearing a napping fat cat snore
plugged into a deep kind of buddha peace
no worries not wanting one thing more
no thought for next dollar own or lease

a drunk royal dreaming on his palace floor
expressing what catatonically sounds
like two balloons rubbed together hard

or the ungreased hinge of a creaky door
this simple sound brings cat lovers
around to the reason why cats are here
just for us they groom entertain and show
mostly it's the simplest things that reign
things that can't be bought don't age or rust
for squeaky (aka the squeaks, squeak-meister, squeakster,
mr. squeaks, squeak toy, squeak-oh, squeaky-deaky, catso, big boy) 1•17•2016

poems that tippy wrote

#1

i love the cello
as much or more
than yo yo ma or
tuna-and-liver jello

#2

i run around like a crazy monster
from window to window guarding my home
from feral cats coyotes bobcats foxes
all wild mobsters security's my jobster
no confidence in what the lock says

#3

i clean and wash myself so thoroughly
raspy tongue on q-tip paws so deft
a wonder i have any fur left at all
am not yet a feline elf completely bald

#4

after doing what i do in my litter box
i cover it all so diligently you'd think
i was digging to china for golden rocks
maybe that's why my paw pads are pink

#5

sometimes i go completely nutz and bonkers
like the ghosts of rabid wolves were on my trail
possessed i sprint from room to room unhinged
scared of shadows being chased by my own tail
then spent i calm down have a drink of water
find a cozy spot and sleep off every binge

#6

sometimes in midst of a self-cleaning frenzy
i stick my back leg up so straight and high

like a furry flagpole reaching for the sky
my flexibility such a wonder is the envy
of kundalini-yoga masters worldwide

#7

from room to room to room upstairs and down
i go from window ledge to window ledge
standing tall on my hind legs looking out
down country road past maple trees and privet hedge
day and night head twisting left to right like an owl's
once i've viewed every window in my house
seen no intruders no outsiders friend or foe
antennae ears like radar dishes tuned in tuned out
two swivels hear faint breath of uncaught mouse
worried sick i howl an awful belly-aching yowl
and still distraught once again resume my rounds

#8

what is it why is it i cannot resist an empty box
no matter how small how big i'm driven to climb in
and sit and wait and wait and maybe doze for what
i'm mesmerized like iron filings to a magnet drawn in
the temptation too great drawing killer me to sin
hidden in my fort safe in my own safe with no lock
the promise of what's to catch better than what's caught
the predator in me waiting for some clueless prey
clueless to wander by and make my murderous day

#9

i'm almost embarrassed to give you my advice
but do listen: forget your fancy dime store toys
all those cutesy manufactured slick distractions
wallmart-catnip-stuffed cigars phony iridescent birds
fake-feathered fish on monofilament tied to bamboo poles
costco hollow plastic balls with bells inside anything rubber
mice and rats of every shape size and denomination
ship them back insipid from whence they came
give me instead used wrapping paper tightly rolled
small aluminum foil balls a few new leaves
sticks twigs or branches (not too thin or brittle so i don't choke)
anything that still smells of pine cedar maple moss or oak
pebbles from nearby streams things peed on by cats or dogs
or other strange foreign country animals like skunks or possums
any scat of deer chipmunk mouse squirrels or other pussums
empty boxes of any shape or size ample bags i can crawl into
expensive fabric arms of armchairs antique table legs i can claw

flat cardboard strips old towels placed mat-like on the floor
the tips or heels of socks stuffed with catnip
and sealed with rubber bands scotch tape or dental floss
any type of plastic bottle tops or corks
from a good Bordeaux or chardonnay
a handmade-by-you mouse of yarn with a woolen tail
a sprig of mint or some fresh cut grass
a blue jay pigeon chickadee or junco feather
stuff with smells that linger stuff that has a lasting funk
things organic in the early stages of putrefaction
if you're going to spend your hard-earned dollars
and are really serious about your fussy cat's satisfaction
don't be duped by all that tarted-up slick plastic junk
spend it on things that i will truly love like
broiled langoustine boiled shrimp sautéed liver chicken fingers
or fresh catnip sprinkled on those great scratching pads
don't be fooled into buying phony feline luxuries
please i beg you don't buy for YOU buy for your cat ME

#10

when i drink i drink to drink
but also drink to make a statement
like a camel from the old testament
i make such a slurping commotion
i slurp with such gusto you'd think
my water bowl was Moses' red sea
a parting feline commemoration
a celebrity millennial's blog
a truly biblical anointed celebration
of all cats' victories over Pharaoh
Dog and his slavey Egyptian dogs

