

Harvest Moon

Poems
by

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Preface

"To be honest, I was a bit shocked. Yes, I see a different side of you. Many times I laughed out loud; in between I was suddenly silent, too, and my heart was tied by the words you wrote."

Marian Orton

I wrote these poems during the five-day cycle of the "harvest moon," September 2016. I walked out into my front yard during its waxing phase, as I often do to view the full moon, which always comes up on that side of my house, because I find it so invigoratingly beautiful. It was such a clear night, the moon so big and bright, that it just kind of hijacked my head, which it held captive for the duration, those next five days. I wrote this series of poems day by day, long, languorous, loopy poems, as you will see when you get to them, like nothing I've ever written before. Many times I laughed out loud; in between I was suddenly silent, too, and my heart was tied by the words I wrote.

9/15: Now I'm on this side of that

The moon tonight is full, so full, I mean really full, overfull, of light, yes, and of itself, that look of surprise on its face, not quite Munch's "Scream," more like, hands to cheeks: I can't believe it's so dark and I'm so bright!

Then the crickets (I didn't notice them at first, that huge moon taking up all my headroom) but now I've settled down, the crickets, pretty loud, a singing sound, so pleasant, not like last night, all those eyes crying. I guess the moon makes all the difference to them, too, a singing-out-loud night like this.

So today I'm thinking, god, I can't take it, this world, "too much with us," WW might say, but no-o-o-o, "too less with me," PK says back, yes, too less, way-too, today, than yesterday, and yesterday way-too than the day before, and, god, tomorrow, if that's way-too, too, well, what's even the point thinking it through to . . .

(If you've been on this track you know pretty much where it goes, just follow it like I did all the way today to . . .

. . .THE END)

OK, now I'm on this side of that,
full moon bonkers with light tonight,
crickets crooning like there's no tomorrow,
well, I'm thinking: Why should I care?
Yes. Thinking: Why should I?

9/16: I just couldn't stop

So this morning I just couldn't stop
laughing, I mean couldn't stop.
I think it was knowing how now
for some reason I happen to know
way more than you're supposed
to get to know while you're still here,
and I'm not sure how it happened,
maybe it was "just bad luck,"
what that doctor told me
when "a couple tough weeks"
turned into months and months
of misery and I still see his face,
that half-smile flash frozen
into his cheeks hoping I'd
laugh instead of lunging at him,
throat-throttling, and I don't remember
if I laughed, but I'm pretty sure
I didn't strangle him or I'd be in more trouble
now than I am knowing just this much,

and, sure, I could tell you some of it,
if you pushed hard enough, thought
you could take it, but then, like they say,
well, at least one of us would have to go,
and I'd prefer not to have it be you,

so I'm off now to the woods,
my walk, all those trees,
well, they already know
all of this, I know, for sure,
way more I think, too,
so if I happen to start blabbing
instead of laughing, at least
they won't be like,
yikes, Munch's "Scream,"

and I'm thinking ahead to the ones
I want to walk by today, hoping
they'll be where they normally are,
which is no sure thing in my woods,
that big black cherry, flaky-shingle
bark up and down, so charming,
like a fairy-tale dollhouse
I could walk into for a little kiss
and one of us would wake up
and the other wouldn't still be a frog,
but I can never find the door,
and believe me I've walked around
and around it lots of times looking
and I never, ever find the door,

or that monstrous oak right out
in the open, six feet at the base at least,
like a ten story leg, so long
I can't see what it belongs to,
so I just guess from that huge foot,
two-foot toes grasping ground,
one side a brontosaurus maybe,
head way up there somewhere,
munching on, what, who knows
and the other side a couple of elephants
leaning into each other, still asleep
leg-locked together, so sweet,
and I always pay close attention
passing, in case one of them decides
to take a quick step and I have to jump
out of the way, but not too far, hoping
I can get a glimpse of what's been kept
secret all these years under that big foot,

or the heart-shaped poplar up the hill
chain-saw toppled last year,
too near the power lines,
at least waist high just lying there
on its side, all that it knew
slowly spewing back to the universe

