

abandoned: (ə-bān'dəned)

Lavender in an urn on the mantle reminds me of you and those jealous days. Where are they now—the boys who followed you home from school, trailing like vapors of perfume in your wake, who promised, as I, unrequited love? And where are your children, where is anyone who once knew you? Damp light drifts in from the coast through a cracked window, warm air smelling of salt and pine oil and the urge of this sallow, dry husk to blow like chaff in the slightest breeze.

af·ter·math: (ăftər-măth')

I want to crawl back through the fissure of night, this morning, what dream, then coffee,  
stoke last night's fire and stand by the window streaked with rain and grey light, wings across  
water, morning star held course saying—follow me.

From the dark crest, stragglers and immigrants cast from the rough wave line where  
obstinate children refuse parent's cries, where shadows peddle by on rickety bicycles made of  
clouds, tongues wagging obscene gestures like old men who climb the skies with kites in  
search of lightening.

Sand-bagged and water-logged after a week of storms, a flurry of blackouts, to float some  
dark alphabet to sweep from shadow what form, bristles of a broom, this day, shake motes  
from a dust-mop, when yearn, then time's vernacular—lie down to sleep and listen.

anamnesis: (an'-am-nee'-sis)

From my desk, it's evening along the Pacific and there's walking to be done through Pennsylvania woods. And the men that were boys when I was a boy lurk in the shadows of Poplar and Ash. It is winter and we are playing Tracker in fresh snow. I hid in the vine-tangled mistletoe for hours. No one ever found me. Where are they now?

I never knew mountains in youth, only flat land, swamp, tawny fields, never the expanse of water that has no memory—frightening to fall in love with absence—smoke hanging in the distance above railroad tracks, some memory of birth rises, tired of loving a shadow, give me something real—the solid life of dream waking. I want a home. There's no room for me in my head, insolent crowds surge, I am dazzled, swept up in the river, never learned to swim.

an i mus: (ǎn'-əməs)

The houses I had they took away from me and burned. I was murdered for stealing water to grow crops as my land was poor like me, and now I only grow thin and thirsty. There are no witnesses and what mattered then does not now, and a ghost is only a ghost so long as there is revenge, but my hands pass through those I want to kill, and my anger bellows like a far off storm that can't make it over the mountain.

autobiography: (ô´tō-bī-ōg´rə-fē)

There is so much silence between the words. This is your story, or so you suspect, but the way one day spins into the next it's hard to tell whose socks are whose. Things have changed. You seem to disappear when you look at yourself in the mirror. This is what comes from forgetting to eat. All day you amble up and down the stairs, searching through cupboards, closets, even the attic with its oppressive heat and tufts of pink cotton candy insulation sticking out where the rats ate through, and still you cannot find it, and you curse at whoever stole or hid it. You'd be surprised if you got an answer, but that part will come later.

birth: (bûrth)

Winter dusk creeps into the dim barn where he forks hay into the Haflinger and big Belgian's stalls, and thinks of snow, how it blows everywhere in particular and says goodnight with a sting like a slap at birth. Even in sleep he dreams of fresh snow, how footsteps chart distances between school and home—a clean line across town. Think of time more conscious under the weight of a pack, his body trudging through snow. Think how a particular ridge of frozen hills flings its shadow against the screen of his porch, how it shudders and clutches at the frame of the house. Think we must love our enemies, even if we're a mother and they live inside us, even if it's what happens to you like birth—that long season of the sky, all night going down a dark chute gone cold, life going on like that until the sun comes up.

bom ·bardments: (bõm'bärd'ments)

As a hedge against dying, our Commanding Officer issued everyone a red poker chip for good luck. I took two chips, as if the Eucharist and my C.O. a priest. We flew over the Nile and the temples of Luxor, finally crossing the Red Sea in a diamond formation. We were thirty minutes out from pickling our bombs when Anti-aircraft shells took out our right wing. Not even Moses could save us. And later, a Bedouin would find strewn across the desert: some boots, a medal, a map of Iraq, partially charred sketches of a flying fortress, a pocket watch stopped at 7:36 A.M., and two red poker chips.

ca·dence: (kād'ns)

A blizzard crept up and bit the recruits in the ass. It couldn't have happened at a worse time. Lying prone in the snow, the slings of their rifles tight around their biceps with sling-palsy setting in, they sighted in and fired tracer rounds at able-body targets— the size and shape of a man's torso.

The young men were led to believe these targets were the enemy incarnate, though no one had yet disclosed the exact nature as to *whom* the enemy was. This small fact seemed as inconsequential as the differences between hominy and grits at morning chow.

*A sweet and noble thing it is to die for one's country.* Chants ricocheted inside their heads. Some of them tried not to listen, but their resistance did not last long. This is true for all young men and platoon 2021 was no exception. All boys of sound mind submit and those who do not are shamed into silence for the rest of their lives.

A miss-fire occurred at the 500-yard line. Some poor sodbuster from Missoula went and got his left eye blown out. The corpsman was called and he applied a compress. Only a minor inconvenience and after the boy was hauled away, all clear sounded and the young men finished firing.