#11

sleeping yes falling asleep at once
a major talent of mine maniacally
i carry no fears no anxieties
i don't over intellectualize
unlike worried dogs no skittish dunce
when i dream fat mice my wish my prize
i snore growl unconsciously i rumble
my masters always charmed mostly humbled
by my gift to leap off sleep's cliff instantly

squeaky outdoors

he lands with a flop
making hardly a sound
in a stand of New England asters
at summer's end he's but an indentation
in the tall grass mahogany black and tan
everything about him is stiletto and rapier
from the ocelot lean of his long frame
to the Bengal sharpness of his claws
the catcher mitt of his injured paw
no longer swollen and held aloft
fur shaved not grown back only
memory of his now-healed wound

the cat in your lap

that the cat in your lap
doesn't bite your penis
is a gift from the gods
men are from mars,
cats are not dogs-
they all come from venus.

watching a cat eat

the mash of all too fishy-smelling goop
defines our two species' clashing opinions
on what constitutes a meal or soup
but in the relish of eating
we meet around an evolutionary corridor
in the hard scrabble corner store
of eat or be eaten kill or be killed
moonpie, mousey, andy, tu tu and rin tin tin

canned and prepared is easier
and less fleeting than fair game
but a cat's singularity of focus has no match
in the act of eating even what he didn't catch
and reminds us whose debt we're in
it's we that imitate the likes of him
we are very much a haunted strain of them
moonpie, mousey, andy, tu tu and rin tin tin

another sunset

a silent lion sun
stalks the horizon
while his little brother
a black and white cat
in the tall field grass

his tail an exclamation
runs to greet his shadow
in pursuit in pursuit
of cricket bronze cricket
saw-leg fiddling goodbyes
for all those
sweet remains of the day
for all those
whose day's now done

**cat of the soul
licking its back**

the same cat
licking its back today
will lick its back tomorrow
hooray hello
hello hooray
today today
tomorrow tomorrow

the same cat
following your footsteps today
will follow them tomorrow
hooray hello
hello hooray
today today
tomorrow tomorrow

cat of the mind

cat of the mind
waiting waiting
for the mouse of an idea
to pounce to pounce

cat of the mind
waiting waiting
any idea of a mouse will do
even one under an ounce

a contract with two kittens

me, you two and meows
in fifteen years you'll be
fifteen and a half
Mousey will be in cat heaven
and maybe, hope not, we too
here's the deal, feline friends:

this should be read in the lispy voice
of warmer brother's Sylvester, the cat:
you eat your kibble and stay fit
and we will too keep at it
through all the twists turns and bends
and when the postman drives by
and we're sitting on the porch
in orange brown and rust october
we'll lift up our drowsy heads
from our daydreaming naps
and think, "my, my...
fly away we must."
and then back
to the work of resting
finding peace true peace
for this our troubled world
if there is a world at all
that we can call our own
then sweet then

slippers' lining

the kittens' savage attack
shreds the old slippers' lining
like children opening presents
on Christmas morning
as if it were the first shredding
since the beginning of time

saying goodbye to mousey

I

seeing you a skeleton
and remembering you a kitten
dwarfed by a king tulip
i realize you're just a cat
a small loss in the vast wander of it all
your wasting away among tragedies
on this blue sphere of shriveling children
nuclear chemical and viral war
is just another tiny tragedy
yet one where your part is the whole
when under the bed your last sanctuary
tired of oral syringes and protein drink
and hardly able to drink on your own
dipping your face into the water bowl
because drinking with tongue
stuck to roof of mouth

is no longer an option
and soaking your face liberates
and allows a last lap or two

II

living on water and air
all eyes you turn to face me
a rag of fur and skin and bones
and hold out the shaved paw
where they stuck the intravenous in
after removing two thirds of a lung
and you reach out to me
and i cry out as i've cried before
for father grandfathers grandmothers
friends and heroes loves and lovers
aunts and uncles other cats and dogs
goldfish toads' lizards and frogs
gerbils hamsters rabbits and rats
whole numbers once now zeros with no end
ancient menageries of pet lovers and pets
and a friend tells me of the rainbow bridge
and i imagine i see one and i wish
i could hear my father's voice again

