

slights

my new tiny poems from here not there

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Cover photo: I took this photo from a distance (thus the graininess) at Woodard Bay in August, 2019. That day there were at least a thousand of these “slight” birds skittering around by the water, sanderlings on a migratory stop to rest and feed before heading further south.

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prefatory note:

My whole “career “as a poet, such as it is, has been a series of discontinuities, starts and stops, sometimes long ones, dramatic changes in style and substance. I have no idea why. It all seems out of my hands for the most part. I quit “submitting” (what a terrible fate for a poem) poems for publication about 25 years ago, a combination of frustration with and loss of interest in that process. I write what comes to me and stop when it stops.

I started writing “my new tiny poems”—more like Zen koans, sometimes, than the kind of poems I’d been writing in my final years in Pittsburgh—out of the blue, right after I moved to Olympia, another part of my general downsizing process I assumed. I didn’t think much of them at first, more like placeholders—some of them were actually texts or emails sent to friends—until the next wave came along, but I came to like them quite a lot, for their concision, their clarity, their sonorous discipline, their subtle mystery. Over time they got longer and more complex, maintaining that same voice and style. I add new poems to the book as I write them, and will just keep writing them until, well, they tell me to stop.

part one: tiny poems open eyes

1.

slight
poems slide
side
wise
right on
by
so

2.

salmon
seethe
one
seal swirls
beneath
water
boils flesh
flaps hap-
less between
teeth I
 deeply
breathe

3.

might be
trees
the sea
a breeze
might free
me

4.

saw this a few
times with you
so happy to do
sky so blue

5.

bare feet feel
everything

so sweep

6.

today
in watershed park
my lens like yours
found light with dark

to see how light is made
seek shade

7.

star
light left long
gone
still shining
here

not

8.

fall
flowers feel full
finally

9.

every day
advance
this to that

what's left
behind
decides that
itself
by not saying
stay

what stays
is me turning
into
more me

if you want
to be
more me
then
say
stay

10.

call
me paul
joel lowell

I'll call
myself raul
and ride bulls

11.

don't be
fooled dare
dark-for-real
stares
softly not scarily
tears small swatches off
edges of everything
how they waft
leaf-like still
air rocking
down

stop by watch
long a while
as you want
this lovely longing
growing stronger
stay with it
lovingly
if you want

know
when to go

though
rocking soft-still
lovely lovingly
scarily
dark-for-real
dares tears
everything
everything

12.

those two
boats
motor fast
sail slow
one
sky sea blue
mountain
still never
moves

12a

two
boats float
sails rolled
stock-

still one
sky sea blue
there
never moves

13.

today I am
nothing

next to

soft
smoke wafts
this way

canada
fires
they say
can't see or smell
myself so
smoky inside
sky
high I fly
through to
that side
blue
way-much-too-much
blue found
no way down
through
filmy smoke
flimsy
clouds twirling
next to
blue
next to
nothing
next to
me
next to
next

14.

they all call
me paul
small
thank me always
no reason at all
weather
perfect
eternally
I love here
everything
even
me

wish all
for you too
this birthday
perfect
(except being called
paul!)
always

thank you

15.

someone says
"love"
so what

is it
isn't
see
say
stay
away

days come
go
"love"
so someone

says so
what

16.

remember
when
to open
close don't
forget

remem-
ber now
how now
feels
like don't
forget

17.

hi

high

I fly

by

bye

part two: tiny poems go for a walk

notes for walk-taking

1.

before there was anything
god took a walk
creating exactly what
she saw along the way

2.

to see something
be nothing
until something
sees back

3.

a walk is a particular
assortment of things
waiting for you
to meet them

4.

a walk
takes up
no time

may make up
time for you
to take up
walking

5.

feet are neat
no hollow
mouth
to swallow

follow

6.

eyes wise
so don't say
what they
don't see

7.

unbearable
how much light
knows once
it learns
to walk

8.

while you walk
nothing moves
but you
with you

9.

if time runs out
to meet you
reach out
to greet it

if time slows down
hold out
your hand
and help it

hold you
back

10.

those gulls
in the road
lull me
no hurry

white boats
sail off
wing tips

stop
where air
starts
wind whirls

fall x 2

1.

fall is here
like there is
fall is

except
so
there

acres of ochres
soaked
stiff with drizzle

blonde blades
splayed
layers

numberless umbers
tumbling one
by one

by one big one
just wafted
by soft

on my left
so slo-mo
right there

to pluck
from the air
a feather

but let it
settle let
all things

settle
that let
me settle

saffron stacks
dump trucks
of pumpkins

russet potato
peels
in piles

cucumber
slices strewn
sidewise

some
singles
straggle

avenues
of passersby
hustle

husks
it is brusque
dusky

pie pan big-leafs
five finger
wide hands wave

cookie cutter
vine-maples
butter dough

baked brown
eight lobes
strobe starlight

overhead
overhanging
boughs still stunned

suns and suns
galaxies fixed
forever in

still air
until . . .
gravity

small cedar
decked
at branch tips

yellow
ornaments all
holiday

ready
not yet though
today

fall is here
still
like there is

fall is
except so

2.

air weighty
with water
makes wakes

on its way
by my face
laden

with more
and more air
so there

as I am
walking
so there

so there

downtown 5/20/19

lilac blossoms fade
frayed blades
the flower
that is its color
almost not lilac
now wilted but
still

