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NUDE WITH ANYTHING

by

James D'Agostino

A Dissertation
Submitted to the
Faculty of The Graduate College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the
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Department of English

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Forklift, Ohio: “The Way She Kisses;” “Why We Didn’t See the Sentence *It Is Spring and Kenneth Koch Is Dying Coming*”

Green Mountains Review: “Half Notes”

Indiana Review: “The Song You Could Have (Had Me For);” “Abject Permanence”

Passages North: “Still Life with Zeno and File Footage”

Third Coast: “Weeping Italians”

TriQuarterly: “How You Knew You Were Naked;” “On Whether What Was Found or not Was Looked for”

James D’Agostino

NUDE WITH ANYTHING

James D'Agostino, Ph.D.

Western Michigan University, 2007

Nude With Anything is a book-length manuscript of poetry that sources itself in a painterly world, one in which a visual vocabulary privileges the materiality of language in all its attempts to rival experience. Its *teleos* leans often toward velocity, a fevered stacking up of phrases, and so its range of poetic forms documents attempts at building calm into the rapids, intersecting verbal excess with contrasting silences, a kind of late-phase Henry James shot through by haiku. With each syntactical tactic and shift in diction, *Nude With Anything* employs an abiding collage aesthetic, braiding different strands of discourse and seeking wholeness risen from its ruptures.

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INTRODUCTION

When I was a Fellow at the Vermont Studio Center the summer before I began my doctoral studies, I lucked into the administrative glitch of serving as the only writer in residence for a month in a community of visual artists. They would come to dinner each night speckled and stained, wearing their watercolors or covered in clay, and I would sit there squeaky clean after an hour or two of alliteration. I envied the ever-available opportunity they had to encounter their artistic mediums in an immediate and visceral way. The sculptors spent half their days salvaging materials out of attics and dumpsters or sneaking into defunct factories. As a poet, all my efforts that summer seemed one long, invisible, idea-driven code machine. Like many artists granted valuable time and space to work, I found the summer exceedingly difficult to “produce.” I had expectations of making major in-roads on a new manuscript of poems, but the progress seemed slower than usual. In an attempt to kick-start my writing, I decided to try following the lead of the “visuals” around me, those artists who seemed happily up to their elbows in their work. I figured if *I* took a blowtorch to my muse in the way the sculptors around me did, *that* will get her talking. It seemed to work. I was building poems in new ways (and at a new rate). The result was a new sense of the plasticity of language, a workable substance to be slathered on or scraped off. I relieved myself of the responsibility of crafting some utterance or other, and instead tried to relate to my material in a more physical way, often employing a collage aesthetic.

Since my residency, I have tried to position my work closer to the other arts’ physicalities. Whether by engaging in the ancient poetic practice of *ekphrasis* (the verbal

representation of a visual art object) or using research as a kind of salvaging of shards of language, in the following years my poems sought to source themselves in a painterly and sculptural world. In his influential book, *The Order of Things*, Michel Foucault takes up the relationship between text and image, warning that “what one sees is never what one says” (11). Ekphrastic texts always remain at one remove from visual representation; words can cite, but never *sight* their object. My interest in ekphrastic poetics fit so aptly with my writing process that its descriptive and analytical terms became, in my work, a vocabulary of consciousness, a way to see and evoke the world itself (and not just its museum walls). As I began work on many of the poems that helped point the way toward my dissertation in its current form, I continued with the composition strategies I discovered at the Studio Center. I would use my research and reading as an opportunity to collect raw material, the way a painter would search for color or a sculptor experiment with some new substance. This led to a new relationship with texts. In addition to all of my scholarly, professorial, or theoretical uses for reading, I would spend time searching for the vivid physicalities of individual words. This approach occasions a kind of aberrant reading. Since I wasn’t reading with any of the usual concerns in mind, I would try to read against the referential aspects of any text, working backwards, right to left, etc., anything to work against my expressive habits by building new linguistic structures. It led to a newly charged, speculative process. I would head to the library with a plan to pan apart the gold and sand, to see what I could mine.

This approach to process courts the aleatory, incorporating chance into composition, and the outcome was a heightened muscularity to the language. I wrote more and more

toward a mad stacking up of phrases. The work took on an almost cryptomaniac velocity, with its syntax torquing in on itself like a mobius. Each trip into the stacks turned up more and more raw material. The resulting verbally revved up poems became a way to frame with frenzy any isolated image. In an essay on the poetic image, Robert Hass points out that “the stillness of the instant exists by virtue of its velocity” (*Twentieth* 276). The newly emerging physicality and velocity of my poems allowed for the further deepening of any image by giving a good bit of chaos to measure its quiet against, its stillness almost exploding under the force of the poem’s “talk.” Instead of metrics or syllabics as a system of poetic measure, the poems portioned out words in pounds per square inch.

The different forms employed in *Nude With Anything* catalog different attempts at isolating segments of the long sentence, trying to find some contrasting silences to make the poems’ feverishly-pitched diction significant, hearable. The book operates under the poetic influence of John Ashbery, among others. In “The New Spirit,” from his *Three Poems*, which serves as manifesto as much as any of his books, he begins, “I thought that if I could put it all down, that would be one way” (7). This impulse captures one of the main aims of the poems in my dissertation, phraseological poems of such Malthusian excess that they always ran the risk of toppling under their own verbal weight. If they were going to work at all, I realized I needed to try and shape all that momentum and the page-long sentences. Luckily, Ashbery recounts an alternate approach in the second sentence of “The New Spirit:”

And next the thought came to me that to leave all out would be another,
and truer, way.

clean-washed sea

The flowers were.

I came to see the two impulses in my work, those of excess and excision, not as polar opposites that needed reconciling, but rather two techniques for arriving at the same expressive end, whether I was writing the slight poems in this collection that seemed to fracture the white space of the page or the walls of words in which (in)sight's slight splintering affords a glimpse of an image in the midst of an unstoppable sentence.

Love has one aim: and that is, not to be.

—Auden

I.

Against Vanishing

Don't you remember. Don't you go
and remember on me winter stars,
so far nothing Summer couldn't make

a decent Spring of. It's easy enough
to pass off as immortal a while
those branches I'd broken in the yard,

now putting forth a quiet green I'll take
as tragicomic April, steadily blurred
or snapped into light the air

would've been full of had I had any
say. All of it seems fine, your face
in me, proof the day is getting late,

a paint I have the sense of here. Weren't
paintings frequently to realize people
walk into a place, and with any luck

back out again, while everywhere the streets
are being blue, rain-attended, ending-
appropriate? Some thought themselves

themselves, some light industry,
the presence and example of good or a dream
to that effect. Soon we're able to say

a little storm on which the sun was kind
of shining made a monochrome
of many things, and silver light, day

enough to feel assured we fully understand
the impact of skin on raindrops, innocent
bystanders at whose hands this lays itself

open. Outside the skin, for instance, circled
the kitchen and Mozart on the radio.
Curtains sucked through open windows

fanned against the brick. One came home
to have been gone at all. I stood
not thinking this to know it

has a life of its own---death—one
great nothing to measure against
whatever's considered delivered

by us pickers-up-of-pebbles at the beach.
Piece by piece, the empty boats and sound
of shops closing takes shape, short on piers

and long on footprints let's just leave
and leave at that.