III

from the other side to be won
his voice becomes all the gone voices
begging the eternal question
who are you weeping for?
and i say silently reeling
for loss of victory
for all the pain to be
for mousey you and me
and i say silently reeling
goodbye my friend
goodbye my friends
goodbye to mousey you and me
living on water and air
goodbye you vanishing and vanished
you vanquishing and vanquished
goodbye you wishing-well earth
you wheeling stars you pulsing seas
you snows you rains
you little ghost of melting memories
february 18,2003 after 8 p.m.
hudson highlands veterinary medical group

last door to paradise

for centuries we've been taught
that your animal nature is fraught
with barbarities and savagery
red in claw and tooth
but in truth truth be told
you are the ones who are bold
you are the ones who are true
you kill to live
usually with one bite or blow
no torture, and, if so,
not born with a sense of wrong or right,
only in blind instinct's play
always (save whales their krill) individually.

we kill massively for greed lust or joy
in pogroms massacres or holocausts
we exterminate the best in ourselves
with a kind of obscene glee
and wake up drenched in blood
obliviously "free" of our murderous history
how can you sit so trustingly near us?
so calm so generous so watchfully?
old boy good boy
still our fast-following friend
brave animal brave heart

your animal sense of time
your animal sense of love
your gentle eyes light
our last door to paradise
quietly reminding us of
a time with no beginning
a time with no end
quietly imploring us
calling us back to begin again

cats can't laugh

cats can't laugh or chuckle
else their bellies buckle
they only purr
goes better with their fur

sleepy cats

oh sleepy cats

sleepy sleepy
how they sleep cozy
as geronimo's teepee
on their faux-fur throw
sleepy cats
oh sleepy cats
sleepy sleepy

Cat TV

our cats are spoiled indoor cats
fireside in winters they sit mesmerized
two males one female staring at the flames
in summers on the screened-in porch
they watch fireflies or fat robins hopping
filling their craws full of night-crawlers at dusk
some life sleep catnap doze
sitting still for hours on the pantry door
waiting out an unsuspecting mouse
more a game for them than a meal
then bring their catch bedside
evidence of their pride

like all of us
they're not getting any younger
and only when compared to dated photos
do we see our aging slightly wider
to add some spice and entertainment
and a workout ethic to their feline lives
the sacrifice of living mice not an option
and mouse adoption no compromise
I created a 'for cats only' invention
A revolutionary cat-tainment exercise device

I leave a trail of pumpkin seeds
an invitation outside our screened-in porch
garden side so every time chipmunk bird or squirrel
passes by they find a treat and gather round
and nibble 'till not a single seed remains
on the other side of this Platonic cave
sit our cats savoring every sprint and jump
for them a brand new episode of Cat TV
until they reach a point in their feline brains
that screams "squirrel and bird futility to infinity!"
turn their derrieres to impossible prey
and shut themselves off to *Cat TV*
thinking "This so stupid awful I'll caterwaul

some days I think I need to cancel Cat TV
though my cats keep cavorting enjoying the play
seeing no foul in playing the clown and my playing them

squeaky

squeaky sleeps all day
twenty hours minimum
his truth his light his play
hey! his righteous way
that's how fat cats like
hour after hour
after hour do pray

For I Will Consider My Cat Tippy

*With apologies to Christopher Smart (1722 – 1771) and his Jubilate Agno
[from Jubilate Agno by Christopher Smart | Poetry Foundation](#)*

For I will consider my cat Tippy who:

With sea-green eyes blinks softly up with the innocence of Eden to inspire joy in those, who
transfixed by his gaze, simply love him.

When he puts his face close to mine, teaches true trust.

Covers his eyes with pink paw pads to block light for sweet daytime sleeps.

Gives voice to his deep content by sharing, with those he loves most, his deepest rumble purr.

Flatters human stomachs or laps by using them as pillows preface to his naps.

Reverts to kitten-hood by nostalgically kneading front paws ever so gently claws on masters'
laps or bellies.

Though spoiled and never starving, demands to be fed with the fury of one pretending to be
pathetic, ignored, or near death's door.

Craves all forms of table treats and manufactured crunchy treats in small bunches.

Is enchanted by the static electricity of dust bunnies and the peregrinations of the smallest of
bugs.

With sandpaper tongue diligently grooms his master's arm, all wet hairs in a row, granting him fellow-cat status.

Is diligent in his hunt for spider webs under chairs, couches and windowsills - for him a form of cotton candy often hanging like Will-o'-the-wisps from his drooping whisker tips.

Watches with tiger eyes the passing ark of squirrels, bees, birds and butterflies beyond his screened-in porch and let's forth a predatory "yak-yak-yak."