“look, this is Mitch
he had no interest
in my two
weeks ago
now hahaha”

she says pointing
to her phone
for friends

the morning
moves I don't
the boardwalk
walks I don't
gulls squawk
kids gawk
people talk
I walk
by
don't
I

woodard bay 5/20/19

a walk is one step
repeated once
deep shade straight
ahead made for me
a barred owl
woos me
wattled sunlight
dazzles dampens
eyes delighted
try receiving
rotting logs
all knobs and knots
the bay laid out
glass the past
blue water
blue sky
one cormorant
glides silent
out then one
in breath
out then
in walk
in then out
a walk is
one step
repeated once

more

walking by budd bay on sunday evening

maybe a million
tiny fry breech:
rain drops

a flagrant leaf
dawdles:
no plagiarist

shoals of shiners
shimmy sidewise:
shimmer

one jellyfish
undulates:
sun-stunned

I take this
step forever:
without

hairy woodpecker

path picking
I walk
right behind

scruffy pate red
jumps jaunty
just enough ahead
to be . . .

then sudden

flight
claws to trunk
waiting for
me

to pass

freudian slippers

two ravens
slide-step up
the rail
sidle to
each other
eyes wide

seagull screeches
from pole-top
wings flap
without flying

fat seal goes
down slowly
grips fish
flesh
between lips

woodpecker
pokes pounds
picks specks
out of
hard bark

first snow

plump junco
skip-jumping
up the path
tail-pumping

a quick flick
of neck
and peck
to pick seed

you know only
what you need
to know about
this snow
 don't you

rain

just ended
hemlocks bend
boughs low
weighted wet
friendly hands
extended

beneath
I deeply
 bow
 reach up
slender
fingers inter-
mingle so
tenderly
with mine

sunday prayer

everything I write
a little
poem today
including this
for you

miss
lotus blossom
on my path
mellifluous
cherubin

and mister
mustachioed
magician
arriving sidewise
greeting gladly
godly

tiny

spider climbs
a white
tile wall

just a speck
minutes to
move inches

unlike me
unlike you

no matter
how hard
we try

will never
climb
that wall

I walk toward

woodard bay
water so still
borrows sky's
pale blue
a few clouds
float by I
believe if I
keep walking
five more
miles a foot
or so above
the water
all the way
to the tree
line I'll turn
into nothing
but pale blue
sky a few
clouds floating
by anything
and everything
but myself

a pittsburgh dream

fallen leaves
street-blown
cobblestone

cloud-whorls
water-swirls
swoop-slope
bridge-works

live music
lost cat
on his way
a handful
of orange tulips
to meet
maybe you

pst

now my time is
 not your time
 probably

part three: tiny poems dream and cry

the morning of the poem

(thanks Dave for reminding me to read Schuyler . . .)

. . . like me
in the head
except fed
by New York
bred with big deals
O'Hara scary funny
daring one day
after another
into the sentence
until it falls apart
not knowing where
Lana Turner is
to start asking
Ashberry cross-legged
on stage so-too-
smooth-aloof to move
shiny tan shoes
poking out all over
might as well be
magnolias
in the mirror
flashy flying
sky so high he can't
make words out of it
that make sense
Koch who "could teach
a golf ball how to
write pantoums"
whatever they are
all meeting somewhere

so swanky you almost
met Eliot there
striped bass
tranquilizers
days in bed
dead

instead
Forest City
no blare-bling
or poet not one
these three
big "Bs" though
Bunga rotund
lumbering-laughing
chatting up three girls
behind the bent down
center field snow-fence
ball drizzles so slo-mo
into oblivion in tall grass
right beside him
I chase from left field
wing it all the way in
great arm no bat
had to quit that game
Bones so boring
shoulders folding forward
a question mark
betting I can't hit the same shot
I just made from the far corner
and I did and he says
you should try out for the team
but I knew all shot
no dribble sure
from 30 feet
bad to the board
Buddha jacked up

from all that lifting
arms two hams
he can barely carry
in front of his waist
da play's da ting
wherein I'll catch
da conscience
o' da king

I mean head like
your head like
which ones you loved
took everything
they wanted
still left everything
still there behind
that blind
like believing
saying you pray
but don't
is all the prayer
god needs
to hear
to care
like thinking
words
like words like
words thinking
is all it takes
to make
anyone stay
please stay
please just one
more day
finding out late
no never

not there
here now
all these years
I sit and read
the morning of the poem
yours mine
same thing
chuckle snarky
sad bottomless
pit of stomach
drops down
eyes drift to
the window huge
cypress outside
such wide wings
waving waiting wanting
to embrace
but never
amazed at you
and me too
no reason why
never it seems
any reason

why

starting to write again

un-words stir
tangles of language
wait for braids

ways I may say
what was afraid
to be made

page after page
turning sager
gray cyphers

click click click

I love
everything
most

when nothing
is just
nothing

not
nothing left
bereft

and please no
not nothing
more in store

just what luck is
when it's still
dumb nothing

“I dreamed I saw St. Augustine”

Bob Dylan

day breaks
I ache
 my heart makes
no sense

 cut glass bowl
just slipped from my hand
aghast I stand
silent
 for a second
the floor approaching

not yet
 shattered
 that future
 according to Augustine
 cut glass whole

still

shatters
always
the present

 cut glass cuts
 according to me

then eternal
not now
a million pieces
to be swept

all the women
I'm in love with
not here
now
fear

fills
daybreak
glass half
empty

but for one

they say ghosts are souls
trapped on this side

of the glass
waiting

for day to break

not entirely sure
here or there
not yet not now

both
always

the mourning widow's veil
all there is
barely there
between

no either side
just veil

UFO researchers say
a disproportionate number of abductees
have hazel eyes
39% compared to 8%