Cease-fire was called. The scores were tallied, the young men dressed, were called to order, lined up in the blowing snow asshole-to-bellybutton, and began the long march back to the barracks, with the metallic taste of brass and gunpowder on their tongues, and the cold wind at their backs whistling a cadence they had never heard.

cracks: (krāks)

Weeping willow leaves flutter in my window and onto my floor, where they lay in a white pool of moon, like ink prints of withered hands, edges feathered as the washed up knot of an oak tree on my dresser, wind-stroked and water-polished. Through the cracks in the floorboards of my room, I listen to skittering mice and the low guttural growl of barn cats in chase and in the morning find trails of blood and bones behind the house. And I climb into the barn's loft, and burrow in the warm hay and my brothers come in from the field—white with dust—twin ghosts who come to take me where father has already gone.

dai ly: (dā'lē)

Sometimes on walks there's no sign of wind. Today a fallen tree where the last leaf clings by some mysterious force. I stop to watch ants travel the trunk and I am haunted by the poem yet to be written. I want to ask for more time, but the sun has turned and the earth too hard with iron to listen.

*One foot at a time*, father said before I went to boot-camp. I made it and now try to summon up that same courage, only boot-camp seems much easier than writing, so I take a step forward but the words are all wrong and I can't help but think of my father, the way we were, bitter to the end, so I put him in my poem because something bitter is better than nothing at all.

day: (dā)

Tired and spent. Slink home to sleep on the sofa, a dark harbor opening in my skull, far-out ships, light yawning from the tips of their metal hulls; slip into coma, what sense there was is gone—wake and scratch notes in the middle of the night—call it a day.

day 'hop: (dā'hŏp')

Shoulder an aimless day, what whirlwind symbols in a city where voices crowd—what do all these signs mean? All we need contained beneath our skin, an embedded code between genesis and coda on our tongues, music worth pausing for on the street, throwing dollars into a hat for a song, just the two of us, stopping there, sun on our backs, and the ecstatic horn player's face in love.

de 'scent: (dī-sěnt')

All our people worked under the earth, Father said, so when we died, we didn't have to walk very far to get to hell. Mother hated when he said that, Grandfather would shake his head and sit there rocking, smoking his pipe. Father got his wish later that year when a slate fall buried him and his graveyard crew.

We seemed the beginning of so many good things, as if the earth and everything in it held its breath for one moment, as when father and I walked in the tunnels with their silver banks and the many stars, jutting and gleaming from thick rich veins.

So I strike flint, spark a fire in Grandfather's pipe and try to reenact a dead flame, the way one passes an old childhood home, alone in the middle of the night, driving slowly by, but never stopping.

di la tion: (dī-lāshən)

Late in bed, after the voices quiet and the mesh of language dissolves in the brain, sleep punches the clock, and he's there again; my father's ghost. His clock-like face bobbing as if on water, and my tiny boat to the stars keeps drifting further from him until he's one bright speck on a mash of sea, and I wonder, as a passenger might wonder when passing another ship, who's moving away from whom, as my own self dwindles to zero-mass, evenly dispersed through infinite space, where there is no center toward which I fall.

dis ʌp ˈpear: (dɪs'əpɪr')

After the long snow began to thaw, the green tongues of leaves gutters dew, drips and creeps through the grass into small rivers and valleys. What's left behind—rich loam, silt, the remains of beetles and ants but nothing to eat—a hunger for harvest, many months to go, many days watching the earth for signs, the winding light tempered by a fear of passing time, winter held off just long enough to prepare for the next. Everyone at church asking, Where is the land flowing with milk and honey?

en gram: (ɛn'grām')

When I was born, a stray gust plucked me from a broken web. I was an empty husk of a fly; exsanguinated but alive. It was a miracle I survived. Childhood. In recollection, there are patterns we cannot wholly view at any height or vista.

There are fragments, there is a distributive system, a function, a framework with shifting boundaries like a topiary maze where neurons dance as children who play hide-and-seek.

Here is my head, an overripe melon with a few marbles rolling around. Here are my skinny arms and legs pumping and flailing in Bass Lake almost drowned; all of these remembered as a mother's voice calling out from an unknown distance and from all directions.

I wake in time, not place, to see myself not myself, but a collection of lint, a fly blown down synaptic highways, hanging on by a frayed thread, kicking and screaming.

ep i ˈtaph: (ɛp'-tǎf')

Lying in a hole  
stunned by air  
alone as before

I was born  
in cold altitude  
it happened

as a shape  
mouth stutter  
a vapor

curled from  
room to room  
it won't always be

like this, colors  
change, our tilted  
travel through empty

dark, metallic sky, a  
watery road to arrive  
the barge sets anchor

a fear of being taken  
as a house on fire  
the one light left on

small talk late into morning  
a single thought  
churned over and over

when it's my turn  
don't remember me.

equinox: (ē'kwə-nōks')

Something brought you here, there is something worthy to say, just say it, when the length of day—a mockingbird—when the length of night—black snakes under the porch—some equality is found, the beauty shine of river-stones, trees of ravens and crows at Blackwater Pond, wind in the roses.

When you stand at the edge of the woods, sometimes you are victorious and beautiful as a lion's mane. See the ghost, a heron rises from the dark summer pond on the flats where you lost a house to crows.

When the rain speaks to you the lark sings something worthy and you are gracious for oranges in a blue bowl of moon-light. Now the rough things become smooth as feathers, their wings are preened and clipped.

