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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS
FOR MOM WHO RAISED ME RIGHT

AND BEN FOR ALL THE VOWS
ONE
A Bewilderment

I have lost all luscious dreams
beyond all kingdoms of thought.
But then I feel happy thinking of you
the way we invite our love to the table
to eat what’s left. I make a stream
connecting the baseball card in my wallet
with the you in my mind.
See how the sun carries certain weight?
It looks like a wild egg
from a prehistoric bird broken open
on a baffled hill. I want to go out
and ride the back of a parable
or walk up and down the city looking
for something that thrilled me back in the day.
Back in the day I tore
jubilant Edwardian script
across a savannah.
I wrote that there was no
stopping a forest
from taking what it wanted.
The Future Is Here

Man burns at a certain degree
but I always burned a little slower.
When I went into school
I left a trail of blackened footprints
to my classroom of spelling words,
ever starred. At the end of the earth
we’ll be locked in our own spelling mistakes,
our arms around the legs of our mother
so she won’t leave, our heads filled with beer, the light
receding. What kind of death is reserved for me?
The green plastic soldier has his gun up against everything.
And what does one do with a gun really?
I’ve only held three my entire life.
The third I held was the first I used.
I was with Rebecca and her father, deep in the woods of Vermont
when she was staying with me in the heap.
I shot at a beer can until my hands went numb.
And I loved her the whole time;
the car accidents and barbiturates, the way
she got wasted, knocked her teeth
into her lap and told me
I loved her too much—what was all that?
What man does is build whole universes out of miniscule
disasters and educational degrees.
I have mine in an enormous envelope two feet behind me.
My name looks good in gangster font.
It makes me want to alight
on the thigh of my beloved like a moth
because I know all careful grief
comes out from behind the thigh
and makes a fist at the grey sky above Brooklyn.
The destroyed continue
into the snow-filled future, shoveling.
And love is either perpetually filthy
or intermittently lewd.
I’m sweeping the entire apartment because it’s mine forever.
And that’s valid, too: domestic eroticisms. The way
he gets up out of bed before you
and puts on clothes and can’t find his keys.
All of it, without parents, without children, without roommates.
It feels good to get something
back. And the whole feels
detrimental and complicated and forever stimulating.
Which is why we live—and why we send out
balloons into the atmosphere
with notes tied to them that say
Nothing bad can touch this life
I haven't already imagined.
I Saw the Devil with His Needlework

The air was like a bullet made out of silk
I saw him at the curb
on old upholstery
saw him with his counted-thread-point
and tent-stitch, bent over an embroidery hoop
the trees lifted their drunk limbs and leaves
while the evening
looked through a succession of windows
into other people's rooms
the evening was a powerful gun
the evening had an Uzi
broad evening
in a neighborhood full of translucent teens
sucking on one another's backpacks
filling up the trains with their heat
their intelligence pouring out into the street, sobbing—
I saw the devil with his sewing threads
making something special for me
and it wasn't thunder
it was perfect clouds
I saw the devil with his stitching techniques
textiles and shadow
saw his hands that never stopped
the clean amp of his forehead
tight intervals of flowers in his teeth
bright as an earing in the drain
and I made a force field with the wilderness in my face
and a fortune-teller’s neon sign
that glowed a painted light onto the street
and I said his name
and his crimes
three times against a curse
and found a coin on the ground and read the tiny date
and blessed a bag of weed
and a wild bore
I left my bones and my scars
and went out
like a poltergeist
totally empty
Even Moon

Even in a window box we fit
even in the dog’s collapsed grave
even in the wreck
and everyday
there’re more and more
memorable Hamlets within us
football season is almost here
so even we
might make it through the air
I thought we fit well in the bottle from the wine club
even if I wasn’t happy
with the grape
I was thinking more of the bruise on Jupiter
and the Christmas lights
that appeared in the densely populated regions of space

I’ll probably never leave this planet
even if I actually get a postcard from 2050
like we fantasized about
it won’t matter
we’ll still be yanking the rope
and mowing the lawn
walking out to the field to toss plastic sporting goods around
I almost understand the moon’s
extremely slight axial tilt
to the ecliptic plane
but certainly not the collapse of Lehman Brothers
though both would illuminate
the limits of this earth
lending and trading our bodies in the darkest rooms of Brooklyn
not speaking necessarily about economy
coming to its knees
but seeing that it does
and seeing the moon once in a while
at its best
every time shocked
and even me—with my terrible health
and declined industries—
am looking up
Sensitivity to Sound