I have hazel eyes

why my day breaks
achingly

these eyes of mine
they are lonely
lonely
from wanting you

as a kid
hypnagogic sleep
unable to move

cry out
nothing

buried
in a body
on a spaceship

they say up there
it's all about sex
how they take
what they want
to make what they want

send you back
slack
satiated
oblivious

I don't believe
any of that

not yet

but why did that stiff sleep stop
when they fried me
unfruitful

no use to anyone
who wants to make
someone

even aliens
gone elsewhere
for bad seed

I wake

hardwood waiting
day breaks
glass

dropped
no use to anyone
who wants

just pieces
swept up
even me

“ . . . a dream I can call my own”

The Clovers

thick black
candles split

sex-calm
wandering

white walls
block all
doors not

morning

waking

aching still
wind wails
inside wild

wicked
sky's white moon
eye never cries

why

tonight

heart bleak
starts blank
beats black
lack locks
dark stars

 streak
 no tracks
back

song

my singing ringing
in my ears
what I want is a body
not mind
 not mine

tonight

I might
not turn
light
 out
but invite
dark
 in

skin deep

her breasts
pressed to dress
test eyes
wired to wander
that way

careless flesh
arrests
for what I want

not to look down

for Hank Williams

Olympic ridges
charcoal
cardboard-flat
no snow
so slow
horizon eyes
water between
choppy steel
washboard

tonight I hope
I will still
be so lonesome
I could cry

mid-night

blind birds
fly by
wind-riven
sky I can't
sleep
through

your tirade
intolerable
even in dream
I push hard
you fall
 back to bed
broken

two dreams
later I'm making
love with
someone you
hate in
 that bed

if only

to be lonesome
own some

phones
I mean

bones
I mean

spring 'n all

always so small
how it starts
all balled up at bud tip
null space
waiting to embrace
what promises
to displace it.

fall

all the alders
call paul
paul

nothing
changes

colors
but me

oops

one
leaf brown
 loops
down

water

so still
viridian veneer

evergreen
verdigris mirrored

buffleheads back
now
bobbing

chit-chit

little bird
in the fern
I start to
step in

flush you
to flit

but walk
by why
should I
frighten you
to flight
just to delight
my eye

these

three cedars
greet me
gleeful

stern firs
stand firm
worry-furrowed

woodard bay 10/26/19

tight lipped
wave tips
wind whipped
white caps slap
shore more
and more

sky so
blue pure
sun blind
sure eyes
blink
tear wet
salt stung

Rainier's tip
squints ice
white over
ragged green
tree tops

nodding to descartes

Amanda stands in an avalanche of language

I abide wide landslides of silence

between us clean sheets wait to be folded

I think I am

too old to think
straight

when Amanda holds my hand
to her heart
another landslide starts

**waiting forever for nothing
is half the fun of it**

the birds start up at first
hint of light
silence to cacophony
just like that

thumb-sized red tulips
stems just cut
float notes
untethered

I lie quietly and listen
all day I will
lie quietly to anyone
who will listen

two sutras too stupid to be true

cold butter on hot toast:
duty is futile

peel a ripe papaya:
beauty is useless

cedar branches

swoop droop
 and
little
 leaves
loop

who's who

I'm nobody—
I know
some some-
body
I said
(to myself)

wondering—
what difference
“no”—to “some”
made (to my-
self)
so kept—walking
without—

for lulu

fifty gulls float
motionless
on still water
superwhite in
bright sun
face right into
the light
waiting . . . for

what?

one and one only
shrieks over and over
no replies
no way to know
why it cries

a child trips
and falls
on the paved path
wails waiting
to be picked up
and held

I walk off into the woods
those cries ringing
in my ears
wringing my heart

no loss is too small
to mourn
all now nothing
here now gone
blank space
waiting . . . for

what?

Rainier's ice shines
behind the tree line
the only clouds
in the whole sky
three filmy gray streaks
smudging up its peak

on my way back
all the gulls
face the other way
the late day sun
slant too much even
for their eyes

no bird shrieks
no child cries
why must
tears always fall
without sound
to the forest floor
no one ever
there to hear

not lulu, not you
not anyone

not even me.

no way back

ferns
eternally vernal
florid understory
forevering

I wander savannas
of frond-fans
until I know
no way back

with each step
forward I forget
someone who has
forgotten me

I will walk until
I remember only
what's left
of myself

the form (says dave)

seems light
and airy
yet some
so heart
wrenching
scary

the wind is

a treetop
torrent pouring
over stones
roaring crowd
heard from a car
driving by
drone of tires
over pavement
two lovers on
the sidewalk
about to kiss
coveting white
noise to hide
what they hope
to say only
to each other
the voices of all
my ancestors
right beside
my right ear
risen from eternal
silences to sing
chorally the only
word I need
to hear right
now to breathe
where air can
carry it to treetops
quivering ever
so slightly
wind's fingertips
caressing every
single delicate
leaf at once

watch

how clouds billow
collide without
violence yield
everything
they have to
one another

when sky goes
blank blue
they wait near-
by quietly
without fear
or loss

when you are
old as I am
rise up with clouds
where they gather
speak gently
if at all

body aching
to behold
what rolls
so fast past
liquid lips
in empty air

ear tuned to
hear what wind
whispers so
soft white
noise almost
no sound at all

plaintive voices
explaining
what it means
to vanish
that way into
one another

the opposite of me
the opposite of you
the opposite of separate
the opposite of afraid
the opposite of wait
the opposite of words

nothing but these cold arms

1.

stiff wind
whips wave
tips raw

the only loss
from fare thee well
to farewell is thee

my dear

and somehow
me clutching
nothing but
these cold arms

2.

the bay so
gray today
grave voices
quaver over
washboard
water say
stay there
if you want

or walk
this way

into nothing but
these cold arms

3.