When you return to your grave, there are blue irises in bloom. Early snow brings some twilight you have never seen, an angel will not come, there are no holy hosts to bear worthy tidings of great joy, there is winter in full dress at Herring Cove, there are tree sparrows, a loon crying late on a snowy night.

er rat ic: (ĩ-răt'ík)

Unstuck from bed, back to branch, a thin limb stretched outside my window where some strange bird gawks, grouse at whatever it is, shape morning light into someone in a mirror,

take it back again with some spare change from my drawer, shuffle to the corner, a cup of coffee, reassemble self into some semblance, tap out erratic messages on my pulse, resist the

urge to touch a woman's sad face on the bus, what's implied is assumed and I am back in time again, motion of commuters, street-noise rocking me to sleep. Walking through leaves,

I found it in a puddle, a dried-out face which once had the hard look of stars in a desert. How does this body mean? Scars that war rationed out, hard labor wrenched limbs in

sockets, a few pins, a few screws, a sagging skin-road, this marching stick-man, this veteran—a tin toy soldier left out in the rain.

et y mol 'o gy: (ět'-əmǒl'ə-jē)

The invisible word was written between dust-to-dust as day was separated from night, when words held light for the first and last time and so became corroded, as now, under the tarnished patina on the roofs of so many houses, where words gather and the people who discuss them, some soft as a baby's bones, others scaled with armor no bullet could pierce, and more as brittle and blue as a Robin's egg, and the hum of voices in parenthesis continues, and the words on the wall on which the hand wrote, illegible after all the fingers touching, hoping to transfer some divine spark, that their own words could possess such power, as when they were young, and discovered patterns of sounds held shape and weight, and that those shapes held an alphabet of practical figures, and those people, charting the dense sea of vocabularies, unaware that those same words they confided secrets with would betray them, and all of them in search of the unspoken, what lies in the white spaces between, the orphan word, unclaimed, how could they know that this single, collective word is all that holds their world afloat?

ex ˈɒ dʊːs (ɛk'sə-dəs)

Under the smoke, sallow men hump sandy hillocks, a few thousand liters of sweat evaporates, no one seems to notice how thin we have become, even our letters home, a few shallow words wrung dry, *We're OK here, life is fine, how are the kids? How are you?* Jokes are made, *Truth may walk the desert unarmed but behind him are 100,000 pissed off Marines*, and I can't help but wonder about the Hanging Gardens of Babylon, what the air might smell like there, what oasis beckons, what jets howling beyond the horizon, the comfort of rifles and rationed water, the huddled masses in exodus, Moses nowhere in sight.

fen'es-tra'tion: (fĕn'ī-strāshən)

If it means anything it means hunters and arrows and beasts, it means bulldozers and monkeywrenches. It means that this young boy, though he's slender, doesn't hesitate to jump from a window into a narrow pool of water that could very well be a bomb crater filled with jagged shrapnel and who would know?

The dead bury themselves and there are enough saviors but the hospitals and streets are littered with his broken parts. This is where the order of appearances crumbles and any attempts to stitch all the pieces together again—fail.

Hearts and livers can be replaced, but phantom limbs can only reattach themselves when he sleeps and vanish when he wakes inside what he doesn't own, the brutish lumbering of what he cannot control, and so floats away on the disheveled wash of morning yellow tide.

The particulars of combat are self-evident; pipe-line ditches are desert trenches and he passes by them on the bus, a boy with grey hair and a man's life inside a briefcase that he carries up to the twenty-third floor where holes in spreadsheets and bottom-lines need to be balanced and so it comes to pass they are balanced and audited and he is congratulated on his success.

There's no going back once you sign on the dotted line, even after it's over, it's never over, and one that is discharged, has the look and feel of one who has been incarcerated inside a deep well for a long, long time.

He has forgotten what the word civilian means; there is a chasm that cannot be spanned and the terrible machinery inside has eaten through his stomach and so he is always empty; the horrors, the hunger he has become.

fire wood: (fir'wööd')

Crossing to where a decade brings us back, year after year winter holds its breath within us, shakes itself—wind-torn—as a branch from an ice-sheathed tree, the impossible weight of cold clinging and in the night—something snaps—and we wake in bed alarmed, it all comes crashing down, there's no foothold, any bonding—untenable—and what can't finally be mended is cut up for firewood—stacked in neat rows.

fish: (fish)  
*after Joy Harjo*

I said I'd meet him, along the river path, choked with poison ivy, at a clearing ahead under a maple, a boy with a cap slung low over his eyes fishing for sunnies or trout. Take a good look at his face—a dirty, lean face, a father must love that face, alone under a tree, and so I stop and watch.

I only wish for words strung together in reasonable sentences like pearls, a simple and expected scene, what I came looking for—a boy fishing by the river, the lazy two-step shuffle of water as if drunk after a hard days work in a hard country, the occasional hawk, but none flying, light failing, the quiet thought of green growing aimless, wind's feeble shroud-like invisible tail and the hope the fish are biting, whatever bait we bring.

folk tale: (fōk'tāl')

On the path under water oak's black branches, on a narrow buttonhook of land, flanked by cattails and crimson-eyed mallow, wash of water pulled by memory and the moon, no one can say what lies on the other side of the moon, has anyone seen it?