bit by byte by megabyte,
terabytes of it still left there on the ground,
and I think if I sat with it for the rest
of my life and listened close enough
I'd overhear a bit of what it now has to give back,

but today is my only whole day
this week to do absolutely nothing
and I'm in a hurry to get on with that
so I keep walking toward a voice,
a real one I promise, a woman,
on the phone maybe, just talk-talk-
talking, and then the three of them
walk up single file on the one-lane path,
that fluffy poodle-doodle dog up front
then her, then him, her husband, had to be,
and I can't tell if she's talking to him
or the dog and what does it matter
anyway, either way it's all still love,
and tomorrow maybe he'll be up front
hearing what's rushing up toward
the back of his head from her, and she says
to me, don't worry he wouldn't hurt
anyone, and I assume she's talking about
the dog, though I can tell instantly
(I am that good at this, really)
that the guy wouldn't either, just happy
to be out walking today with these two,

and then the little "bridge,"
hardly a bridge, two steps long,
the tiny "brook" running under it,
hardly a brook, two steps wide,
heady today with yesterday's rain
going over the rocks with a hard
"glug, glug," like pouring a two-liter
bottle of coke into the sink fast
because it's too flat to drink,
and I know right then that this poem
is over, all I have to say today,

down the drain or under the bridge,
whatever, even though you waited
all this way thinking you'd get to know
something you don't already know,
not just glug, glug, glug, glug, gone . . .

. . . except on the drive home,
a big truck I'm following, on the back door,
a ten-foot, full-color bottle of coke,
not the two-liter job like your fat uncle
in too-tight pants but the Marilyn Monroe
one (yes, I am that old) with the waist
you just want to put your arm around
for a long, slow dance all the way home,
all those dew-drops on the dark glass
like maybe her voice would be,
whispering into your ear, I mean my ear,
something that means nothing
and everything all at the same time,
one breathful of it carrying more
than I or all those trees
could even hope to know, now or ever,
and the slogan high up on the right side:

Love it!
Again.
And again.

OK. I will. I will.
Soon as I get home.
Can't wait. Thanks.

9/16: THINKING! Whew! Who?

So there, right then, last second or two,
I was thinking of her, I mean
thinking! Really THINKING! Whew! Who?
No way I'm telling you that because then,
well, like I said earlier, one of us
would have to go and this time
I'd rather it not be me, not at least
until I get done with this thinking.

Anyway, what's so bad about that?
Take that Galapagos turtle I was reading about
today online, the one who's well over a hundred,
stuck in a zoo until he was my age, I mean,
really, literally, MY AGE, stuck ALONE in a zoo!
and then they let him loose back home,
to make up for lost time, do his best,
get the numbers back up, 800 little turtles
out there with his name on them now, they say,
and he's still going strong with the ladies, sweet,
except one article called him a "dirty old man"
because, what? you tell me. And why
I'm wondering aren't young men
ever dirty, like right now, when they're
thinking about her, just like I am, I'm sure,
except way more so, because in my head
she still has all her clothes on, I know,
I just looked again to be sure, and,
really, all I was going to do was
ask if we could hold hands, really,
that's all, for a walk in the woods, maybe,
have a few laughs together, that's it,
pretty tame, I'd say, or lame, you might . . .

but, hey, don't get me wrong, if she
was up for more, I'd be up for more,
except holding hands is enough more
to get me thinking right now, been so long,
and I'm sure she's way too busy anyway,
a little dinner, dance a while,
back to my place, hers, either way,
spend the night . . . yeah, right!

OK, now I'm done thinking about her.
I need to go out and mow the lawn.
This summer sucked that way, so hot
and rainy the grass never stopped
growing the way it's supposed to,
mid-July, August at the latest, and now
it's September and I'm still mowing
once a week or more, just like
this "thinking" was supposed to stop,
I thought, mid-July, August at the latest,
now, September, well into it even,
it still won't stop growing, huh?

. . . and another thing, that guy
she's going to be with tonight,
well, I was him once, and I can tell you,
or her if she'd bother to ask, but she won't,
he's got pretty much one thing on his mind
and it's not her, hasn't even started
yet to "think," believe me, and another
thing I can tell you, or her if she'd bother to ask,
but she won't, I have, I mean I really, truly have.
So who's the dirty old man now, I ask you,
tell me, who's the dirty old man now?