When I blew smoke rings
they were blindsided geese in the air,
they were ships docking at my face.
At night I heard the mice screwing in the walls.
Heard them stop, heave into one another, flail back
onto the pink spun insulation
and I heard their terrible dreams begin.
When I shaved my legs it was the sound of dogs barking.
Not the low, consistent bark
but the shrill ones that rise and fall in intensity.
My eyes made the sound of a date being set,
of a photograph being taped to the wall.
When we kissed it was whiskey with ice—
when we kissed it was two swordfish, vaulting—
when we kissed it was hay being torn off the bail by a mouth—
when you went to the dip of my neck,
it was the sound of a fur coat being buttoned—
In the rain I heard each drop crossing the immaculate bridge
of your nose. Your penis lifted
like a crane lifting a piano to the top floor.
In storms I could hear earth.
From across two states I could hear my mom reentering the atmosphere, a demigod in her purse. I could hear her sadness converting itself to pure energy.
I could hear her crushing a carpenter ant with her thumb.
I could hear her hearing the cheese and whey factory hum.
I looked and I saw my body sunning by a river and the river was the sound of a circumstance of blossoms and the bees that covered them were barefoot women on wet concrete.
Reading a Science Article on the Airplane to JFK

Today I flew over the Midwest
ing filling out a questionnaire
on the emotional life of the brain
and personal capacity for resilience
against despair. I was making
a sculpture of my limbic systems
in a huge conceptual neurosis.
Under the simulated
middleclass environment
of the fuselage
the snow was falling.
And in everyone’s skulls
complex régimes went on and on and on.
I seek forever the right way to know this.
That there are bridges
not built in me. That there are areas
that do not light up—
You are at a party having a conversation
with an interesting stranger.
You are in a restaurant and the service is bad.
You have experienced profound grief—
how do you react to this?
Down on the ground your family
writhes. Down on the ground
you are surrounded at Starbucks
with a terrible glow.
And you have seen someone you love,
with a colossal
complex vehemence, die.
And it is pinned under glass
in perfect condition.
It is wrapped around you
like old fur. You’ve looked at the sky
until your eyes touched
zodiacal fantasies—right there in the void.
You know this. That the body lays down
while the mind bloats
on intellectual chaos.
And you have just eaten
a bag of cinnamon-flavored chips
and assessed that if you met
a wonderful new person
who ran from you in horror
you would fill their space
with calculated desolation.
Thus, you are waking up
having traveled through time.
You are looking down
at the Statue of Liberty
garden gnome with her arm in the air,
her head full of strangers—
And you hear crickets. Lined up.
Playing their creepy violins.
And you want to be good.
And you want to be liked.
And you want to recover.
Now whenever I get up out of bed
and go into the kitchen
I really take myself
back to the field
among the puissant
among the sterile plum trees
to find a door in the ground
my bullet hole in the mountain
my password.
I take out my collection
of tissue and listen to Judy Garland
sing Have Yourself A Merry Little Christmas,
her voice like some wildflower
absorbing into the crimped human mind
an infinite medium of grief—
this human brain that cannot assume
the trust position.
I stand like a wizard in that field, my hands
on fire, over where I think
the body is. I open the refrigerator
staring at the eggs, each in their Styrofoam socket, each
dumbly assembled head bowed—
when I hold in the fridge light,
the cold driving over my knees,
I think of the funeral.
I think of us all lined up.
The chorus of Greeks spat back out into the trees.
And I realize grief is only for the past.
That it broods on a kind of preservation
flaring up like angles at the base of a lamp.
That grief walks barefoot, eternally,
in the local Grand Union grocery,
filling its basket, stimulated
by each regret;
that it knows my teenage ghost.
I stand looking at the milk, the rack, the maple,
and I realize grief wants me to stay
a child, negotiating a stream of atoms,
picking flowers. Grief wants me in good condition.
Grief wants me to remember everything. Imperfect. Clear.
Because You Love
You Come Apart

Your hair is wonderful today.
This is a microscopic caress at a party.
This is the dead fathoming.
This is coming home
with your gorilla heart all disordered.
This is feeling like a steamboat
swaying at the wharf at midnight.
A picnic bench weathering
in wind. But this is also your life made
with your clumsy hands—
your brain lighting up
when you see a beautiful woman
eating french-fries in a dark bar.
Your head is split down the middle by a brook;
each hemisphere, divine, witchy,
out of the depths—your trouble,
your grief speaking, your cartoons.
The crazy, absent fathers
all breaking wind in a fire
and the fire engorged.
And your heavy body is getting up and going.
This is starting a sentence with
I’ve never told anyone this.
And you are gruesome, hungry
at the edge of the earth
where the dead wait it out.
From a babble in the ground
in a vortex of quilts and roots:
they are still listening.
They want to be loved.
They want to be remembered correctly.
We bring ourselves to the river
and we feed ourselves coffee and blasts of airborne opiates.
This is bone-dust.  A fistful of mint.
The collected writings of Dante
that cover everything in a brunette wood.
There is the clear image
of someone beside you who looks just like you
but can get bluebottle flies to land on her finger.
This is the optic nerve
in endless reflections of your friends.
This is your friends making you a massive cake
filled with blackbirds and figs,
making halos with their hands,
saying loyal things
and getting emotional.
This is leaving a dark bar with them.
In the cab home you lay in each other’s arms.