There is good crabbing here with a line or a trap, as when I was young, hiking in the woods, fishing for white perch or croaker, accepting all that I could see as the whole world, deciphering glyphs of wood beetles and termites etched into fallen pine, and the tremors I felt when I found the severed wing of a robin in yellow leaves near Black Duck Marsh, as now, the rumble of Spanish horses on Chincoteague Island, crossing over, season to season, island to island, no one knowing why.

found: (found)

A half-pint of Night-train, a smoker's cough, oh, forgive me I've just returned from nowhere, have you been? They say there's twenty-four hours, though I've never seen them myself. I never have time to read and the newspapers stacked in my bedroom date back to Kennedy and King. What can they tell me that I don't already know? World can be written and read but not known. Even now, a new planet is discovered, every second a thousand people die, and what of reincarnation? Maybe it's not History or numbers—dare I say—words, images tell me what's imagined; a tin-horse, a deck of cards, loose change, and Christmas cards from last year I forgot to send.

fox hole: (föks'höl')

Ash rain lit by the green glow of lightning cracks against the windows like a fallen tree, my heart harumps, skips a beat, remembers when a short range Frog missile hit the perimeter in rain at night, struck the same chord of fear, and in the morning we found the scattered remains of a camel but animals do not grieve, or if they do, it is not in any observable manner, although elephants mourn. They visit the bone-yards of the savannas again and again, grasping their relative's tusks with the gristle of their long wrinkled-gray-trunks, as if to say, *I am here, I remember you, I will never forget you.*

gen·er·a·tion: (jĕn'ĕ-rāshən)

Some small self, breathless as a mirror, your son's dirty face at the screen door, eyes as big as a heart pressed against its cage. Love—like being kicked in the head by a horse, and while the surface tension of the day weakens, you wonder how much longer gravity will hurl this rock through space, and later, while you watch him sleep, how many breaths left, the simple exchange between air and lungs, his chest falling and rising like the pencil-stroke of a black-bird across blue sky.

gol go tha: (gɔl'gə-thə)

Father, to write this letter is to move towards forgetting, so in the act of losing, something can be found; a name, a particular Saturday morning, a father and son flying gliders into strong headwinds in spring.

This is a land where no one remembers what they cherished—or hated for that matter—watch out for those treacherous crosses, you said, see the lines of those laboring beneath, their long moves plotting a course up Golgotha.

I remembered the word for your name and called it out in my sleep, as if I believed in its power to save, as if all the stories you told me were true and there was no such thing as fiction.

grave: (grāv)

I had everything I wanted. I learned that friends, like love, couldn't save me, and in the end, I died alone. And I am reminded how much I love these hot summer Michigan days at the cemetery, where everything seems to be dying: the sky, a gouache of scratches painted with a white-hot poker, a few slow crickets creak, yellowing grass in the sun, sparse pines and weeping willows that draw women and children to their shade after they place flowers on their loved one's grave.

Most of what I wished for as a boy was to write poems, to have some power with the word. It was still true, even in my later years, when alone, by flashlight I secretly wrote poems in the dark. I wanted them for myself. Perhaps I was selfish or greedy for the one thing I could possess completely—a boy who will not share his toy even if it means he must play alone.

heart: (härt)

Bloodless, the dead doubt themselves in corners, beads to floor, they throw wooden buttons into the air and search for them in the dark (they know it's first name), mouths open, as if in question, no sound, no scream, things that become desperate—the heart too full with yearning, cramped in small lightless spaces.

hun gry: (hŭng'grē)

The screen door bangs and my children holler as they run through the tall sunny cornfields, as if the sun had nothing else to do but shine on us; a few brown children laughing, corn in a basket ready to be husked, cherries and granny-apples for the washing, and my man coming in from the fields, naked to the waist, and hungry.

hys'ter'e'sis: (hɪs'tɛ-rē'sɪs)

mother, clouds of tattered sheets blow across the sky, everything is beaten and wet, and there are things I want to show you; the pale yellow flowers growing in my pot on the fire escape are in bloom, and through the yellow and green stained glass window the world looks fine.

But you are gone, as when I was a child on cold winter Saturday mornings watching cartoons, and now I live where something is always in bloom, the weather here is usually fine, tell me, what's the weather like where you are, can you plant tulips and daffodils, is the humus dark and rich or hardpan clay? Do you still stop on dusty one-lane roads and dig up plants?

I wish I could follow you through your day, watching in hysteresis, marking time or some measure of grace, how the shape of things depend on its history, like a spade striking stone, the edge dulling, even now memory snaps back, work calls, the lag between cause and effect subsumes, the rain stops and I haven't even begun.

infarction: (Īn-färk'shən)

Out of his body into the rapid cascade of brain-traffic-rush to grid-lock—an incidental hum, an obstructed string plucked too hard—the steady grind of gears shearing under the red weight of eyes and flashing lights. What are these sounds if not translations—transmissions—shifting one speed to the next, rattling inside a gourd—stale air through the chambers of his heart.

in 'gre'di 'ents: (in-grē'dē-ənts)

At the forge, we hammered a mathematical formula for familial equilibrium. Put some backbone to it, these formulas require sweat. In particular, what physics is a child with small wings, what flight might evolve in his lifetime?

Build, desire, reduce. In biology, size *is* important. Only the small will inherit the earth. There are other fathers to ignite the rule of kingdoms. An example of such, any Joe will not do. Many left home. One snowflake becomes two, and so on. The next ingredient is dynamics; systems as they develop and evolve. Turing's models of spots and stripes.