9/17: The rest of this is not a poem any more

So I'm like five minutes into my walk today
and I'm already going, OK, Paul, gotta
get that poem going, gotta, gotta,
20 years is a lot of time to make up,
and my head is warping into it and then
I thought, there, right there, that's
the exact reason I quit writing poems
20 years ago, that gotta, gotta, gotta,
until there's nothing there except a foofy
white dog yip-yapping, look, over here,
I'm pretty great, and really, aren't you
just A guy-who-walks-in-the-woods guy
without me? me, I make you
THE guy-who-walks-in-the-woods guy,
they read me and think, WOW, you,
and without me they don't think of you
at all, not one half-second, and that
damn little PITA dog is right,
but so what, I think, yeah, you're
pretty great--if I do ALL THE WORK
to MAKE you pretty great, and besides,
why would you think you're even
pretty great, what have you ever done
for me, you, yeah, you, I'm looking
right at you, and those others, too,
the ones I turned into book after book
I sent out a million times and what?
nothing, a million form letters:

Dear Chump: Thank you for sending us
your reading fee so I don't have to
really try to sell anything, and SASE
so I didn't have to walk across
the room to shred up this POS
ms., I mean your work, I didn't
even bother to read, or did I?
don't remember, so buy our new
books: *My Grandfather's Life Sucked
and Now I'm So Sad, Let Me Tell You!*
and *I Put In a Few Real French Words
To Make You Think I Know What
Surrealism Is . . .* anyway, you
(I mean you mean dog over there
now, not that letter-writing guy),
you won't get anywhere today
unless I say so and right now
I'm not saying so, I'm gonna stay
here, right here, over here,
where I am, my walk, the one
I got to take all those 20 years
while you and the rest of your
snippy-shit friends sat around
in someone else's posh parlor,
a real poet maybe, books, one
that took you to the hair dresser,
fed you chopped steak from a china bowl,
I'm telling you, all I have to do is say

STOP

and you're done, yeah, you can bark,
but without me doing the work
that's really about it, and I'm saying

STOP!

So now it's 8 minutes into my walk,
and it's just my walk, and the rest
of this is not a poem any more,
and as soon as I looked here, now,
in front of me, well, one of my favorite
trees, which I would have missed
if I waited another two seconds
to say stop, that tree, like one tree
for about the first 18 inches up
and then it's two, but I can never tell
whether it was one that turned into
two going up or two that turned
into one going down, and today
I see this flat stone, wide and long
as my foot, jammed down between
the two trunks about 5 feet up
and I think, no way that stone
got up there on its own, someone
forced it in there, for what? oh, of course,
so this just-another-tree-in-the-woods
might turn into a Robert Frost poem
someday when the trunks grow over
that stone and it looks like it's part
of the "twin-tree," their "shared heart"
or something, but who I ask you,
whoever you are who put that there,
is going to write that poem, me?
I don't think so, I'm not even a poet
any more, not for the rest of
this poem at least, because this
is not even a poem, it's a walk
in the woods, and I'm just A guy
not THE guy, and I can tell you for sure
that Robert Frost isn't going to pass
this way any time soon, so I just
grabbed that stone and wriggled it
out, took a while, it was jammed in
pretty good, and that tree, I'm telling you,
I heard it, said "ah," that's all, "ah,"
not thanks, it's no poet blowing

smoke, but I knew it meant thanks
because now it was back to being
just-another-tree-in-the-woods
and now just-another-guy-in-the-woods
could look at it every now and then
wondering whatever he wonders
until he gets along on his way . . .
and about 10 feet down the path
I turn around and those two trunks
are in full embrace, no space at all
between them, just a graceful
serpentine seam, the way true lovers
splice together after long separation,
so grateful just to be close again,
like that Klimt poster, "The Kiss"
everyone had on their dorm room
wall back in the 60s, two people,
but so entwined with one another
that after two or three tokes
you could swear there's no line at all
and you think that will be me
this weekend, with her, or her,
but it never was because
there was always that flat stone
someone had jammed in there
and neither one of you knew
how to get it out, then one day
you do, and you fall into an embrace
just like that one, two into one,
for it seems like forever, but
it's not, because one day someone
up there says "enough is enough"
and jams in a rock the size of
Gibraltar and says OK, Paul,
let me see you yank that one out,
and I can't, so I turn around again
and get along on my way . . .