when there is
nothing left
ahead

stand on the last
spit of land
long as you like

stop or step
either way

nothing

but these cold arms

here

while I lie
in this silence
waiting
all that dark
gathered
to greet
cherish
carry me
there
where I
cannot fathom
more than this moment
fulsome fathering
nothing
but love this
moment
alone with
this moment

what is lost
never found
taken unreturned
learned
forgotten
mourned
yearned for
past its last
moment
lasting forever
fixed in memory
what life becomes
in eternal stillness
instead of . . .

today a great flock
of forty herons
rose at once
from one side
of the bay
together
to settle
in bare trees
on the other side
found souls
crossing

never to say
why just flying
up like that
over dark water
here to there
to settle
in bare trees
there on their
way

to wait with me
for the first moment
of light
of first light
of light
unremembered
the flight
of birds
on their way
to whatever world
will stay with them
here

while I wait
for the same fate
bearing
what cannot be
born again

harbor those
walking lost
with little lights
in the deep night
carrying
cherished
memories
of love

lost

how I loved
try now
to find words
to guide me to
sounds to announce
my arrival or passing
a line that will last
past this moment's
single wing beat
not question
or answer
just a gathering
of greatness
that has waited
belated missing
its mark
this moment
alone with me
alone

in the dark
that has gathered
for years

here

this silence
I lie in
waiting

so snow

has
no place

t
o
g
o
b
u t
d o
w
n n
o w
f
a
l
l
s

i l
f r o s y
u u

t w w o
a h a f
l i l
l t l i
e s t

so they said
it rarely snows here

now two

f
e
e
t
o
f
i
t

so-so-so-so

c-c-c-c
o-o-o-o
l-l-l-l
d-d-d-d

part four: tiny poems shelter in place

table for one

a quiet mind
is kind

find

one

if it's not
yours

yet

in

vite it

in

for simple
social dist

an

c e d

in

n e r

un

wind

clouds out my back window

1.

vapor
paper-thin

one layer
gauze

sheer
off white
vener

next to
nothing

next to
intrusions
of blue

still enough
weight
of water

to somehow
drizzle

right behind
my house

now
wow

blue
wins

sun streams
down

instead

2.

cccc
llllllllll
oooooooooooo
uuuuuu
dddddd

s?
////////| | | | \\\

so **LOUD**
what light
gets by
is

s
o
l
i
t
t
l
e

even eye
might not
get by

if
eye blink

eye am
eye think
therefore

soso

s
o
s
o
l
i
t
t
l
(m)e

3.

one
puffy white
one

dawdles
flaunts
fluff

erupting
tufts
of more
white

slomo
popcorn

that blue
haired
lady sky

slips
piece by
piece

between
her lips

watching
some old
movie

I somehow
cannot see

from my side
of the wide
white screen

4.

i
am not

i

i am

not

not
i

allowed
to name
that cloud

or that
one

even one
that says
straight

call me
that

is what
i
am

not

5.

there

the rare
pink tint
skinny fingered

daring dawn
to linger

I fawn

want to
fondle
fondly
but

it is way
too

s
l
i
m
f
l
i
m
s
y

and now so
gone

I wonder
was it
ever

like love
when it
leaves

even
there

clouds out my car window

driving
down
state street

that bank
of clouds
afloat like
breeze-puffed
boat sails

taut-flappy
duck cloth

moving
schooners
over
hilltop
treetops
on the back side
of budd bay

fills
me
up
till

I too
billow
with
well
being

why

are high
white clouds
always flush
to the horizon
side of
woodard bay
air lush
with them

so
slo
mo
I must

stop

breathing

to see
motion

great freighters
waiting
to offload
cotton balls
one at a time

until
they are
all
gone

never hovering
over head

as if
right there
where I
stand

can only
be empty
sky

so blue
so
blue

so so
so so
blue

night

turns a
blind eye
crazy

black
mane
rain
slaked

slicked
side
wise with
wind

night rain

rain static
attic rafters

so gray
all day

less alone
am I

since your
goodbye

heartbeat
misses
when rain
kisses

attic rafters
static

electricity
don't pity

the fool
I am not

since your
goodbye

alone with
all this

beating
of my heart

if

that seagull flaps
only one wing

will it fly
in circles

or flop
right
down

I need to know
like right
now

in case
she makes me

break a wing

tea time

pinky finger

pointing
out

the next
spot

to nap

pay phone

if only I
had a dime

for every
time

I almost
call you

sweetheart
but don't

have
a dime

alone

is a word
with
out words

with
what is
missing

when I'm
alone
in bed

with
out
words

you don't

know me
never will
unless

you read
this I bet
you won't

right now
while I
write it

alone
in bed
quiet rain

outside
even I
don't

know me
when I
write

like this
how well
I hide

when I
want to
or don't

know how
time
passes
for no
body
my body

alone
in bed
same as

for some
body
trying

to decide
how to
read this

no way
of knowing
what

if any
thing is
missing me

binary code

sun in my back yard
sky so blue-infused
cloud-wisps twirling

rain in my front yard
falling so soft and slow
intimate on my skin

somewhere I know
must be a rainbow
I can't see between

I will walk back
and forth around
the house until

white light lays out
all of its cards and
one or zero wins

love song

1.