Understand how proteins fold, the biology of many species, a symmetric way of thinking is not enough, the chaos of a million years split the geometry of proteins, snowflakes, or families. When mother left and did not return.

I had in mind the space of symmetry. Written dynamically, what great fiction when metaphors or bodies breakdown.

One spring, bad atmospheres in the lungs, ruptured membranes of cells, a broken collarbone, an illness. Put father all together again. Beyond the poisonous formation of fractals in our Universe, possibly what father said that night drugged on the gurney: Come fellow mathematicians. The great principles of science are only the memories elephants and the symmetries of butterflies.

What he collected. Models of crop predictions from 1950-2001, crayon sketches we drew of solar systems on his draft table, how he kept the largest collection of Farmers Almanacs in the country.

The snowflakes, how we grew, the things that needed to be done, he got done.

Father looked like a metaphor when we found him slumped on his tractor, hoary with frost. Calamities accumulate in our atmospheres, reach dew-point, are loosed from the banks of clouds.

A few pine planks, several dozen penny-nails. He was an average size. Laid up at home, what preparations to be made, were made. These are the days of fundamental principles. He never explained a snowflake, the mechanisms of speciation or cellular decay. This is a new year, the age of small, everything works at that level, father said, reduced to an equation.

in ter po late: (ĩn-tûr'pə-lāt)

Fireworks over Gun lake trace patterns in water—a diagram or rippled upside down world outside the general store where they work while outside, people play, there is sleep and morning orange is sudden through laced canopy of larches and pines, convince someone he's a father, fail trying. The surrendering construct is a simple formula: mother+father(-daughter-son.) Translate blame, *it's not my fault*, be the center, to qualify or set right, to define contrast and practice lying, when backed into a corner will become ferocious. Take inventory: father/son, mother/daughter. Strike on box matches—keep away from children and combustibles, store-room walls in flames. Reorder inventory: son, quantity of one.

lev 'ee: (lěv'ē)

By breakfast it had still not entered our neighborhood. We stood on the gallery of our house and watched and waited. Then down the gutter of Percy Street we saw it slither, like a dirty brown snake swallowing everything in its path.

Father looked over the drowning town and a light went out in his eyes as though a swarm of locusts obscured the sun. We had no money, no boats, no tents, no food, yet he waded through the mounting flood, with me on his shoulders, to the poker-rooms of the Knights of Columbus where Negroes were not allowed, hung out a sign labeled "Relief Headquarters," and installed a telephone.

In the end, the engorged snake had done its work; washtubs, workbenches, houses, chickens, our Springer spaniel Bigbee, my father and many others, all floated away as memory does. It was in this way I learned that the flood brought a swift and redemptive judgment to all of us; my father standing tall and straight as a Jack pine, a man that never leaned against a doorframe or a wall, a man that never put his hands in his pockets, aristocrats gone to seed, poor whites on the make, and Negroes, all of us aliens that blend or curdle, firstborn and the last. Who can argue with the justice of the Lord, and the mighty arm of the river sweeping us up as though we were wayward children with nothing in our pockets, lost and in search of a home?

lin' e' ar: (līn' ē-ər)

A position between:  
the trajectory resides in a republic  
of space, multiple dimensions

occurred, presented  
with the idea that there is nothing  
so everything came to be

framed like any other work of art  
as the one great mystery, a big bang  
filled with noble gasses and particles

discovered in the creak of  
a footstep late at night, the humility  
of sound in a vacuum, or any method

of progress, a movement forward  
as interpolation in the problem of  
gradualness with a heavy and pure

logic that remains fixed  
between point A and point B.

lis ten: (lis'ən)

How delicate, the sound from here, inside the glass and steel canyons of city, the deeper waves move through me unnoticed but for slight perturbations, as the light mango scent from a woman's body in my office awakens me from day-sleep working, there are fragrances, the rise and fall of office workers in waves, living vapors trail a wake around me like a stone cast into a still pond, even more vibrations, voices in whisper like strings from invisible pianos, the not-music of motions and gestures, body bent, arms and hands at keyboard, strike as chords traveling on light, but for the hidden spaces that hold within us, where even silences are important notations and a fool is thought wise when listening.

ma 'laise: (mă-lăz', -lěz)

For example, your hands, legs, and waist are tied to a table with salt crusted, thick leather straps, so much so and to such a degree you are in pain, but it is a pain only your body feels, your head is elsewhere—disconnected by the constriction in your throat. There are people who smell like ammonia in white coats with safety glasses circling you, murmuring and nodding, scratching marks on their clipboards. You have the notion of something crawling inside you, and the feeling that you must be seriously ill, you don't try to struggle, it's impossible to get up from the table, much less look out the window to see if it's raining, and your head is a dead cloud, full of nothing but dark, like an empty walnut or a black hole, not a block of ice or a stone, you want to grieve for this loss, but you don't know how or why.

man ic (mă'nĭk):

Disarmed, and certain you may be attacked at any moment, take immediate cover in a low-lying area. Use whatever camouflage available to conceal your awkward shape that shouts—Here I am! A sniper could hit your bright reflection from 1000 yards out with a scope. If no immediate cover is available, dig a hole the size of a shallow grave. If you find that morbid, crawl on your belly in the dust until you reach the safety of uneven ground, any depression will do.