Nearsighting

This likely company of light
and shade as day spills

into the valley—not ideas
simply because

we first encountered them
on imperishable materials,

particularly stone—but real
feelings, gathers

to a point I wanted
to make about the means

to a happiness that could be
infallibly stated.

In the thicket
blooms your face

smells like, the sounds
of spared birds.

The spun world
tends to take off

our hands everything
acutely felt. It's so old

a story that the only
way back can be said

to end in every breakable
object that passes

between us.
The dust

of ordinary rooms
is everywhere

able to implicate.
The change to evening,

the print dress slipped
off. It is to leave

oneself in the fullness
of bright mornings

and afternoons
that drift and settle

how a day is to be
felt, good fraction

of eternity,
else we cannot be

sure we're here at all.

Self-Portrait in a Thermos

Said often enough, that I exist, that I do exist,
reflects the face of a person and through it
a landscape or backyard so palpably there
that instead of everything, the sparrows might be
understood at least, or daily rainfall, English
vs. Spanish moss. The mask itself at times
seems animated, capable of breaking friendships
over friendship. Something that happened was
happening and would probably again, resulting
in the formula for older songs than ever
could be written down today. First tulips
aspire by the gate as if they were a day older
in history than anyone and closer by affinity
to mysterious beginnings. Turns out
the ultimate obstacle's death after all,
that theory and practice of everyday living
have succumbed more and more to the dusty
and blunted. But which ash are we to store
in porcelains marked by accidents in firing?
Why there was something rather than nothing
kept people busy for centuries. Of late
the nights are dawning, and it seems necessary
for what had been thought to give up at last
the milky depths of surface moonlight. And
for what? For the accumulated cadence of memory?
A last look around, the unhookable eye
of the bra strap? Any curve's a straight line
lamenting its mortality. Any lunar information
throws its indeterminant grief into relief, kinda
shiny on the wall, both reminiscent and expecting
mute procession to impart the silver hours
with the restrained lament of the solitary man.
Look it up. These things are drawn from life,
packed in as though they were town contours,
all the clearer for the rains looked occasionally
at, always maddeningly slanted, yet straight
in the papers in the morning, a task almost
impossible to accomplish without maps
that pour over onto further sheets the certain
slowness of arriving anywhere. First try to look
heavenward without placing God on any particular

spot on the ceiling, then deal with such things
as the shoelace, which formerly made it difficult
to notice any lives walked otherwise out of.
One air makes you sad, another joyous, a third
confers a purely objective affair, treed
wind or fruit-fall that seems stark enough
a surface to reach degrees of depth as yet
unknown. Life can't tell who believes it
seeable at last, and through the big end
of the telescope, to boot. The wolf skin
one day gives way to paintings of the chase.
Your many failings, a poem. The dust
upsets. Comparative lack falls back to little
more than abundance, as sunset overthrows
its older feudal yellow and red for a famous
silver-blue, and leaves the intervals between
so varied as to offer beauty as a curtain drawn,
fusing the local effects of calm and storm
into a new ensemble, the window itself.

On Whether What Was Found or not Was Looked For

—for Herman Rorschach

It might just precede what finally appears, the windy trees certain / doors have / long since lost. Two forms, sad and watery (abrupt / hillside) (empty telephone / factory). Me, I'm real, this dilemma / to lessen resemblance to / a pile of clothes on the chair or wind / in drapes awakened to, any / but the most singular fragment / because it manages to extract from one image / the entire sense of its blue / illustrator. Something has to happen to the sudden ellipses / rowing frantically toward the downed / aviator, secondary / on all accounts to just thinking the world and / there it is, a thoroughly likable debris, many things, sure, you could have / said—part to be still / you, part roomy predicament / due most to a minutiae urging usefulness / by standing smack in daily life. Storm / pastorals, dilapidatia, they can be what they are / without effort, ablaze / with the most noon you'd ever be / called upon to recite. Wondering where the fuck you are / purveys a certain quality to the registered world, desires / to express the pageant other than inert and helpless, more / appropriately bodied-forth, / an entire center (woman) with a lighter gray (translucent skirt), and lighter / still (thighs and legs), lower (hands), innermost (hand), lower / side (sheaf of wheat) (leg, sometimes), adjacent / bright and dull (days) corresponding / fogs (cellos) seem. Instead I tried to think of everything / I am. Standing, recumbent, facing backwards, doubled / over, in a pictogram it does not matter much that it's difficult music / sung by the mouth / to embroider any words around a subject all the harder / to escape because we're in it, since / it is outside, since, believing / nothing, I believed slowly what I could, a little / ceremony, if even only / pouring ordinary water one glass to another to feel a thing / turn into itself again and again, like the problem / of a driver asking his passengers whether to turn left / and getting the reply, right, meaning, / yes, right.

City Second

It only takes a moment for the mind to turn
the chiseled V's to U's in the official facades
of Chicago, with its Doric fixation affording
us so many spots to piss or think up songs
about cities that speak to themselves in sirens
and times new roman underneath the aqueducts
that stand as ornaments of ingenuity and thirst.
Even Wabash points toward two infinities tonight,
and somewhere in between a streetlight waits for us
to watch it just blink on. A man waves away a fly,
then for the benefit of anyone around, waves again
to reiterate the ideas *fly* and *wave*. A moon. A gauze
of cloud. In the smallish rooms above, the sound
of toast scraped less dark, or slide guitar, a woman's
laughter through the wall exactly like a bookmark
in a book of women's laughter. On the street
a woman in the wind turns to shield the thing
she's folding, inventing one more use for the body
in these first moments of last light when the early
side-effect of beauty is a vague and luxurious sadness,
and a gull of blown garbage banks above the inner Drive,
then vanishes for a moment, then vanishes.