STOP

and now I don't hear any dogs at all,
at least not the ones that can't write
themselves into poetry books,
on their own, need me, sure,
but don't get me wrong, I like dogs,
real dogs, I mean, not simile dogs,
already smelling of poem, real dogs,
that one yesterday, say, poodle-doodle
leading the way, that one didn't
bark at all and wouldn't hurt me,
or Sadie, say, Bridget's dog,
who loves her no question,
misses her when she's gone,
welcomes her home, poses
for all the pictures she wants to take,
a dog with pizzazz, razzamatazz,
even that high-pitched bark, well
it's charming, and she can make
it sound like words if you try hard
enough and listen carefully, I mean
her own words, not mine, not
some poet hearing all that whining
not here but over there and thinking
OK, gotta, gotta, gotta, or who
the hell is gonna care about me,
well, I'm here to tell you,
all of you, you unwritten poems,
I've been around long enough to know
that even if I get you pretty great,
and I don't get that form letter
back, but a real one, nobody
and I mean nobody is gonna care
about me one whit anyway, just you,
you lazy, barky little things,
over there, never here, always
over there . . .

STOP

9/17: All these silly silences inside

I woke suddenly with you still on my mind,
harvest moon, last night's light,
the time we spent together
out in the front yard, so sweet,
yet how might I continue to write,
my mind asked in my last dream,
with all these silly silences inside?

It is 4AM. I was sure
you would not still be here.
But the bright pool of light
on the silk rug in the sunroom
stuns me as I walk past,
that pale glaze on the grass
out back, your so-soft touch.

I am sorry I am so shy.
I never understood why words
left when light shone down.

I know now, at my age,
what I should not say to you
and why: "I love you," never,
how it stirs up still-still
water, little waves rippling
across a too-dark sky
lapping fine-sand shores,
brittle white, wearing
thin edges thinner.

I know how silly silence
sounds from my side
of the table, that restaurant,
dim as this moonlit night,
so romantic, my heart
full to overflowing,

needing to be free
of the weight
of those three words,

and I knew not to say them,
but I did anyway,
as I always do, just
pushed them right out
into the soft light,
all that hope and fear,
no place left to hide,

and from the other side
of the wide-open sky,
those vast still waters
of togetherness
stretching out forever
as far as I could see,
well, silence, statue
smiling stiffly, staring
back, saying nothing
at all, and everything
at once, not silly
that silence, I will tell you,
nothing silly, except maybe me,
if you were there that night
outside the window looking
in, trying to fill my head
with silence instead of
those three words,
fool, I knew, as soon
as I heard them.

And for some reason
we went on eating.

Now, again, sitting here,
all these years later,
filled with a silly silence
that tries to hide those words
in its dark waters, down deep
where even I might not
overhear them . . .

such a fool, I tell myself,
every night, every hour of every night,
even in my sleep, I tell myself,
a fool, so full of love rippling
through my dreams,
and when I wake like this,
4AM, wanting just to say
the only three words I know,
the last three I remember,
you are here with me
listen, smile, but sweetly,
reach out and touch me,

all anyone needs
when those words
can't echo back,
just one soft touch that says
I know, I know, I know,
and I will hold this moment
forever in my heart,
those words so sweet to hear,
chalice for my joy
and sadness, always with me,
and when we part tonight
I will kiss you lightly
on your lips,
so soft and warm still
from the few words
they let pass between us
here, and mine, forever
silent, you know, but still,
still, this dark water.

Fingertip caresses
of moonlight on
the back of my hand,
along my arm
resting here with you,
me, in that pool
of your soft light
in the back room, glowing,
another little moon,

and I know, I know, you will be
back tomorrow, sit with me,
all these silly silences still inside,
how I might, yet, continue to write.