metamorphosis: (mĕt'ə-môr'fĕ-sĭs)

Stop at some back-road-side diner, take-out for lunch in the shade growing old, a woman's arm around his shoulder, her drift, some airiness to behold when gravity has lost all meaning for his body, this time it's for real, and they are together, now is the time when impossibility seems absurd as laughter or the way she sang, one song after another in a tongue he never learned but understood, the way one does when young and wishes seem as simple and delicious as rocky-road ice-cream, he knew she was too large for this poem, but he tried to fit her in anyway. Wind at the ear, her breath, warm in this dark, she sings something that sounds like flying, so he does, lay back in her lap, fold into a cocoon and wait for spring to come.

me'te'or: (mēt'ôr)

I would not call the stars generous. No one  
has ever found a meteorite, but every

night we scan the skies. And sleep,  
in sleep, we listen for that small sound, a memory,

the Outer Banks, meteors over the Atlantic, the deep desires  
that split our lives but I'm uncertain, after all

I'm asleep and when I wake, this will all disappear and  
I'll find myself sitting in a room where the light

through the blinds shifts so slightly  
I only imagine movement. Night with its mantled

skull and blue-tinted silver hollows  
leans down to me and whispers,

as if someone's breath touched  
my shoulders, lightly, for the last time.

mid night: (mīd'nīt)

where  
the spruce's

sharp cry  
cracks an

icy sheath  
startles

a doe  
shadowed

there  
in snowy

hummocks  
her head

tilted  
nose

raised  
breath

like mist  
she goes

mi gra tion: (mī-grāshən)

Entering the field, thrushes scatter like buckshot; the angularity of wings, the yellow sky as if dozens of farmers harvested heavy stalks of corn, honed steel-edges steady and sure as history in the eye of the beholder, if one could divine wisdom by merely witnessing events; a shadow of a cloud on crater-pocked pastures where there is no wind, just the measured swish of wings above empty bunkers and the rumble of distant armory, and the quick swinging pitch of the day assuming itself, what is absent is what I remember, when birds migrate—who can say what they consider? I stare at them, trailing like a loose black thread into nothing.

mo ment: (mō'mənt)

The chipped blue bowl on the table, crumbs from an apple pie—this fractal day—what portion—a cul-de-sac, open an iron gate, out the window, now and then through the drizzle, the flash and bang of battle, I couldn't remember if it hurt, but for this scar that her hand traces. I put my finger in her mouth after sex and when she bent toward the small bell sounding from the church in the distance—she turned to light.

mor`phemes: (môr' fēm's)

Begin at the sub-atomic level—a thought—theta waves like leptons or quarks. Take pen in hand, if blank sheet frightens, use lined paper.

Start with something small; build township with a lead river full of Brook and Rainbow trout and people as particles strolling down Main Street. Color as necessary.

Listen to them speak—Precise and Rational as the devil on your shoulder. If they get wet, wring and air-dry all day. Not machine, but by hand.

Once dry, link pairs of them together with plenty of air and adequate space, like clouds, lours of cumulus, the shapes of a red-tailed hawk, a red spindle sinking in the west or blood oranges in a blue bowl.

Test colorfastness in small hidden area, research applications in neighbors house, preferably with some other husband or wife, let arguments ensue, beware of entanglement.

Put them into a mirror. They become you. Take them for a walk or on a picnic in a forest or the rubble of a city. Make them iron or energy, ocean music or good clouds under a good sun.

If broken, beat them into clay on a porous surface, score, slip and slab, bisque at low temperature, dry them in a kiln. Spin counter-clockwise.

Make them into roots, patterns, imprints, a negative of a shadow, if you lose them or finish or grow tired of them, travel to Yemen, Ethiopia, and Egypt, trade in coffee, skins, guns, die young.

obfuscate: (ɔb-fʊsˈkɑt)

A coral copal descends like a bright curtain in the sky. Field workers return, disguised with dust, glinting in last light against the stenciled edges of larches and pines, they turn and wave at me where I sit in the bay-window, how they lean when they walk, shake free from the earth, drift into the barn where the tin sound of a radio and laughter could be heard late into morning. It was July—years ago—and whatever coming and going is found and lost. No use to make any philosophies here: Who will grieve for empty windows? I see no god in the empty field, there is nothing redemptive about memory, just wind and what sounds like laughter ringing from the trees.

oc to ber: (ɔk-tō'bər)

The boy-body goes on living where the man is beautiful with grief, up from the spring where a lanky dog snuffs for a rabbit in a hole, looks up, saying *come quick*, shoves his nose further in, claws through roots and dirt, tail whipping like a cyclone, haunches quivering, whimper in the wind at some late October wonder.

por·tal: (pôrtl)

The walls compress the spaces  
but not the floor between us

air sullied by the sudden mating  
of my words against her

wings where she reads in silence  
but for the street outside the

window I've made enough mistakes  
to build a crooked

bridge—who can trust?  
the dampened light makes it hard

to read or write and I ask her  
so I might raise the blinds

and let what wants to enter  
enter.

process: (prös'sēs')

There are large spaces for the useless. There is the writing of poems—a sickness that is incurable. There are lungs and tonsils for breath and sound, tongue for the hammering into architectonic forms. There is the iris to the eye to interpret—so the percussion in the brain is immediate.