I want to slumber
under a penumbra
tumble unencumbered
with some comely number

2.

lofty clouds
shed soft
fleshy

petals
that waft
“in lacy jags”

never seem
to settle for anything
less than me

3.

if all goes well
it will peak
in two weeks

if you won't tell
I will sneak in
for a peek

I still get weak
in the knees just
hearing you speak

those three

dreams
left me
bereft

endless
calculations
always

wrong
long line
for dinner

I'm not
in it
never

what she
wants
me to be

and one
so dark
I refuse

to re-
member
it now

re	fuse
to	
re	member

cloudscape

layered gray
one glum
galleon
glides by
over off
white waves

then dustbowl
storms plow
over what
little
is left of
a missing
sun once
yellow fringe
now singed
slate

later
layered gray
times two
my mood
I'd say
but blank
is no
mood I
know I
can name

between almost-closed curtains at dawn

bright light
knives in

thick black
backs out

think bends
dead ends

night dozes
white roses

gazillions
of photons

fill space
spill lines

still words
now there

I cried

now
emptied
of what

I didn't
dare
hear

blank
pleasant
like

after sex
with
someone

not in
love
with me

wondering
what on earth
made me

then later
can't wait
to do it

once
again
again

I have

no idea
why you
don't

know how
close will
is to won't

wait and
too late
mated

a word
blurred to
unheard

I have no idea
why you
don't know

how wow
my now is
how sounds

surge with
such force
irresistible

without only
immovable
silence

why how
true my love
you want

won't warrant
even one
in return

starlight

photons
parse
parsecs
of space:
starlight

spark
neurons
outside
now in:
starlight

I am
now
not

I
am but
what

was is:
star
light

fog now

cloud
found
ground

my eyes
founder
flounder

to focus
cyclist
whirrs by

blurry
I look
back up

from
my fog
now

bright white
clouds
billow

so high
and tight
I cannot

see through
or be
with them

three

collared
doves swoop
in queue up
on the power

line I am
so happy
to see chilly
today I

walked empty
streets unlonely
two joggers
scatter them

wide white
Vs on tails
bobbing
in flight

note to self @ 2:49 am, may 1

I love you paul
I love everything
about you

except for

 well
yes

there's
that

loopy

no
I am
not

no
not
am I
losing
my grip

just

l
o
o
s
e
n
i
n
g
i
t

you would too
if i were you

doppler effect

five AM
dark
I lie quiet
seagull
flying by

piercing
siren alarm
clock cries

coming:
now
now
now
now
now
now
now

going:
why
why
why
why
why
why
why

so you say

you always
get what
you want

oh yay

and then
it's not what
you want

no yay

what?

well

go back
to go
and
don't want
what you

wantwant

want

what you don't

the full moon, 2/20

1.

because I know I cannot save

even one second

of moonlight in my memory

for later

I crave more

until after

even one second

the urgency becomes

unbearable

and I turn away

2.

when it comes to moonlight

there is no such thing

as the precision

of a sphere

borders

blur to black space

the difference

between dark and light

like the MRI image

of my brain:

“unremarkable”

3.

that pale white stone
racing around in the sky
frightens when it steals
all that light
and lies
claiming
it is
its own

4.

the moon wears
a long silk gown
lit from beneath
seen flared to the floor
from above

not quite round
on the ground

but almost

not quite white
in that pale light

but almost

5.

the eye cannot stare
long enough
straight at moonlight
to keep it settled
in the mind

photons keep speeding
around
at the speed
of speed

6.

Li Po drowned
with the full moon
in his arms

but no one knows
whether he was trying
to love it or save it

it just melted away
in millions of little white
flakes on the black water

that may well have turned
into deep space
when they both
went missing

7.

Li Po died while trying
to keep the full moon afloat
mistaking time for space

after he went down
for the final time
and water stilled
the moon was somehow
still there
still full
still still

8.

when there is no moon
you cannot possibly
imagine one

go ahead
I dare you

try

now imagine
this page
is a so-black lake
you cannot fathom
any bottom

try again

see?

9.

Li Po wanted me
to know how
“I died” and “it worked”
could both be true

so, so true

and why

full moon, 2/21

last year's snow moon
was so cold, thick
slice of ice melted
into a black felt sky

this year it is a peach pie
succulent
as mid-July
I have no idea why

last night I woke
at 3 am just to be sure
I wasn't mistaking
time for space

three wavy clouds
above the horizon
lit from above
by a floodlight moon

like wide stripes
of fluffy icing
off-white
slathered across

a so-soft dark
chocolate sky
waiting with that pie
to satisfy

all the hunger
in every february
in the universe
at once.

night life

a flare of street-
light: air
delirious with snow

each step a dent in
wind blowing
over what's left of

the night beside me
tucked in
luxuries of snowfall

two trees across
the street
lustrous to twig-tips

in tuxedos I pull tight
the bow
of my black tie

step out in fineries
sheer syllables
of silk ruffle through

a sheen of street-
light still
delirious with snow

part five: tiny poems grow the fuck up

song for every one

distant thunder rumbles
up from the south
beat boxes booming, then
hard, pounding thumps,
house-rattling tympanis,
some huge heart
big as the mountains
beating harder and harder
bright pulses of lightning
coursing through the veins
of a dark sky and then
after minutes of breathless
waiting rain sweeps down
one black sheet after another

grief grips my throat
won't let words go
I watch
the long genuflection
of a knee on a neck
8 minutes and 46 seconds
to breathlessness
a month of grief a lifetime of grief
an eon of grief reaching back
as far as time can measure
one knee after another
genuflecting on a neck
God still on its side

Credence Clearwater
blares from my stereo
the same song for fifty years:
“Saw the people standing,
thousand years in chains.
Somebody said it's different now.