Weeping Italians

In my basement apartment I make a figure eight with my antenna until I tune in what I can. It's Italian and sorrowed, though softly, the way at dawn pastel sheets posted in the neighborhood mean someone can't find their cat. I don't know the opera or speak the language, but it's their pain that's universal, the infrequent oboe distant as a satellite. A woman and a man. Silence. The unexpected entrance of a third. I imagine the shapes of their mouths on some Milanese stage, hot under the spotlights, how to the audience they must look like tiny wounds shuddering. Like the calluses I got trying to learn the guitar. The burn at the end of the fingers from books with black and white photos of a left hand fisting out chords: the three-fingered A, the B flat seventh down by the bridge. The more painful the contortion, the more beautiful the sound. Like the enormous bronze bull of Phalaris in sixth century B.C. Sicily, with its hollowed compartments holding the tyrant's prisoners, cooked all day over a steady flame, its jeweled snout bent at such an angle so each wail echoed like a distant horn, tender in its resonance. In the final scene the heroine's sweetly grieving, the last alto left alive for another sold out night. The announcer says she throws herself into the flames after the last measure, and the crowd is on its feet, people who know that sometimes things get shaped like boots, hearts get stepped on, women with soft throats walk into disaster. Pythagoras knew each star swelled with audible mathematics. Right now our twenty year old radio waves bathe moons near Pluto, our static pronouncements put to tune, any sweet misery logged incrementally between 87.5 and 108, where these Italians tumble toward the edge of the universe, weeping, refusing to leave.

Kalamazoo

Why must it always be a question, what it meant, that part of speech
and/or I loved you most

in need of explication, affected shadow, one
good bar, reason why or how

long it had been raining and I felt like that
spun globe stopped somehow

in the ex-celery capital
of just one possible world, this

town in which the city persists.
Someone tumbles from a car and through the open door
the driver yells out *gave*,

the damn I gave—for a second

coasting really slowly past me
watching it all, everything he wanted whittled down to wanting
to know

what to want, went wrong or the fuck I'm

looking at.

Empiricism

Every tiny little leaf illuminated is the answer / 2:30 in the afternoon / lifts the meaning from, when / someone, namely, me, asks / of it what the world looks like / anymore, carried along, and yet slight, that / the first impression may be easily a face / in bas relief, in braille, in the region of our historical / feelings, not so much / catalogued as repeated to the point of dissolution, pouring / out of subways clearly felt / variation in the terms of interiority, a sort / of wakefulness or drowse, so blended with / the urge to know another in the room and really understand / them, not by readily detectable facets, but years and years of research / born from grief and isolation both, a continuous / music glossed by plenty good / reason to think we've more than even all of it / is, beyond / the cities we knew / the look of, a more formidable / miscellany everything explained / is, forgotten, whatever it is we say / when we mean it was a touch, / almost. It was / all those others of our solitary kind, recognizably familiar by that solitude, that lack / of any world but this one / likely encountered in any great rush to feeling at / the same time so long ago from now, for instance, years gone / telescopic smoke. All or none / of these things and many others with them / come together as to legibly express / an unaccusable whole. The bouquet lay / in its stock of appearances. Surely / any color there cries / the light denied entry into that / which throws it back, so rapid / that we take it as a single / truth, that damn bit of difference / paradise will be our fortune, granted / now, then loosely remembered / to have lingered here a while, the work / of obliterated figures. Today down here it's Autumn / among the many door examples, noise / of the possible city. It is as it might / be, sort of, not the clock / part, not a sky / to wring, mirage to feed, not foliage / at all as evening advances a little / at a time the various circumstances here / of life, but how the idea feels what it means / to go through / whatever happens, combined with some weather, gray / waves of traffic toward the one big theory we had / been about to find out about, to return / exhausted, probably, to / a past that crumbled on and on toward the desperate / ellipse of this morning, some late hope.

Against Having Your Hero Always On Stage

The morning etc. all fits brilliantly
the city dwell, anonymous enough to name
the flowers "rolling-spring device" or "small songs"

made of cloth," and leave the river scene
because the same old water rushes in,
the same stalemate of wishing and standstill

of guilt about the happy he has come to
fear and more, and just before
the mirror holds polished an impression

of the face he refuses to see, he refuses
because this is today, a day of very little
to hold together—bird song, room

on the sofa, a wife who would release
the tenderness that had to be gathering
within him—any, some, anything

she thought called for loneliness
balanced by my not having murdered
the man she wished I was, just

removing the knife from his back again
and again, shot in probably monochrome,
skin-side out and sometimes drawn

of waves, of blue light, snow often, rock
lichen, summer looking for a window,
a blue-toned approach to simple beginning

middle end structures, like who stands what
and where, on a steep slope or at a height,
as a wood, a garden directed downward,

as the glance, downcast, has the chance
to show them all the difference between
giving a shit and the sense one must

use words to carry on stage whatever scenic properties the actors can't themselves, namely, themselves.

Abject Permanence

An original copy
wherein one illustration
of a bunch of roses
pitched beautifully that
she may not refuse to love him
may come to remind him
how words which were the words
that made whatever he looked at
like itself especially—
the vertically tuliped daytime
of her sleeping mouth if fog
had lifted the small apartment.

Pattern occurs, is rearranged
or an adjective added, an aching
nostalgia, yellow doorways, letters
where the same verb in the same tense
and the same formula of tenderness
is used over and over. The weight
of places they entered, gave up,
sat stupidly building long
disordered quarrels was, eventually,
where all rags fluttered.
To know it
he only had to close his eyes.

On Believing to be Paradise the Place Where One Is Not

Were it any less than shadow
keeping any building
at its one address all day
we could but cut it
from its mooring, a gravity
in keeping with the elevated ideals
etched in any threshold, held there
for believing where we are
underneath a sky that's shaped by cityscape,
spires in silhouette less like pointers
toward a heaven of our own invention
than an intervening silence
lending its patina of a little longing
to the pale blue shapes
to be read as roofs, but really more
a mindedness mirrored in the shimmer
of the morning, the somewhat abstract
sense of everywhere it renders
with the hard brilliancy of new coin.
There is no chance of losing ourselves.
The city falls back to grass
and waving grain that can't be passed
without a verbal parallel
of movement, as in the rudiments
of dance, of vivid endless pleasure
rooted to a world that's dense
with meanings, lives
receded into, spoons
hitting plates and the garden gate
as spurs to memory, something
lost perhaps, indicating passage
from the present to the past and back.
Rather than to instance merely
kinds of loss, words, too, will build
an altar to The Beautiful From Elsewhere,
certainly orange for southern skies,
a blue skirt for the bodice to make
a kind of presence, a face today
where once you would have seen
such thinly-latticed clouds
practicing austerity in the mirror

of that lake. There are also numerous
close-ups of the eyes, flashes forward
toward nostalgia. And several hundred
pages later rainwaves on red tile remind you
the world is right there where you left it
in the kind vigilance of common light.
Half light, half shade, the still
life's right there on the table.
Help yourself.

History Without Stopping

Once you get it all down imperfectly, the ceiling
rolled away, general bloom or morning into canyons

wild with plums, corn shadow, oily street or episodes
of sand and pipers whistling triplets down along a shore,

the vivid sense of the actual you actually notice
in your attempts to account for why things are

what such light has against empty space, how much
to do with anything window-bathed a window has,

you'll learn enough about where you are, skin
under clothes or the depths of things, something

in between extremes suggesting tables and umbrellas,
trays and trays of drinks, the day at anchor. You'll learn

enough about history to suspect it ain't going to turn out
the way you had thought. Today still sweeps horizon

to horizon, the coldly lyrical to something warmer
finally. Little clouds of walkers in the heat, a man

tells usually a woman with her groceries
that he'd learned to recognize as a child

the maps printed mornings at the weather station
and tacked up at the schools early afternoons,

how to any single drop of it, rain
is always standing still.