After a long process I arrived at the conclusion. Who knows what palingenesis or resurrection, of which the signs could not be glimpsed in words or contrived structures—objects for the consumptive horror I have become.

I beg your pardon if I offend, there are words that cannot be known, similar to certain pictures found in an antique store, and we're left to wonder—who are these people? There are those who stand in the city-square with pantographs sketching or with a megaphone to shout out verse for everyone and therefore no one.

There are symptoms and diagnoses for the illness but there is no medicine, there is time that is the spectacle not the means of measure in such a hysterical landscape like the explosion of a grenade—there is no true meaning.

I foresee your objections. They are noted.

re gres sion: (rĭ-grĕsh'ən)

and on the peak of the hill, embedded in the burm, gnarled sinews and bones like rotting roots, his skull with the hole that some small animal made home, I only imagined it wasn't real, and one became divisible, and so I became two boys, and the real me stepped aside and waited while my other half carried on until hunger crept up and ate me and then I was no longer and the other me behaved as if nothing had happened, sold all my photographs and books in a garage sale and forgot that I ever was, until one day the other me walks along the bank of a river and on the peak of a hill...

repositor: (rē'pə-zēs-sor)

You'll find traces, the fact of his shedding, apparent in the wounded, those fierce but polite enough to say simply—*No thank you*—to his gestures or advances. I do not intend to suggest

one can say no *forever*, it's merely a delay. Our desires cannot urge the sympathy of angels. He's more hungry than imaginable—what falls in him, keeps falling—and he's no angel.

road ·kill: (rōd'kīl)

Headlights across its head like a crushed beer can spilling into the road, it drug itself to the edge where its lungs collapsed in red bubbles. I stop and dig silt and mud, clawing a little furrow for its mangled body, and the weight of the thing no more than a child's hand, cover it in loose dirt and a few small words, caught by the unknown, I saw against the surface of the road, yellow eyes, a passing shadow, and I swerve into its splintered light.

ru ·bi ·con (rōō'bī-kōn):

Near the green house bordered by laughter into weeds for fields where farm boys work, bare-chested, overalls down to their waist, dust-blown boys laughing against a blue sky, white teeth mirroring noon-light, sweating with the work that fathers say turns young boys into men, and the young boys—children really—shine in the youth of their bodies' yearning, and the anticipation that summer brings; bonfires behind the barn, smoking corn silk in their father's pipes, swimming holes in the Kankakee, leaping from the trestle bridge where they fall flailing into the river, where the sound of shouting boys disappears like a Sunday sermon, *where the peace which passeth all understanding abides*, the shock of cold, and then, the struggle toward light, and always, the body in motion, itself unaware as if in the effort of remembering, experiences pleasure, autonomic, that is to say, the push against gravity—of boys into men—toward light and air.

si lence: (sɪˈləns)

First, the term *silence* in the small roots of dandelions thru the fields in distances where wild deer roam in rain so soft one only imagines something wet, or silences of isolation and exile, present only in paratactic afterimage, as a bullet hole in cloth so is a soldier who sets his rifle aside, an indexical silence, a silence that witnesses war as a stone gestures slowly over time in miniscule increments so one comes to understand not-words, the act of opening spaces between structures where a greater strength could be found, where the wind has nothing to seize, is the instant, which speaks for the whole of silence near the border of the cemetery of the living, when only the dead have something to say—listen...can you hear me?

sin gle: (sɪŋ'gəl)

Out one  
morning  
by harvest

late  
one summer  
where we

fall  
by one  
river-side

one leaf  
red  
where

one stray  
goose  
lands

opens  
one day  
as a field

waits  
for  
seed

Sun day: (sŭn'dē)

This is a child's truth; Sunday, the smell of lemon on freshly waxed pews, or yellow through stained glass even when it rained, yellow streaks when I pressed my fingers on my eyelids—I believed they were angels—and when I released, red spots, tiny bobbing demons like ruptured cells, fever like the yellow afterglow of prayer opening inside my mouth, dropping like a penny into a well.

tag mem ics: (tæg'mēmiks)

In the last day on the farm, my brothers struggled with the pigs, their arms bulging like ropes, shoulders arcing and straining under the weight. They stood ankle-deep in mud and shit, and flipped coins for the rifle and chainsaw. Standing on my tiptoes, I watched from the window of my room.

My brothers stood over the pigs like twin gods, their muscled backs toward me, things tucked into a back moment enough, flesh-colored and smelling like rotting wood and mold. Brittle bones like razor coral, some hearts and organs, and later that day in town, the church's steeple rising like a spear, and the thank yous to the Lord for his bounty, sanctioned by measured nods, something about a mighty sea parting, significance and miracles.

And the things we lost by the end of the day; a one-arm hired hand with two children walking away from our house, one-hundred acres, twenty-three chickens, a few horses, a father, a farm, my life.

tel·e·logy: (tĕl'ĕ-ŏlə'-jə)

A movement. Slow and encumbered but precise. A process of continuance, as if living forever could satiate an appetite for design, old age dragging a bloody past back down the western ladder, and from out of nothing, Richard Howard says “all is nothing... after everything has been endured. Till then, everything is something other than what it is.” As if our lives were a simple Aboriginal dot painting viewed from above, the squiggles and lines forming the shapes of creatures and landmarks: a river here, a mountain there, where we squat around a fire, the metaphor for sun, or spark of life, everything in its own space for a season—a purpose and time—a design I cannot fathom.

ter mi nal: (tûr'mə-nəl)

This has nothing to do with immunity, what white count multiplies, a call to arms for the infected host's affliction, it has nothing to do with a cry for help, a hand to hold, white sheets and sterile masks, nothing to do with thousands of white robed spheres in a single drop of blood, nothing to do with T cells that migrate from bone marrow to thymus, or how a plug of platelets enmesh in a network of insouciant molecules.