9/17: It's that line

I was just about to drive over
to the farmers' market,
but now I'm not going to, I mean
I'm REALLY not going to.

It's not the drive, gruesome
at 4 PM Friday, all the rush going
everywhere else at once
or how hard it is to park, gnarly.

It's that line, the idea of getting into it,
those 10 people in front of me,
thought-bubble tomatoes floating
over their heads, or behind me,
well, I can't see them because
I'm so focused on the sellers,
so slow, two of them, walking
with her, her from this end
of a forty-foot table to that end,
waiting to hear, a basket, wait,
no, just three of those tomatoes,
how much is it, make change,
stopping on the way back to sit
on the back edge of the big truck,
flatten dollars into a tray, drink water
(OK, it is really hot out, so OK, water),
and I'm thinking if I concentrate hard
I can push the fast-forward button
of farmers' market time and get up there
before I'm more wilted than I'm afraid
that head of red lettuce I have my eye on
will be by the time I get there.

Now if the guy would drive over to my house
and drop off all the things I like to get,
carrots, beets, corn, beans, green or yellow,
but yellow if you have them, snap peas,
any fruit you're picking right now, all of it,
squash, garlic, even tomatoes, which I'm
kinda allergic to if I don't cook them a lot,
that would be great, and I'd tip him good,
just don't make me stand in that damn line;
of course, he doesn't make me, I do, so
no, I'm not going to, not this week at least,
one line too many today in that way too-
long lifetime of lines waiting for her, her,
to make up her mind, thought-bubbles
I'm fighting to pry my way into,
but they're always already all full
of tomatoes, forty feet of table,
me sitting in the middle, and, well,
it just those three tomatoes, not that Paul,
not today, just those three tomatoes please.

Me, I take everything, all I can haul
to the car without having to go back
and wait in line again, bags and bags of it,
enough for today, tomorrow, tomorrow,
and you, for sure, if you were available tonight,
I'd take you in a second, twice if I could,
and I'd wait in a lot longer line to do it, too,
so, what-say dinner tonight, I'll make it
for you, all these bags I hauled, no,
OK maybe some other time . . .

So tonight I'm gonna make french fries,
out of a bag from the freezer
burnt crisp just like I like them,
lots of ketchup, maybe an egg,
I have that, too, sounds good,

and tomorrow, well, I don't care
about tomorrow because today
you wouldn't come over and
no way now I'm going to wait
in that stupid line, no way, just because
there happens to be a tomorrow.

9/17: Except for this, so far

Everything I read these days depresses me,
even if I wrote it, except for this, so far,
this doesn't depress me yet, so
I'll keep writing it until it does . . .

9/18: I just had to take off my pants

It started to rain just when I got in the car
this morning to go to the woods for my walk,
not hard enough to stop me, not even close,
but I got pretty wet, wet enough
that I just had to take off my pants,
soaked through just on the front side,
which, if you walk in the rain, you know
is how it goes, unless it's a total downpour,
the cost, I guess, of "going forward"
in this life, clammy on the thighs,
and I'm only telling you this because
I was almost totally silent on my walk
today, which is not how I usually am,
so I need to get this down fast before I
forget it, which is already happening . . .

I didn't even notice that until about
3/4 of the way through it, in that section
with the huge oak and the huge poplar,
and I tried to remember if I had said
anything out loud so far, which
I always do now, lots of it, and all
I could remember was swearing,
once, right at the top of the first hill,
which I do every day, same place,
without even thinking about it,
because it dawns on me again
that Carol is not there with me, so
"FUCK!" "SHIT!" "GODDAMMIT!"
LOUD, or "jesuschrist," soft, and today
I remembered soft and thought about
that Berryman poem where the guy
on the street whispers "christ"
under his breath and all the passersby
behind their rosy-pink glasses can't tell
if it's a prayer or a swear, and believe me,
and you can because I don't wear

pink glasses anymore, it's both, that one
and all of them, they're always both,
as in "hey, how 'bout some help down here,
oh, yeah, right, I know, when hell freezes over,"
and that jesuschrist, that was all I said
out loud today because it was raining,
which is why I was telling you all this.