The Neurochemical Composition of Sundays

—after Seurat

God's thought one thought throughout
the morning: yellow no. 5
thickly spilling through the avenues
where almost-stolen cars cycle through
their songs of loss. Now we're stranded

in this anthem of the side-swiped
or the nearly missing, stranded with this god
of alternating fire and nonchalance,
with all our frisbees on his roof,
with morning giving way to whiter

light, while I give in again to worry
for my brother's brain, the one god
stuck him with, built to barely recognize
itself. Now he volunteers at Sunday
school to make sure no one's shaken

in their faith or in the bathroom
when the really crucial stuff is covered,
like what to do about the punched in
dry wall, this poem, the pointillistic
lesions on the CAT scan that mean

no matter how far back you stand
this is no picnic coalescing, no retinal hoax
of distance insinuating *A Sunday Afternoon*
on the Island, underneath a parasol
of only clustered blues to shield you.

Crash Course

Sad, getting it over with right at the beginning of a poem
about my still-born brother. Sonnets.

Professional bowling.

I could never show you

how I don't know what

to tell you. Satellites. Marbles

and the clouds in marbles.

Auden

Why are older bodies likened
always to a map,

making of them places
with such complicated ways

of getting home? First
the newly dead are only thought

slouching for some pen
or document that dropped, page

on which is always written

The Doctrine of Knowledge as Recollection

I was thinking when, a few slides back, I tried
to give some general account of happiness,
I should have lingered on the boy
bent over diagrams as the cogency of the argument
dawns on him, a long since transcended pleasure
of approaching trains and where they'll wreck
respective to their speeds and hours of departure.
How many other nights mentioned ended in skies
already invented, cloud on cloud making it consonant
with what we perhaps think an early expression
of the longing that later takes on the heft
of the calculable world? Times past fall into
place, full of meanings, the dead all collar bones
and answers. Implied rooms shadow deeply,
as the doors lie open a while amid the numbered
flowers. It is today, surely, but also a heap
dispersing into coarse gray dust, be it part
of a description or the necessary coordinates
of precisely here, the light now sharp and short
as in a waltz, dark hollows between the hills
again we're crossing for the first time.

Elegy for the Duino Elegies

Carpet heather rises on the hills, a rhythm
come more recently as wind surge the sky begins

to open, less a way of looking at the sea than blue
depths borrowed from the world built up within.

In that knowledge around here covers a lot
about living taking place, the day is damage

done by maggots and realizes, yes, there is
nothing about us it could much do.

Ardent morn, all rich and spreading
drapery, took sunset as its theme and saw

the intrusion of the fleeting into landscape.
A blessedness approaching ecstasy prompted

by a long and detailed description of the body
had been abandoned to its fate, lost in funerary

function. To even begin to secure this really
new body of feeling gathered from the distant,

pathless places meant a metaphor accordingly
revoked, to tell of where things lost are taken

place, insofar as loss itself is anything wrong
with your part of what's incomplete. Far more

than the categories particular and universal,
this seems a sad life. Log books at the inns

had shown the hopes placed in legible bodies,
sure, a past, but without the evocative ritual

of living it. Rippling under the surface, memorable
is actually the premise that the water contemplated

every afternoon, a way of looking at life surrendered
with relative ease, as shoreloss, as mist is

to what once ranked as beauty and desire
to wrest forms from the real world. When the new

Hebridean wishes to give ancestors a voice
he carves them hollow tree trunks converted

into tom toms and covers them with spider webs.
Extensive Autumn makes a pleasant subject, eventually

opening crises in descriptive space approached
in terms of light and dark, day-sky information

still useful to the dead and written as reminder
this universe is a place of maybe delicate brocades

and lovely silver jewelry, one red figure of prominence
cast as merely resting from the exertion

of climbing granite hills, and in arriving dusk,
almost understanding.

II.

How You Knew You Were Naked

The same old apples come back slowly
through the siphoned fog, with nothing

to aid them but their own skill in mime,
in groves the history of dirt and weather

watched from empty kitchens and no more
real than the window it's impossible to see

bird shit on and not think Aphrodite's nipples.
The day arouses circumstance, interested

enough in us to rip off the gauzy veneer
and let it all pour out. Rainy gulls wash in

or it's wood grain through glass bottles,
a glittering harbor in all its determinable depths.

The sea shell spirals tightly its Babylonian
ziggurat. The jellyfish again assumes the shape

of tear splash, a tragic bell of light that must have
washed ashore last night, stinking, mistaken

in the mirror of the ocean for the lingerie
of drowning nurses. You do recognize in this

bald improbability the very thing, irremediably
full of pathos while shaking from life the subject

of where a thing is and what it is and the beating
that it takes by asserting its existence

in a Summer suddenly bound by association,
as when one thinks of it in Fall, how even

streetlight fit the story, blossoming some
on flowers named by reason of their shadows

under skies acute enough to count each needle
on a jack pine climbing through the moonlight.

Every song collapses to the same old things
said across the chord change, essentially,

ouch, or more about these ashy provinces
of afterwards pursued until performance

might come faultless and the house lights
light to just what's happy in the ending,

up against the backdrop of a world
that had hung there, wholly believed.

Morning amassed, was splendid, and slowly,
as to keep efficient well into the afternoon

you cannot have enough. So blue the sky,
so unexpectedly and felicitously placed

the data, a loveliness which falls to fragments
writ so small into things you hardly see

until you look away. Impossible to grasp
the entire grain of sand, a glass of water

with a flower, one with a lemon. You think
photographs inseparably linked, yet have

retained fearful little of any of it. The lying nude's
a solitude and then some, taken from your fund

of private knowledge and if possible
surpassed there, less gossamer an answer

than the depth that surface has no place upon
and suffers loss from no desire thwarted

or trouble spelled to secure what's never really
said without some damage to expression.

Years and years of days got out of bed
and wanted to write down colors in the sea

and much else besides, so loved when you took it in
your hands or reached out to a little starlight

sifted through a later arbor loved also
when it rained, when paradise at last had let us in

and let us at each other. A woman brushes
grass from the back of a man, must have

lowered herself onto him on lawns that so soon
after take away the shapes they've made,

affixing form to matter so it matters
the two of them have both evolved from water

to look into for a time and then try to speak of
as the radiant body of how to stand the heart's fall

into bone distance, as morticians say, the way
to differentiate all faces viz. that they will be so

much the more of all lines drawn one point to
another and no less forceful than any description

of lovers one could hold in harmony with
the general drift that draws its numinous impact

not from ghosts, but the world as it is,
where perfect means exactly what it always

has, that you could call it this.