Look it's just the same."
Now nobody even bothers to say
it is "different now,"
the noose
of a knee on a neck
and neighborhoods in flames
fifty years ago
the Pittsburgh Hill District burns
and I stare at the amber glare
of fires on the skyline
a night-long sunset, feeling
not fear, how could I, death everywhere
back then, might as well be mine
as anyone else's, and burning up
on the outside instead of the inside
as good a way to go as any
and then the dark, the darker,
the darkest, that long, slow descent
to the bottom of the ravine
where the Vietnam Memorial Wall
is tallest, grief intolerable
each name in relief
the ones I know the ones I don't
a tourniquet of flames around
the neck of goodness every
8 minutes and 46 seconds
another breathless measure
of what time is in the shadow
of power's eternal rage,
tower after Trump tower
glowering down on everything
it fears and hates,
tears holes everywhere;
"Richmond 'bout to blow up,
communication failed"
as it always fails again and again
every 8 minutes and 46 seconds

for 50 years when God's side of it
is still a knee on a neck
"If you know the answer
now's the time to say."
and still, now, now's the time to say
and now, now's the time to say
and now, now's the time to say
and every 8 minutes and 46 seconds
for 50 years now is the time to say

stop

genuflecting on a neck
God still on your side
"they could've
saved a million people,"
or a billion, or just one
a knee to his neck on a street
just like yours and mine
could have been saved
"how can I tell you"
how can I tell you
how can I tell you
every 8 minutes and 46 seconds
for fifty years
over and over how
can I tell you
when that knee of grief
genuflects on my neck
and "I can't breathe"

a fairy tale

every morning now
I wake on the other side
of something
all those dreams

like the last one
last night you
in my arms
feather light
and I carried you
for miles surprised
thinking you are so light
I can carry you
for miles
there must
have been a reason
but I don't remember it
the way we never remember
the reason for anything
sooner or later just
that we do it and do it and do it
and one day we wake up
on the other side of something
and have done it
and you were smiling
yes, smiling I remember now
and it was like I was carrying you
"over the threshold" but it was
outside in the open air
sunny and warm
greenness everywhere
greener than green everywhere
a lightness even to the light
which was everywhere

and we were together there
my carrying you in my arms
your arms slung loosely
carelessly
over my shoulders
as if you were carrying me
and I was so light
you could carry me for miles
your eyes sunny
and warm a lightness even
to their lightness
and I was smiling
thinking yes
we can carry one another
just this way
all the way to the other side
of whatever was there
to get across
all those dreams say
the ones that come
night after night
some of them staggering
through the darkness
unable to carry the weight
of anything to anywhere
unbearable
and then the one
with you right in it
still in my arms as if
it was not yesterday
or never
but now right now
the only part of now
still worth remembering
carrying one another in our arms
and then out of the blue
I kissed you right

on the lips felt
the taut softness of them
like it was not yesterday
but now right now
and the moisture we share
when we kiss was right there
like a mist
lingering on my lower lip
right there right now
and how surprised you were
that my lips and yours
were touching like that
not for the last time
but for the first
and when I woke right then
on the other side of something
I was not who I was
and I knew I could still
carry you in my arms
all the way to the threshold
and then over it
home for the first time
on the other side
of all that green
and all that light
smiling into the light
on the other side
even lighter than light
everywhere
a greenness greener than green
a lightness
together
ever after
happily

how change happens

things go suddenly
south
and they never go back
north again
again

just another day

sheer liquid
curtain cascades:
gutters clogged

huge sun-spooked
clouds shapeshift:
dustbowl billows

sun comes and goes
rain unrelenting:
tumbleweed

if cararra marble morphed
modules growing nodules
puffing slowly
Kilauea pillow lava

skilled winds
sculpting
abstract bodies
so lovely

it would be these
undulating clouds

the tree across the road

bleach blonde tatters
smatterings swivel
in the slightest breeze
this one then
that one letting go
so so slow
almost all gone

every minute I stare
fewer and fewer
soon just long skinny
fingers clawing
into a gray sky
longing for
lingering leaves

Trump

airbrush
agent
orange
rubber
bladdered
pig skin
counter
Kaepenick
kick trick
make up
rattle can
shake up
shit hits
pepper spray
flash bang

shamble
bible
gestapo
despotic
pop pop pop
tear tear tear
gas gas gas
shit

I cop in piitsburgh utterly I . . . shit and I

(This is the title Word gave this document when I typed up a few details of my dream half asleep last night. I've corrected the typos now:)

I'm a cop in pittsburgh utterly loony lick the magic toad loony everyone chaotic and out of control crazy and I'm waist deep in a muddy puddle falling down exhausted not drunk laughing and you on my arm I'm explaining why I have that wacky look on my face all the time because everyone goes around absolute batshit loony and I can't believe it and I try to tell you I know I mean really know you don't pay any attention to anything I tell you but I keep saying it anyway because maybe one day you might wake up before it's too late and the only other person I ever knew who never listened returned a favor or said thank you was him yes him you know him and I keep saying these things to you because I hope maybe one day you'll wake up and realize you haven't been awake because you know what he was almost charming that unawake way when he was thirty but a total total tool that way when he was sixty and you are about halfway in between so you do the math . . .

01/22/2021

january sunlight blazes
june bright coaxes
amazingly
each grass blade
glazed white with frost
into sudden blossom

silences rise
like chimney smoke
through my mind
all day watching
this and that
pass through
without a trace

each vernal
instant
eternal

nothing

every
thing

still

there

still

think

what it might mean

today

to say
out loud
I love you

if you are alone
walking in the woods
among winter trees
their svelte delicate arms
outreaching
so openly
they will smile
understanding

never say
I love you
back
knowing
you will know
that everything they know
about love
is in words
that cannot be heard

except
we will be here
when you come back
tomorrow
lovingly

by yourself
with us
another ordinary day

you may say
I love you
all day long
to children
the glossy wings
of those words
gliding perfectly
through the crystalline air
a bright white wedge
dissecting the bluest of skies
swooping
to a soft
landing
in the greenest grass
that grows
in that wide field
at the top of the hill
where you always end
your imagined walks
with them
together

and you may
say them
smilingly
to any passerby
on the street
who will assume
a lunacy

of loneliness
or the out of tuneness
of Jesus
sounding loose
even stupid
so barren there
in the open air
when they cast
eyes askance
and walk past
at an obtuse angle
as if they cannot hear
or nod smilingly
to say
silently
safely
thank you
even if I can't now
know for sure
or say
that I love you too

be wary though
with those
who barely
know you
out there
in the marketplace
of giving and taking
wanting and needing
where those three words
are a worrisome
currency

care there

is imperative
say I love you
even beneath your breath
and those who overhear
will tighten
recoil slightly
eyes dipping
tiny invisible anxieties
gripping the corners
of their lips
tipping them
down

but always
and I mean always
in the lush hidden chambers
of your own heart
where you speak to yourself
ceaselessly

say I love you
over and over
an endless loop
as if those are
the only three words
you still remember

ever need

to hear

or to think

back at woodard bay after a long absence,
1/25/21

1.