I just kept it all inside my head today,
and what I was thinking about most of the way
really was "silence," maybe because
yesterday I wrote about how even if
the only three words you know are "I love you"
sometimes you wish you had just
kept them all inside your head . . .

So I spent most of my young life silent,
really silent, like this family story about me
my mother told, how I didn't start to talk
until way late, cried continuously for year one,
then shut if off at the main and was just placid
for year two, "low affect" they might say
these days, and she wanted me off diapers
but I never said anything, so every so often
she'd take my hand, off to the bathroom,
and I'd sit there and either do it or not,
so one day she takes my hand and I say,
you don't have to come today, I can take
care of this myself, and she's dumbfounded,
having started to worry that I was dumb
in more ways than one, and she asked,
why didn't you talk before this?
and I said, because I never had anything
I wanted to say until now, and I can tell you,
that is how I was, then, now, exactly,
and going to school back then, well,
you never needed to talk except to say
Torricelli, or 7, or predicate nominative,
so that's pretty much all I said, and I was
so good at that, I mean fantastic, that

teachers stopped asking me anything
because they figured I knew it, so why
not put somebody else on the spot,
and today I was thinking, yes, I bet
that's exactly why I got fantastic
at that, so I wouldn't even have to say
that much, and college, well, back then
they hadn't invented student-centeredness,
so all I had to do was say manifest destiny,

$$\text{or } y^2\sqrt{x^2-3}/\sqrt{2} \text{ or}$$

irregular Pindaric ode, and they'd
leave me alone there, too, but obviously
when I got into this line of work
I knew I'd have to say more than that
because you can't, for example, go in
on day one, fold your arms, and wait
for a great course to uplift itself
like one of those push-button
umbrellas, or stand up at a conference
and just say "epideictic," well,
you could, but I'm guessing it wouldn't
go that well and pretty soon you'd be
silent on your own dime, and I didn't come
from a family that had enough dimes
for that, so I taught myself to talk,
the point being, for me at least,
what I told my mother 65 years ago
is still true: I have to have something
I want to say to say anything,
and now that I'm thinking about it,
I'm going to SAY those three words
when I WANT to say them
no matter who misunderstands,
and I. A. Richards might say that "rhetoric
should be the study of misunderstanding
and its remedies," but I'm here to tell you,
Ivor, you can study misunderstanding
all you want, and I guarantee you won't
find the remedy anywhere in rhetoric,

not for this one at least, and really,
not for any of them, the ones that most
matter anyway, because you know what,
misunderstanding doesn't start with
words, you mean this, I mean that, and
"we need to talk," that kind of thing,
no, it starts way beforehand,
like the one all those years ago,
that one started before either
one of us even learned how to talk,
and I'm thinking if she saw me
here now with my pants off
she'd misunderstand that, too,
and for some reason I'm swearing again,
LOUD, into the WABAC machine,
at her, and I know it works
because now I remember on the street
walking home alone that night
I heard all this swearing, LOUD,
and I swear no one else was there but me . . .

It's just pouring now, I mean really pouring,
and you know what, when I'm done
with this I'm going to go out for a walk in it,
just around here, like Carol always did
when it poured and I didn't want to get
drenched in the woods, and she'd just walk
normal right through it. I'd see her coming back
up the street, soaked through after an hour
in it, that floppy hat she always wore
rain or shine sagging, walking like it was nothing,
the way she walked through all the rest
of the pouring rain in her life, just head up,
OK, this is how this world is, and me,
I'm going to keep walking and walking,
not going to speed up or slow down
because in the end it doesn't make one bit
of difference anyway, and you know what,
there are probably 10 or 20 other things
she did all the time that I never did

when she was here, and I'd be thinking
why do you do that, care so much about that,
whatever, and now, you know what,
I do them all, all the time, and, well,
what more can I say about that that you can't
figure out for yourself. . . jesuschrist