The Year Before You Always Move Here

Always there were clouds whose pictures went
for very little. Always shadow meant one thing
was lit. The clotted pine was past tense

gravity and snow. One thing was as important
as another. Long fence sunrise. The perfect
of my kitchen. And yet the light of traffic

pearled without the hope that you were in it.
Under the strange hieroglyphics of a loss
of memory, all things happened. The heat

first on burned metallic through the vents.
A few nights broke against the hills such
simple examples of a harvest moon.

There was the sense of someone inside
a black dress with sleeves down to her wrists.
The last flowers of the Chinese fireworks

restored a ruby kind of calm. And delicacy
required on dusty roads to kiss likewise
needed so absorbing an attention as to just

pronounce the stuff with names—plums, blue
morning, evenings, rooms lit with light
from other rooms. You were the last person

I didn't want to love.

Nude With Anything

Sometimes one can read about it, that everyone's unknowable
insofar as nakedness arises from observing future absence

stripped away, a river dammed to make lake knowledge
in the very long run. One looks for even more lights

and darks reduced to swan and shadow still there
on the water where it isn't, and isn't it enough solitude

to support a presence one associates with afternoon,
a few neurochemicals when we look at any object

in the violet light of our emotions? If I thought I had looked
to find it there in windows that catch the rectangular

within us all, the residues of conscious life so adept
at stranding us we don't even worry about how we got here,

fine. Words come up thought and story props up a can
of spray paint originally there to demonstrate certain

properties of blue and red, faithful to the problem
of accuracy already taken with what constitutes today:

the cast-together-him-or-her life grants consequence
aimlessly. If rain appears a pretty thing, one could not say

anything about it that its quality would not still surpass.
Blue flowers often reflect a lot of red that's invisible.

As to whether we'd skinny dip, the universe has
a complexity-generating force that corroborates the day

stark against one's aspirations. I had other feelings, as you
yourself often called a cloud in the sky *rose*. The clouds

in the sky rose and seemed a single painted marble.
Nobody knew the world on its surface

except that it had something sad to say about landscapes
on which weather might settle for a while. Spring and morning

were always childhood, night and winter, well. It's all familiar
ground poorly lit by way of the moment, the world we knew

words fell to and could spot them. Ideas expressing themselves
in water unfold only in resistance and therefore find it

beautiful in air, as falls or public fountains
captured in highly abstract ovals or a simple line

because further specification detaches from memory a future
we'd never recognize as now every time we saw it.

After Seeing the Cryptograms of Nudist Sects

If it so happens that life is no more than word made flesh,
not that that was easy to do, mind you, but that it comes

across as otherworldliness and desire to retain its terms
yet mean them in a newer sense—noon sky, ruins

brought to code, apparent outpourings of grace—then it's
on to the world to appreciate her as the force of the claim

that it is the unfolding of things in our time that makes
possible interpretation of the past. Whatever the ancient

music still conveys, any expression into which it's swept
frames an absence, one's raiment laid away or a word

for pleasure itself in the art of fixing former moments.
So you'd be dancing in the skin of someone sacrificed

on the highest alter, the heart in your hands held up
to the sun god so there'd be morning in the morning.

The fitting of forms to function, the way, say, numbers
enter one another, emerges as an echo, as though

if you squeezed a four hard enough a little three would
ooze out, decorous nudes thrashing like a memory of names

for those who'd later come to believe in anything,
the rhythm and geometry of fire escapes and windows,

which have to do with stories, while at the same time
a sense of inwardness, this way of treating feeling

governed by light.

On Coming to Botany After Porn

The garden it started in recedes even further
from their grasp. Shadows are blue clothes below

and these, too, can be rooted in the human air,
set against the brightest windows of our watching.

Not so much the blossom over-spilled its frame,
but found a body to reside in, and here it is

like an O'Keeffe you could stick your head into,
screaming down the stamen just to seek expression

in a way more accurate than pictures, in bodies
comprehensively fire and air, earth and water.

It is very difficult to disentangle them,
as the length of evening draws along, eagerly

luminous with a need to heal over at their wounds.
The attempt to narrow that they are themselves

the outcome of, began in the hands, no more empty
than a language: that dress: a history of idleness

to rise above. Suffice it to say the whole thing
darkens and purple leaches from its edges,

a message we're the inks of, thusly marked. And thus
a crossing need be made through the interior

of what's theoretically possible, an ability
to capture the subtleties of thigh light

to be wished upon, actresses being then,
as now, a favorite source of names, so known

to the body, so generously legible as to rival
an experience gone through only as perfectly

good paper and a mouth around the world they are
themselves too well remembering to disbelieve.

Chasmesque

Not that we may yet discover what it is
we know already, it's that the whole thing
stands in as is: fielded mist, a rinse of cloud

or great chandelier of city storm falling
on your hat that strikes your face
while running and seems to come from

an ever-changing direction always
somewhat ahead if you run in circles
after some elusive other, that face

regarded as a series of circles
embedded in the overlapping days of rain,
sleep, love, death, men and women

when they fall. Gets so the name
on the mailbox isn't even yours,
never was, yet that's what sold you

on the place in the first place,
that mutual vulnerability of message,
of music from the farthest reach

of a portable territory called precisely
here—superfluous, extravagant, emptily
focused upon the richnesses of little birds

with one signal alone to summarize a day
a billion blades of grass beheld the sunrise
as that act of breaking given something

of a purpose to ravish. And once you feel it
in the hot cadmiums of lumenist dawn, languid
banjo or too many tercets, helplessness

becomes necessary to defend against.
Her body to the mirror as words were
to libraries, was words, a world still

cheered by the presence of beauty sometimes
so subtle, so charged with hesitation
we no longer consider life the province

of the hopeless. After all, paths at least
had lain open to musicians preoccupied
with irretrievability. One can always

warp the frame a bit to accommodate
the crickets singing, so it all comes clear,
compressed from the multiform content

of whatever reasons, but because we don't know
where to stand or what to do with our hands,
we keep recalling shortcuts through speeches

studied for years, which, fortunately,
we had a lot of at the time: Youth
beneath the trees, thou canst not leave

the struggle to escape, and still that leaves,
is emptied of this song to Autumn and still
more, somehow, flowers thou dost keep.

Those who fail to repeat the past
are doomed to learn from it forever
in the forms that we've preserved, painted

on the walls of caves walked suddenly
out of and into what came to seem the presence
of another toward whom one hurries, charging

through the Dutch interior, where one feels
as alone as a painting x-rayed to reinforce
our suppositions about a girl in love and early

plans to put a man in a farther room, a few
small bowls of bulbs or peaches owed but little
of the real—folded letters, opaque curtains

drawn on a world we'd after all wanted,
swiftly executing the gist of everything
that happens to come apart. A part, a word

musicians use in orchestras referring to their score
scattered in the street winds of some dream
thought first the force of spring beneath

the surface or about white orchids, maybe,
anchored into dirt, the gap between the little
given and the real sense of how good it is

itself to live, at once a tearing away
from the things of the world, ala bolts
in old motels or all we have of the ancients:

only the necks and wrists in the statuary
left holding all that sky behind
an ordinary silence.