Diligently, season after season, follows and makes his bed on every patch of sunlight that moves warm across the living room floor.

Brings a mouse head, tail or mouse half-dead, a treasured gift to your bed.

Has a dozen types of calls to telegraph what mood he's in from "Food!" to "Being here is good!"

Serves as self-appointed security patrol, defender of hearth and home. At dusk and dawn runs from window to window panicked head swiveling, staring out into the desperate dark for things that claw and bite, caterwauling, and, at last, exhausted, settles down for the night.

When entering a room shakes his tail like a maraca to telegraph the ecstasy of being there with you.

When petted in pitch of dark, his static coat sends out tiny sparks.

Bolts under chair or bed when terrified by thunder, lightning, loud trucks, engines revving, generators, gun shots or fireworks as if pursued by the four-horsemen of the apocalypse (pestilence, war, famine, death).

Likes few things better than using a clean litter box.

Loves to give chase to small aluminum balls, paper wads, pebbles, tiny rocks or funky socks.

Presents his face for gentle stroking; bumps your head with his to mark you as his domain and friend.

Rolls over and stretches offering the gift of his soft belly reserved only for those most trusted.

Is worshiped for his inscrutable eyes and the movements of his dancer's body, nimble even if chubby.

Plops down as if shot by a gun, then elegantly stretches.

Breathes in the outside air all year round, before rain or snowfall and, in the Morse code of the wind, deciphers the stories that abound hidden there.

Leaps with abandon from floor to table or chair to floor; falls self-correcting when falling from any height, anywhere and always lands fair and square.

Often consoles himself with the most thorough cleanings: his paws, between each toe, his back, his belly, his legs up and down like flagpoles, his delicates, and finally his face which he washes like a little man in a suit of fur. Then spent, curls up and has a sleep.

Dulls his claws on table and chair legs, arms of sofas, sisal rugs, scratching posts and pads.

When ingesting catnip, takes on a form of madness. Licks catnip-coated toys till soaked, runs around insane, passes out, sleeps it off having taken a crazy trip on the catnip-adylic rocket ship.

Bumps his head against your arms or legs or chest like you're the hitching post he likes best.

Keeps us from our work by sitting on it: saying wordlessly, "Hey! What could be more important than me!?!"

Does the front-toes-and-paws-splayed-out-back-arched-high stretch of stretches followed by the back-half.

Though smaller, is of the Lion tribe. As fierce, alert and noble in demeanor. Has a yawn that's cavernous. His teeth and jaws, like razors, ravenous.

Likes to nibble a blade of grass, a dried-out leaf, a flower petal and sometimes, in a fit of pique, regurgitates a bit of each.

Embodies stubborn willfulness. Rarely comes on call. Will fetch as he sees fit. Demands and wins attention on his terms only. Is never needy or desperate to please. Knows he is a good cat. An angel to those who admire him. Ignores those who don't.

Carries himself with a balletic grace.

When spooked by forces totally unseen, his sudden, panicked sprint or leap a hilarious form of comedy.

Rarely is out of sorts. When offended will give a firm paw-slap, no claws. If pressed, a hiss and then a scratch.

As he falls asleep is sweet to watch. Not wanting to miss a thing, his eyes weighing heavy, then out for the count. Sometimes twitching to his dreams. Sometimes making tiny grunts, growls or soft meows.

Aided by the roughness of his tongue has the cleanest of coats, sweetest of smells. Never requires a bath. Never stinks like unbathed dogs.

Suffers with long standing patience and courage, forgets any injury and heals most quickly. Anticipates only love and, unless trained otherwise, never cruelty or pain.

Is gentle and affectionate on his own terms with his brothers and sisters. Often on cold days, after a thorough mutual grooming, curling up together in a cozy clump.

Is fascinated by the bums and delicates of his siblings, if too-ong lingering, receiving a clawless Q-tip pop.

Loves the olfactory offerings of toilets and bathrooms. Attends our doings to savor the smells.

Always entertaining. His charm: an unpredictable mix of kitten and cat.

He neither requires nor seeks approval but goes his merry way, without a word, makes his agenda ours.

Magnetized by any empty box, napkin, towel, magazine, flap of cardboard on the floor, will sit on or occupy, content for hours.

When hungry eats. When sleepy sleeps.

Even when he creeps, he's never creepy.

Believes in God because he knows he is God and God in him trusts us, like the Egyptians, to worship him.

Is very Zen, never looks back or worries ahead. So natural he's supernatural. His time, Time Eternal.

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