from the tip of Henderson inlet
a phalanx of buffleheads
is swept off like flotsam
on the outgoing tide
three flame-coifed mergansers
heading the parade

2.

a dozen juncos
skitter and flit
down the gravel path
zig-zag back and
forth settling
in low-slung
hemlock branches
on either side
of me singing

3.

a tangled stand of
white-blanchd alders
eighty feet tall
winter bald
all lean jauntily
at the same angle
tipping patiently
in the direction
of remembered
summer's sunlight

4.

the water seems so much wider
without late-summer foliage
mirror white for half a mile
then washboard gray
the rest of the way
to budd bay

5.

twenty seals slumber
on the hundred-year-old
abandoned lumber dock
gurgling and grunting
contentedly

every few minutes
one bellyflops off
to fish

6.

as I stand at the point
one stunning bufflehead
flies past me
the first one I have ever
seen on the wing
inches above the water
displaying all at once
in freeze-frames
flickering fast-forward
all of its dazzling whites

7.

once again

I am
after all these months
nothing
but an absence
happy to host
all this presence

once again

just when you think you can't possibly

be more

alone

wait

wait

wait

there

now

see

you

can

on my 72nd birthday
I wake from a dream in a library

where I wandered the stacks
failing to find
the folio of Marlowe's poems
I so wanted to read from
for a friend, then
steeped a pot of tea,
rare, rolled leaves
sweetened with a secret
Renaissance syrup
of honey and milk
and we two sat silently
smiling slightly, sipping.

Outside my window
a foot of new snow
has buried
the drab, dreamless
February world
in endless deeps of white;
at 5 AM, not even
one footfall
mars its sheer veneer.

I think today I will
forget everything
I ever knew,
except Marlowe's great poem
"The Passionate Shepherd
to His Love:"

*Come live with me and be my love,
And we will all the pleasures prove
That valleys, groves, hills, and fields,*

*Woods, or steepy mountain yields.
And we will sit upon rocks,
Seeing the shepherds feed their flocks,
By shallow rivers to whose falls
Melodious birds sing madrigals.*

after daylong drizzle

somehow clouds
bloom behind
hundred-foot firs
across the street
from my house
plumes of smoky
blue wind-flumed
sidewise west awash
haloes hazy peach-
pink thin salmon
fingers stretch east
past downtown

I walk back and forth
window to window
breathtaken it settles
even evening gray
all that disarray
of sun-frayed
light somehow
still layered behind
my pried-wide eyes

dawn awesome

pink glaze dry-
brushed sidewise
hand poking
through puffed up
ruffled grays
thin wristed
long skinny fingers
reaching all the way
from here to downtown

half a dozen
seagulls black
wedges drive
wildly down wide
whitening highways

then suddenly
like me
barely
any longer
there

avian inventory, 3/22/21

1. *the inlet*

2 bald
eagles glide
side by side
treetop high
a flight path
to my right
so soon
out of sight

6 herons
galumph across
the inlet settling
separately
in topmost
cedar branches
their s-hook necks
stretching up to
pick something
for nest-making
or just to laugh
breathe in deep

a smattering
of buffleheads
maybe twenty
in a scattershot
pattern near
the inlet mouth
dabble and dunk

half a dozen scoters
scoot around

in tight formation
at the center
bullseye

1 kingfisher
bullets instant
down the inlet
inches above
water alights
on a branch
overhanging

30 seconds later
2 kingfishers
bullet all the way
back up the inlet

30 seconds later
2 kingfishers bullet
all the way back
down the inlet

I have no idea
how few kingfishers
comprise those 5

2 canada geese
snuffle up
something sumptuous
near the shore
then paddle
madly away

2. *the bay*

30 or so herons
stand statue still
on the abandoned
lumber-dumping
railway trestle
out in the bay
soaking in heat
from morning sun

2 geese waddle
side by side by
a big alder near
the picnic tables
marking a spot
for me to stand
tomorrow when
they are not
there to bother

1 spotted towhee
flits twig tip
to twig tip
in underbrush
but I know for sure
it is not a robin
by all the white
bits on its wings

1 rare varied thrush
yellow-orange stripe
above the eye
rusty-color breast
robin-like but not
sits still on a bare
branch long enough

for me to memorize
later to learn its name

3 more herons
float overhead
barely wing-flapping
waft down to join
the legions warming

1 robin after another
every fifty feet
or so too many
to number
and sparrows
and juncos zinging
back and forth
across the path
same thing but

I see them
every single one

3.

every single one
I see them

the air so clear
so right here
nothing not near-
by my eyes wide
as sea and sky
unconcealing all
these things
with feathers
floating or in flight