The Rest In Music

Since dust returned / to interrogate informally the new / idea, some happiness / spun from early aims to regain songs / about dust, yes, but also something gone / through six or seven times / until you'd even have a shot at / hearing anymore the facts / which it frames. It gives / the baritone exactly what he needs, / and she will, too, there / enamored of the storm / they are, slowly blameless / through that rain / of tunes about a road, old / through pain to dwell on / and out and farther / cries from further feeling. I knew / why I knew what I knew, / that given time, the wreck / you're in assumes the shape of glass / ground down soon enough / to jewels, pretty / in the ancient sense and complicating / all the recent ways to think / of what a little moonlight does when sung / by Billie Holiday, and listened / to, a Prussian blue quiet / in front of the sea it is / one entire tendency toward, / where interest in the nude restores / a vanishing pursued. Half / the trees are leafless, half the leaves / are treeless / in the gradual fall of all / the trouble you don't mind in that. How things can go / so wrong that had been that way forever / becomes an afterpiece a man and woman / act out: empty vessels / sometimes people / recognize within each other, in a sky / far enough away to seem all it seems / we are, a whole other / darkness to chance / this strict evening the mind / can grasp, though only as the sea / herself, by long detour / into those who've absorbed it / in doorways and awnings / out of the rain that never came then came / as other rain.

Lake

It's what makes them look like and have nothing to do with swans, perfectly

still and still betrayed by breathing, exit
signs or a kind of quiver of the inner thigh,

high

in its mimetic arc and sadder even

than the shadow underneath

the legs of lesser ballerinas, still

everything you'd hoped

she'd be, with hands and ways to hold them

to mean deeper

trouble, like the moment in the conversation

when no matter what

you've told her with your body

you only peel and peel the label off your beer

because nothing

just reveals itself in the infinity of any arms, this

intricate, this little

bit of light between us

when we're thrown.

The Way She Kisses

captures within the compass of a single name
for itself, the end of not all things
but one. A page of calendar

tears forcibly off to some uncertain and vital end
known only as today.
There is a run on small events

to be filed again to accommodate
so large a feeling for anything
we've come to mean, those put on forms of flesh

referring to a cup of cloudy water and holding
it a while in the mind.
Spring had left a trace of sadness, only

now for the last time, so far as records show.
Metaphor could be used openly.
In your heart you still believed that.

But which hidden meanings have been revealed
and which just sat there in the open,
suggested by these chambered nautilus

opening directly onto one crisis after another?
You emerge one rainy night and it is
not the house behind you held to

by a doorknob, it's a way to feel
you truly don't belong. Outside
there are three vectors of space

and only one relentless direction of time.
And why should it be possible?
The day broke just as you had

hoped, as foreknowledge
asking that you visualize an aftermath
well known to musicians as somewhat parallel

blurs suggestive of a road, punctuating
trees, breathless speed likewise capable
of expressing itself in forms

of increasingly forceful waves, e.g.,
reinforcing the song of one violin
by that of many violins, a wind itself,

itself an arbitrary ambition,
letting willows ever be
remembered and thus exceed all

measure, dizzy arches suspended
in the air, the bright blue sky so
much it doesn't matter anymore.

Equipoise

—after paintings by Moses and Raphael Soyer
and for my brother

Our wives aren't *Woman Buttoning A Sweater* and *Seated Dancer* and next to each other in the Kalamazoo Museum

and we aren't Russian twins born the last Christmas
of the 19th century. Both button from the bottom up,

unveiling one brother speaking to another in a solitude
of figures—shop girl, seamstress, positions

of the human hands, just the thumbs and first fingers
working at what seems an entire life of windows

and of mirrors, 1949 and '50, canvas, oils, dilluvial
blue deep and the ambered-over afternoon a garment's

given shape is given. This is the moment right before
you'd call it *dressed* or *dancing*, a grace I guess

we've seen a thousand times. Better still is when
my wife sits at the mirror and pantomimes a blouse

she wants me to go get her, tracing out a neckline,
kinds of clasps. And later with it in my hands, matter

seems again this sadness asked of light. Outside it
is Spring, America, one possible day into which, dear

brother, our image hasn't receded, brushes in the sleeping
milk of what they've painted, once an ocean, simple trees.

There are two ways out of this corridor. To the right
a charcoal skyline calibrates the future, old men

to the left, beside the shadow of their chairs.

First Kissing

In Geometry, which is also made of theories,
the encircling world the intelligence becomes

aware of is itself the question. For the mind
suffers more than the body, may laugh at

the force of the absurd though at the time
it is no laughing matter. It is love we halve.

That high seriousness and purity figured
as the sun and the sea, we are unable to abandon

those thoughts of the abyss replaced by today,
which in its turn suggests the backwash of a wave,

the process of a storm, break, disintegration comparable
to that of dancing, which should be allowed

the very taking of place—site and sight,
feel and field and felt—the length of pauses

of a dress, of little else, of little glyphs
of dust where birds had bathed.

Belated

A little louder now and rained on, April's fetal heartbeat, one
woodpecker, barely

dawn and all this world to fill with
how to sound so slowly

lonely, *flooded enough*,

percussive

on our gutter because it carries better, which might
be

what he's thinking in the moment

in between the poundings

in his little brain, more rain and song about how hard it is
to live

without a little luck, some

kind of Indiana occurring

under every star for you to look at

while I looked at you

or wanted to and am.

Crash Corsage

We would never say you have been remaining beautiful or the blue
dress is

fitting you. We would say instead it does

and you are.

The distance of the stars tonight is not

being ridiculous

and you are not seeming unhappy. I am not

now understanding anything,

although there are rules for what we have

been and rules

for what we are, whether it's finally over or happening still,

whether the moon

is being here, made sense of

or the very end

of what we have

to try and try to say.