Most mornings the exchange takes place without fanfare, without notice, the slow steady hum of oxygen pumps, the body more or less, weighed, needled, and changed, just the blue-gowned nameless way of living among tiled corridors and distended shuffling feet. Most evenings, the invisible procession comes and goes with exquisite hushed voices, heart monitor's metronome, and what can be mourned is mourned, what luck one has is spent, and plans, what's become of them now, dusty mumbling and photo albums, and when there's nothing else to offer, take out your tattered ticket, listen to the low voices call out numbers in the dark, watch the clock and wait.

translations: (trāns-lāshəns)

Looking out at the lights across the channel or through a window into a room where a man's finger swirls a drink. I stand on the corner with my paper cup. I write poems for donations, I meant *for translations*, for me without a family, and to have failed which is hard enough and the prospect of losing words is like a blizzard in the brain, soused with the white lightning I drink from a jar. Out of control. What I do every day is give blood, collect my money and sit and look out at the city, where one by one leaves fall down in the street, where they lay like so many atrophied veins, I figure they've all got to fail sometime, I meant *fall*, and they do, every year like clockwork, and I can't stand the sight of blood, or words drained of life, with gray skin like underwater plants, where sound travels well but goes unheard.

un'employed: (ŭn'ĕm-ploid')

A sound like someone knocking, no one there but cancellation notices from the unemployment office on your desk and something rank inside you opens and shuts like the gory maw of garbage trucks and sewage breath floating in through the window, the rasp of street sounds, cackle of homeless roused by beat-cops, business as usual, but for your own pale shadow against the wall where you stare at some other self, another place where you are not welcome, and the sun's shallow vein bleeds a yellow stain across the sky, another day where only weeds grow and buildings rise, people sleep standing, and what matters most is coffee and time to figure out what you're going to do with your life.

unmoor: (ŭn-möör)

It was not dark—that opening to the east between then & your bed. You lose yourself in the hum, the glow passing through the blinds to where you lay stunned in the slat pattern of heat. Your slight pulse carries the vanishing knowledge of ancestors, mere whispers—persistent—a longing like cities disassembled by fog, and to love that stranger rising from his bed—your hand rises on its own, touches your face.

va ·can ·cy: (vā'kən-sē)

Scars on break-light, the first tide-line rushes toward a cliff where our house will soon tumble, it may take years to rebuild, see what it will bring, what hope to encounter by the wire fence where the old Ford rusts in a field, climb in the drivers side, windshield shattered by light passing through the clouds, heartbroken, gathers me up in its name, glints incantations, semaphore from mirrors and pitted chrome, a message as clear as laughter in a bottle uncorked, spills shine out on green cracked vinyl, littered bottles glowing with stale liquor, a weightlessness for the past to enter, an orphan space—call it home.

va·ca·tion: (vā-kā'shən)

In the days of my father  
in youth  
in faith of names we wrote

wide in sand

And later  
when we looked for them  
they were gone.

What did we expect?

Castles?  
Small feet trailing into surf  
kites hovering

in a cloudless sky?

Bodies buried?  
Where could we have traveled  
that we hadn't already been?

Late night on a pier in Pensacola

Fishing poles in hand  
the sky beginning to fall  
the tide beginning to rise.

ve·rac·ity: (və-rās'ĭ-tē)

On the road  
I was robbed

at a truck stop  
though I didn't

have anything  
they could take.

except an old  
zippo and my

'68 Rambler  
I don't smoke

anymore anyway  
and I think

I placed this  
line somewhere

before but I can't  
remember where

nothing like this  
ever happened

to me really, but  
is remembered

as a family  
member

might recall a  
story no one else

knows or  
perhaps it's all

fabricated, who am  
I to judge?

“veracity” cont.

All this has been  
said a thousand

times before and  
will be said after

I am gone in this  
blue vault, a closed

box, the world  
distant and mute

I can't contain myself  
and carry my

heart, bleeding in  
my mouth forever

like the sunset  
held in a square

sky, stars  
poking out like

broken teeth  
where I stand

in an empty truck  
stop parking lot

vet 'er 'an: (vĕt'ər-ən)

On crutches, in wheelchairs, on walkers, more old than young, waiting in lines more long than short, with respirators for orange lungs, catheters for bladders in men in plastic chairs, snow on television, magazines from last year, with clouded eyes borrowed on patriotic loans, on shrunken spines they hump their aggrieved past through rice paddies, up mountains, through deltas, through the shit of the dead, bent and bloody, the revenant, the wronged, the lost, the righteous, the wicked, the doomed, the numbered, no names, the bodies.

white: (wīt)

Alone between lines of drying sheets, his taut body hunched over a salted dead snail, while in her flowered gown, his mother fingers wooden beads of prayer, be still, be still, she says as she lays her hand on his white nape, white sheets like flags of surrender where the salt was spilled.