9/18: I was just thinking

I was just thinking about entropy,
and I can't tell if what I'm thinking
comes from Pynchon or physics, but, hey,
even for him, what's entropy but two
stories bleeding together toward chaos,
me and him thermodynamic today,
and I have this idea that the brain
is a super-anti-entropic machine
absorbing all sorts of little things,
perceptions, words, everything,
and synthesizing them into complex
systems, day after day, year after year,
lifelong and then, wham, you're dead
and the rubber band or magnetism,
whatever it is that holds it together
stops holding and that stuff blows
right back out into the universe
a big plume of smoke, or like that poplar
I talked about yesterday, a slow leak,
but still, sooner or later all that packing,
in school, thinking, loving, all of it,
unpacked, wham, and it's gone . . .

And I was just thinking, everything
I spewed out this year, books, poems, songs,
like a 4th of July sparkler,
a million blazing flecks of light
zinging out, every which way,
and I keep thinking, a guy like me,
what the hell is going on, and last week
I mentioned to somebody how maybe
I'm about to die and my insides
are trying to get out fast as they can,
on the record, so they won't just evaporate
into the ether, what a waste, all that work,

hey, they're saying, it was hard to get
this together, and I want to get said . . .

Then I was just thinking that maybe
I did actually die last year except
I don't know it yet and neither do you
reading along here like, yeah, a live guy
wrote this, not some smoke-poof
wiping away after all the sparks from that
4th of July sparkler have sparkled out,
nothing but a bent over, gray-hair
stem that if you touch it turns to ash
right there between your fingertips,
so maybe everything in me is flashing
back through the motherboard
into that great hard drive in the sky
except for some reason I get to leave
behind the heat I accreted in this stupid
almost absolute zero of a world,
and you say, no way, that's not possible,
well let me tell you, I know a thing or two
about what's possible and not possible
now, and lots of what you have listed
under one of those belongs under the other,
and that's all I'm going to tell you about that
because, well, like I said, one of us
would have to go, and since I'm thinking
today maybe I already have gone,
that just leaves you . . .

9/19: And now, right now, I'm calling this one done

That moon tonight looks a lot like me,
not quite altogether, beach ball
the day after, half flat on the left
side of its head, migraine maybe,
air gone missing. I have no idea
why we both went from wide-awake,
light brimming over everywhere,
puffy-cheeked kid with such a smile,
to saggy, dimmed down, looking out
through vague, smudgy haze
that either seeped out or seeped in,
about as much light as that night-
light I use now, not because I'm
afraid of the dark, because I'm
afraid I'll get afraid of it if I don't.

Kind of a relief, really, so intense,
too much pressure to keep
the air in, pour the light out,
teaching-head heavy instead of
TV-head light. Hear that hissing?
the air still going out of that moon
from last night, my head, this book,
five days in and it's already half-
flat, like I'm stuck in all of Zeno's
paradoxes at once, the half-way one,
faster and faster to go slower
and slower, a book in 20 days,
then a book in 10 days, now
a book in 5 days, and I'm just
saying, I can't write another book
in 2.5 days, no way, I have chores
to do today that I put off to finish
this one, I teach tomorrow all day,
so you tell me, where does a book

get written there⁹ and even if it did,
you know as well as Zeno does
that sooner or later I'll be writing
like a million books every microsecond
and I'll still never get to "done,"
and the arrow one, zinging along
so fast but each instant a standstill,
so which is it, zip-zip or zap?⁹
time turning into space or
vice-versa and that's summer
in a nutshell, so stop-action
day after day you can't remember
anything that came before,
so fast it's like it didn't even happen,
and the race one, that tortoise
slow as those stones sliding
over mud in Death Valley
when the wind blows and
no matter how fast Achilles runs
he can't ever catch him
with that too-big head start
he gave him, so if I'm Achilles,
and maybe I am for all I know,
I'm thinking, I'm going to make
a cup of tea and let that tortoise
sweat it out wondering whether
I'm gonna catch him at the wire
because he's too slow to know
that can never happen, no way,
and I'm not even running anyway.