Findable

Nude, we tried to recast the way the past was intelligible only to those conversant with a future written letters as metaphor for how life works and what is wrong, a commonplace lyric of the soundtrack we felt compelled to shout at one another. When I last saw you, a map handed back the sense we had next to no idea where we were within the braid and shift of rivers. You seemed quite taken from a life acutely, almost painfully legible from afar, like Byzantine mosaics. Light came very slowly down, by way of what was then the new despair. We are here, we seemed to say in all conceivable ways and wanted to hold on to another wrong turn home. In town pawn shops glittered all the first things to go. The words for rapid movement remained stationary. Here and there springtime acquired a kind of solidity. Sure, changing heart came strange, but strange at least is visible among the rocks and clouds only half of what they used to be an hour or so ago, allowing now the shadow of a hand to fall on any surface, suggestive of the breach irreparable in all. Forgotten cartographers, too, wanted to get something like that down, how sheer pleasure is, aggressive vanishing of bodies at horizons. Not to encounter the world in part implies a whole, yet if compared to things real—issues of form and light and large red roses—the otherwise intangible nuances of human feeling have a way of capsizing into closure, the ghost of something that should have happened, been felt, but wasn't for various deep and complicated reasons, each with its general and simple objective of finding within the newly tilting landscape the shortest possible journey to sea.

III.

The Darling of the Mining Town

The broken shade of huge pines
describes a husband and wife
driving through it, less simple

than the central problem
of their snowscape, namely,
the August it was every morning

in its amount to look up to—
diffuse, verisimilar—the city
now most difficult to find

summoned among who he was
she would have liked to know, for instance.
A full moon can only be conjectured,

but must have been enormous, a surcharge
of soliloquy on how mountain clouds
could be made of cotton from any moment

onward, birds across the perfect
felicity of one man at the edge
of a woman, far stars, the outskirts

of a single darkness, a pure classic
in point of form, but firmly content
to pass off distance as a great vogue

enjoyed only too violently. A future
molded and not this blundered into
had already pictured it all in order

and where the light would fall
full upon the one story built
in a rectangle, a next room

she walks slowly to, as close to
paint on silk as the burning city
gets.

Minor Avenue

If it fails / on account of what's called imperfect / vision, my terrifying luck / to have been there then, that / couple of years that chain-link / seemed to melt into the maple growing out / my window, what shall answer—even / for a day or longer, a few / evenings—the whole material question / of living, facing / even my furniture, with all that room / for me, though it does / sound little, not one thing / burning away / in a way. I proved empty here, as / elsewhere, at ease momentarily / with my really good heart, itself enough / to trade for certain subcategories / of Summer, right / smack up until the leaves / disappear again, a half an hour at / a time. The morning light seemed visible even / in the afternoons that filled with / loose color, the subjunctive / mood of that vast a mass it seemed / around the house. A certain part / of the coast we measure as a lake, / torches much / of the only extant copy of today. Attention / spans. Rain alone / turns out to be the thing / dissolved. Each window / inhales a little moon, some / insect exhalations, held there in the open / air answer for absence and elision, both / local projects distance undervalues / until it never ends, slightly / full of stars, a sudden whole sky to live in the eyes / devising means to see whatever spills it / like a glass of good red wine, and that / slowly on the ground to give / the shape the world / around it makes it.

Cup of Hands

Off in the child, the distance jumps a little rope, writes shit
on the sidewalk with lightning bugs

I wrote about, completely
blameless, once, productive

as a cough:

*Stuck with what I've written on the sidewalk, the fate of
the firefly, first-person*

*narrative and its smear
of iridescence and demand*

*I ask what life exactly
is, I ask, even if it's obvious and quantity*

*of light or none
of my bee's wax what Summer somehow comes*

*to, whole sonnets
at a time, yellowing*

*the middle distance or caught
beneath my sneakers, schematic*

*on the still-warm
concrete, simple
lines connecting one thing*

to the next, this luminous

and gone.

Deluge

You live for a moment with dawn / as a couple of parts / of speech, a truth to
return to / beauty, if only for the ransom. Then / morning cannot even as a guess
/ inhabit less / and less. That's for the afternoon, / during which time it seems its
scaffold / grants eight minutes, tops, / for the meaning of us all speaking / the
makeshift dusk / will be, sitting alone, sieved-through, everyone / trumpeting the
ocean's return / to copy on wet stones / whether this world's thrown back
understanding / as one's response to loss or not. / In the floating city, here /
among the good idea and all / its garbage rain / came down to, you / come in,
plant your feet and / tell the truth, James / said (Cagney) because you couldn't /
do anything else, and there it was anyway, large / as you like, souvenir disrepair
you'd engineered, a train of / ancient complaints and chases and rusty smash-ups / set
among the past to have / been that fleeting thing, in itself / not so far gone / into,
initially, but rooms / you come back to / by terms internal as the traffic sprawl /
retreating to a kind of structure, not so / seamless as the seam / itself. It's all been
in / fact real, a wave / another wave / crashes then dissolves, remembering / your
troubles as a single grain / of sand, a bottle / green meandering the margins of /
this darkness today seemed / after all along, a song / invisibly as ever through a
radio / singing every time it rains / it rains, sentimental / with someone if
anyone's / listening, one foot in / the page and falling / back onto that strange
calm that came / to seem familiar, that same old April around here / again
breaking close / enough to only know the storm / could do its worst yet, not /
erase a thing.

To The New Tenant

Someone has to turn the vacant candy
stores to florists to indicate that
childhood remains useful, for it shows
to what we were what we are, such rooms

piled up yet the number of the street
grows sharper, confers upon the threshold
its stark relief of table shapes and human
talking, blue airplane, small in the hand

of the child I am in every room and out
of the house from which I saw the first
thing I saw bulldozed, and sadder still
is everyone was right about sadness,

wind in the yard, whole waves of leaves
we need not make hardly any sense of,
streetlight tenting up the dark, the place
a sugar cube dissolving

in trips to the car, all the mirrors
off the walls, but looking anyway
for what first seems small, then
far away and immense.

Reassuring Roger

More and more than not, it is the knot of thought thought loose
of you, lost

or just less of you more often, off in
loss itself or southern Indiana, curtained
in a kind of weather,
kind of after and right after, a little steam

up off the street,
taste of rain and laundry and the right light
allowing it

to seem like this is how

or even happening, deliriously
Summer, meaning gin and missing you,

all of us triangular
again about the crooked rain or what typing even does to anyone
watching

with a couple of questions about why
you'd ever want them
answered.

Indiana already is the way it should end. Accidental
still and standing,

a far off barn
in slanted light falls
into description,
into place and the erasure of place, with its plank or two of sky
inside and darker
for it.

Still Life with Zeno and File Footage

—for Walter Payton

As much Autumn as you ever are
going to get is going to have

to be the name of this moment
forever. Everything is sadder

in the slo mo. Dead halfbacks.
Sentences. Soon it won't be so

late. Daylight Savings,
i.e., we're almost over with

October and already dead
last in the standings. This is

the season, the capitulating sugars
of the chlorophyll. All bodies

fall at 9.8 meters per second
per second and yours is only one

inside those snowstorms. Chicago.
Green Bay. Minnesota. Such a simple

wish this ever is. Such daylight
to be saved. 2AM is 1AM

but that gets us only halfway
there. The day it

used to be. The very day.
The 15. The 10. The 5.