**out of the blue
(for pamela)**

high sky a confusion
of blues with huge
cumulus clouds

bright sunlight
on the path
I walk

to woodard bay
trying still
to reconcile

what's lost with
what cannot
now be found

the way love
no matter how
loud you announce

today hears
no echo
anywhere

then out of
the blue somehow
soft snow falls

I have no idea
from where
it comes or how

for some reason
I just laugh
and laugh

it reminds
me long
as it lasts

something
is wakeful
enough even

in thin air to
make me forsake
what is false

no matter
how alluringly
it beckons

like love lost
but not at all
hope always

because even
in brightest
sunlight sometimes

somehow something
surprising arises
out of the blue

and soft
snow
falls

quietly on my thighs satisfied

if you could slide
your fingers
inside mine
would I try
to type what
I think
you want to
write or just let
our hands
rest quietly
on my thighs
satisfied

if you could slide
your eyes in
behind mine
would they
smile while
I imagine
your hands
resting quietly
on my thighs
satisfied

when you answer
clearly even
when I can't
find words
to fit your
voice tightly
inside mine
I let my hands
rest quietly
on my thighs
satisfied

place setting

a white seagull
floats motionless
beak upturned
fancy folded napkin
to be unfurled
across my lap

one bufflehead
bobs porcelain
well-steeped
Earl Grey
tea cup bright
white saucer

a mallard drake
and a merganser
side by side
unlikely pair
vinegar and oil

two collared doves
seem almost
asleep breasts
to ground resting
salt and pepper

one sandpiper
hops and yips
might as well be me
on my way home
to make breakfast

full moon 3/27/21

moon bright white
blur teary-eyed
haze-hidden behind
wispy not-even-
there-clouds way
too much light
for this late at night

a slight blue aura
seems to droop
like a droplet
from the right side
of its bottom edge

after only one
minute of looking
I lose all clarity
fall into confusion
can't any longer
remember where
I am right
now or how
to get back
where I was
a here which I fear
no longer even exists

full moon 2/28/21

hammocked between
two hemlocks huge
helium balloon
yellow smiley-face
laughing out loud
not *at* me or *with* me
but *for* me the way
the best laughers
sooner or later
make everyone laugh
for no reason at all
except to keep laughing

a few smudge-smooth
clouds huddle up
closer and closer
brightening with
gathered light more
and more cheerful
the nearer they get

after only one
minute of laughing
I lose all confusion
fall into clarity
can't any longer
remember where
I am right
now or how
to get back
where I was
a there which I swear
no longer even exists

“even a numbskull has mind for a teacher”

Chuang Tzu

pregnant with possibility
invisible absence
gyrates and surprises
name and named
surging urgently
from a fissure-field
I cannot cross
except by abiding

all these words so
uselessly intimate
what is not
that but this and
cannot be not-
or better-said

absence and presence
the same
generative tissue
issuing one
from the other
which is which

walking down the hill toward town, 4/1/21

a ridgeline of clouds
like springtime mountains
snow-capped but
browning down
toward the base
shimmers up behind
the rolling hills
on the other side
of the bay
mimicking every
peak and curve

the absence
out of which
all of today's
presence evanesces
into place

just to the right
the Olympic range
looks exactly
the same
hovering above
the treeline
mimicking rows
of sailboat masts
crowded into the
south corner
of the bay

the presence
out of which
all of today's
absence vanishes
into space

water

*“it is the earth’s eye, looking into which
the beholder measures the depth of her nature”*

1.

a lone bufflehead
bobs on ripples
in the middle
of budd bay
her partner
jets instanter
out of nowhere
kaleidoscopic
whirls of blacks
and whites
on the wing
glides in side-
wise sidles
over beside
her then
together they
dive down
under water

I want to think
they seek dark
to nuzzle and
kiss secretly
out of sight
but 30 seconds
later they bob up
40 feet apart
paddle fast back
together then
do it all again

down and up
down and up
down and up
over and over
together apart
together apart
together apart
over and over

I watch long
as I want then
walk on wishing
I were . . .

2.

I hear the piercing
beeps first then
spot that jet black
swoosh perched
in a white birch
above a reed pool
in the middle of
the plaza mottled
mate waiting 5 feet
from a mosaic of
the quote above
about depths
measured this one
no more than a
foot deep about
the size of my house
but ideal it seems
for these marsh
and meadow
lovers to make
a living and a life

on the wing
that slice of red
centers earth's
eye and every
redwing I ever
watched as a boy
by the lake's
edge flies by in
my mind's eye
just to say hi

3.

one pigeon
rests breast
deep iridescent
in a small pool
so peaceful

I try to walk by
quietly but
look too closely
and it flies off

I will regret that
rude intrusion
the rest of the day

4.

two randy gulls
flap around
on the arm of a
tall pole squealing
one failing to
mount both fly

off in pursuit
one of the other

the plight of all
lovers in flight
at least for a while
in early spring

a few birds a few weeks later

1.

on the peak of a metal roof
white slices on an indigo sky
two gulls bob heads up
and down rhythmically beak
past beak sharp clear bleats
repeated keeping the beat

one mounts wing-flapping
wildly both screech
in tandem then settle
suddenly glide off wide
sails sliding over still water

2.

a dozen purple martins
dart and zing above
the upper finger
of budd bay flash
white bellies barrel roll
defying gravity and belief
chirp their multi-note
bird-perfect songs

then perch for a few
seconds at bird-box homes
nailed to tall poles
in the middle of the bay
to deliver their trove

3.

at the corner of east bay
drive and olympia avenue
a crow pecks away at
a clear plastic fast-food
tray clicked closed
shielding three donuts
from its eager beak
then eyes livid with ire
cries wildly and flies off

everything that matters this morning

he picks up piled
pine needles
and dry grass
on a plastic rake

*good morning
hello how are you
doing great today how are you
I'm good thank you for asking
have a nice day
thanks*

he dumps dry grass
and pine needles
from the rake into
a big plastic can

the end

when
you
know

that
nothing
matters

any
more
and

never
will
again