And really, you could argue
this is not even a book, just another
half-book, like the last one,
that long line of half-books,
my history, and I was just trying
to decide whether to put checkered
or decorated in front of history
but the only way it sounded
like a poem was if I used both

and you can't because you end up
with two half-thoughts that can't
ever add up to one thought
each racing on a different track
toward half-books, and I'm
calling this one Paul's paradox
and, ditto, a cup of tea, Achilles,
let them run as long as they
want, because so what if I get
another half-book, it's a
whole-book world I work in,
and maybe that's why
I never got anywhere
in this poetry racket:
the only box you get
is just too damn big for what
I have to mail in, and sure,
I could unroll a half-book
of bubble wrap, and I got
a headful of it, believe me,
thousands of little pressed-
together polyvinyl pierogies,
keeping this bit of empty away
from that one, and you need them,
really do, because if all that empty
got together at once in there,
there would be trouble,
no way to say where this empty
ends and that one begins
on that long shelf of books,
the ones Aristotle named:
"this is this and that is that
and don't mix up them up,
OK, because it took me a lot
of work to get them apart like
that," the superhighway right to
www.dotbubblewrap.dot.edu,
and for some reason I can't
seem to write one whole one.

But don't get me wrong,
I have no bone to pick with wwwdot,
not at all, because if it weren't
for wwwdot I'd be, what?
Emily Dickinson shoving stuff
in a drawer, where it dies, or I do,
and if I'm lucky, I mean like
lottery-type lucky, some
huge doofus like Higginson
(give me a break, Tom, what's with
the Wentworth?) swoops in, scoops it
up, says: don't look at her, look at me,
too big a prick to stick my neck out
for her while she was here and
would have loved it, maybe even me,
and hey, all I'm saying is if
she says to me "I love you,"
I'm outa here, like lickety-split,
not even giving her the fake statue act,
just, well, you know, she's wacked-
out as all hell and those poems
are like, WTF? but, hey, now she's
gone, looky here, slicked up by me,
they look like a good whole book.
I'm so-o-o smart. Well, no, Tom,
you're not, YOU are NOT!

And I know enough now to know
it wasn't always this way; take
Parmenides, he hardly wrote even
a half-book, and he's on Amazon,
OK, I know, someone has to write
a long preface and add lots of notes
and there's tons of white space so it
doesn't just end up being 10 pages
and when you pick it up you think
"it's just two covers bubblewrapped
around empty, I got totally ripped off . . ."

or I could just talk, not bother
with all this typed-up hype, like
Socrates, say, never wrote down
one word, just yakked and yakked
with anyone he could track down,
and I would love, just love, to be
yak-yakking like that with smarties
about the soul, say, but the way
things work where I work I could sit
in my office with the door open
now 'til the cows come home,
feet on my desk, and not a soul
would walk through that door
to talk about the soul, all of them
crouching over desks behind
closed doors writing whole books so
they get to stay in the whole book
building here with all the other
whole book people, the ones
I mean who might wave, weak,
rushing by my office while I'm
waiting, but if all Plato had was

Protagoras: wave

Socrates: wave

well, there you have it,
nutshell around nothing, so . . .

I'm going to go for a walk. I'm back.
And first thing I noticed was
now all that air is out there was room
in there for me, I know, because
I was there, all of me, on the drive over,
not me talking to me, or pretending
I'm talking to you when, get real,
you know and I know you're not there,
no one is, not for a half-book
at wwwdot, I mean me just happy

being me, and the drive went so
slow, maybe not slow as that time
in the WABAC machine I smoked
some laced weed and it took me
a week to drive three miles home
and I was almost hoping I'd get
pulled over so I could ask the cop
am I really only driving .01 miles/hr?

Then I got there, and
the sunroofs I walk through
right when I start are all
just slumped over now,
like their air was out, too,
a few flecks of yellow
still stuck up on the stems,
but summer on the run,
and that was the last thing
I can remember seeing
on that walk because
it was just me seeing,
not me seeing so I could
pretend to see you
seeing me seeing.
And now, right now,
I'm calling this one done,
and now, right now,
I'm calling lots of things done.
You might be one of them.
All I know is I'm not.
And this is not

THE END

because, like I said: Now
I'm on this side of that.
And when I say now,

I mean NOW.