Half Notes

Last night on the 151 a man couldn't stop weeping into his balled-up necktie. I was reading how each winter new walls of half-finished cathedrals were packed in shit, preventing cracking, when his heaving shook my paper: shopping days until X-mas, lottery numbers, far off swarms of killer bees. It all ran together. Understand how much I'd trade for a decent can opener, a job, but the singer's dead so we listen: songs so true you have to smash your instruments after, traces of notes remaining only as an ache in the lower arm from when the cymbal wrecks the amp. Through my window this morning the sun again without asking. Time of year when even sparrows burn with a kind of human love: flawless song all morning, then whole days of sprinklers and worms and aiming for windshields. I don't know when I'll forget the back of her neck, how much she loved Barber's Adagio bandaging its own wounds, like I don't know how a name beautiful as Cassius Clay can't already mean beloved prophet. There's something in the second movement resonating like my phone, so until the winds ascend again their troubled stair, I'll go on answering nothing. This all made sense a minute ago: mistaking oboes for a phone call, my bank balance, one flame consuming another. Picture the man from the bus getting home, crawling in while someone's laughing into the phone. In the fridge there's real fruit entombed in a gelatin mold and guests due any minute. Time enough to tuck his shirt, reknot that soaked tie. The last ingredient on the can of whipping cream is a tasteless gas, used solely as propellant.

Why We Didn't See the Sentence *It Is Spring and Kenneth Koch is Dying* Coming

Say how much / crickets are a piece of silk / of hers, and why / not light a little later on / the wall, and dawn the thing I am / of my father, irrespective / of the footage itself, less intensely / the cause of birds / on the terrace than luck and dumb / hunger allow of song / the air changes easily / the subject of, always / clockwise, always toward / evening, because it contains / this compelling road into it / and out, come / pretty, small / names or not. Sometimes I feel nothing / had long since lost its charm, that certain little / is known, and *that*, petrified with longing, which / in classical fashion seems to emerge already recorded / in our annals all in one / day and without our knowing. Anyway, it takes too much / TV to figure any of it / out, the best and happiest / moments of decay. Where once we got it, slowly now / we have no choice but to learn again / what almost Spring is / like, the pink much in others, a whole new this / and that to look exactly at. I love this / blue flame and I like that / feel of snow in anyone! Later scenery / change excites a new suspense, yet / continues to carry a picture of a kiss to set / out across the desert with, dreamy and translucent, attentive to / the stars that came to say nothing / after the several years of / not shutting up it really was— / a little far, but still me when I was younger, graven and detached, used / to crowds and yelling and now a silence / not able always to manage the wonderful / we owe anyone for so small a chance / to look at it and say / whether we're going to be able to have that / the way we wanted it to be, standing / by a window to look / something like the person things / change, a little / clearer, a lot more / fun, a mask of someone peeled off / the face of another, when only / everything looks for what might be / called something to say / by way of sequel to the story, happy / if a kind of sad.

To Those He Sensed Were Tiring of Him

Now that we no longer understand
each other, sometimes beauty will
leave the given data behind.

The light this was ten years ago
fell for an hour or so this afternoon
and all my friends knew I was better
friends with other friends and said so,
making up the soundtrack to whatever
security footage I've shown up on
lately—rumpled mark, insufficient fund,
false alarm who couldn't figure out
the velvet pattern roped into this
or any waiting area. That we exist
in the eyes of others and think ourselves
invisible seems in contradiction
with clearer meanings. Real love
under such circumstances makes it
difficult to understand so tentative
an agreement to collapse regret
into perfect peace. Best begin to
understand the solid, such as the ceiling
was up and the floor was down
and the personal cruelty things
can exercise against us at least
seemed taken from certain ritual
models. When you arrived, respondingly,
another left, so that no one present
was qualified to retrace for you all
that's come before. Concentrating
and trying to understand the riddle
of each other operated a specially
patented rig of wires, pulleys, ropes
and drums, the sum of which is a woman
and man—themselves alone—and able
to unite a taste for plenty with care
for little. Many solve this problem
by attaching themselves to each other
by means of holdfast mechanisms, even
though strangeness had already begun
in breathy signs hovering between
implying something permanently placed

and a little sadness far simpler to postulate
as ordinary doorways, crystalline light
and leafy shade, river glimpses, a drowsy
sense of the actual looking through the fog
invited in for speculative purposes only.

We should at this point point at all this
body language that made our dancing
just a fun little thing conveying the body
back from the invisible. Tactile communication
in hand to hand combat is murder, among
acquaintances, affection. I took everyone
seriously.

The Song You Could Have (Had Me For)

That the continuity of things is the whole
matter on this piece of cut silk—wind

stripped ash, a moon into chambers—the total
effect is that of an immense butterfly, empty

curtains. And what is there to hope for? Walnuts
fall through the yellow afternoon. As a day is

always the same day within it, I am but one
umbrella to the rain. What need is there

to fetch a torch? Without being sad exactly
I recall sorrow. With sorrow I remember joy.

Nearly

5AM
and the moon dissolves

not out of desperation
but into mounting daylight.

Beside the road
surveyors in fluorescent suits

appear at first
reluctant flame,

watch each other
through their tripods,

wave,
make a few notations.

Often one wakes to fog,
the day trying

to erase itself.
One wakes distant

in the shared body
of a bed.

Across a cleared field,
one signals,

that's enough,
now come closer.

Cardinal

More idea, really, the female and still you get the sense of one
in there somewhere, emerging, ghostly
through the rhododendron
blooms and gone, muted as your mother crawling through
the crawl space was
and is because she hasn't found it yet—
the idea, ghosting through some photo exactly as remembered,
still in there
somewhere, the sense of you, somewhere
crawling
to her, was and is, really, the idea,
still you.

Lullaby

Of all the kinds of ash to take into account (moonlight
on a lake), to take with you forever (how much of it
you see at night) and fervently wish to continue living

with having been able to do anything regrettable and stupid
as remaining here, always closer to conditions of the cry
than articulating when (between a woman and man) to miss

(without being gone) a time when all things were to hand,
and thus retain (as in a diagram of fire) the closest possible
brilliance holding fast to its consumption. Sad occasion,

that something of a wish remains where so much is.
The sum that passes through had united something
of the wreckage we now see lighted tapers thrown from,

whole former parts concluding with a desire to be
remembered, endured and done with. And yet more
wonderful that it should be so returned to us tomorrow.

Another

And still some poems need more real
bad—her skin (not pictured), slept-on
linen. It is Spring and what he wants

is one surface truly brailled with itself
and not just light and distance, more
or less April in all the ways we are

stuck depicting life down here. What he
thought were birds, etc., having left her
asleep were tire tracks torn into

the lawn and these were the flowers
between them. See? Spring returns
like an elevator still filled

with the perfume of the temporary
help. The very last of the last
ice storm loosens

from the lines above the alley.
Hear it? That face of hers, written
down but hers.

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