

**I ONCE WAS SOMEONE ELSE
& OFTEN STILL AM**

by Tyler Gobble

“Pain is a vibration; allow it to shine out as part of your content; it’s not consciousness itself.”

-- Mei-Mei Berssenbrugge

“It’s hard to be / hard to be / it’s hard to be / a decent human being.”

-- David Bazan

TO THE FUTURE

I've decided no more traveling
To the future, which was far
Easier than shifting to the past
Which was chock full of problems

& trees. Personally, I would love
To catch up with the present.
These tremors I can't properly halt.
These words can't help but lead to

Stark, untimely death. *No more dying*
Replied Frank O'Hara, who
After saying did a bit of his
Own dying, squeezed from the tooth-

Paste container of life by what I
Assumed for nine years was called
A doom buggy, a mistake Frank might
Return a nod, slight giggle. My mom

She once demanded I eat as much
As craved & act terribly.
We arrived at Daytona Beach
& I learned if a family

Listens to a sad sack yap for some
Thirty or so long minutes
About a condo, or seven if
Your pale child behaves poorly

Enough, they'll let you grab freely from
Their rack of donuts, Slurpee®
Machine, plus you will receive
A coupon for a free dune buggy

Rental. Of course, this happened after
Someone done ran over Frank
O'Hara on Fire Island, but
Before it was said, *Uh...no*

More dune buggies on the beach. Simpler
Times, my hair was thick like sand.

LIFE

This string of seashells on display illuminates
Life. Look how delightfully it resists being
Interpreted, interrupted, relegated.

Slippery, was merely pieces once, haven't cinched
To maintain a singular space. We can all see
The friction invested in their surfaces over

The centuries. Much bounces off my string of seashells.
Humor, agony, ecstasy, boredom, doubt, self-
Referentiality. Say God put these shells

Here. You would be wrong, interesting premise, but
You would be wrong. One cannot glance upon these shells
Without maintaining his or her own preference.

We all misbehave for our own purpose. A kind
Of collection of what I was thinking at each
Given moment. This one for when grandmother died.

This one for the envelopes I dropped beneath
The tires of the tractor. This one for the snake
The redneck kid pulled out of Lukens Lake. This one

For my first dislocated shoulder, my seventh.
This one belonged to Matthew's dead hermit crab. Me?
Never cared if a seashell signaled a thing, more

Interested in the next seashell I will happen
Upon. You can feel this sort of energy grow.
I was thirty-one & I thought to myself:

*This is a nice way of making something, a way
To remember what I've seen in the crashing waves.*
Two unanswerable questions rose to the surface.

Are we ever beyond the pulling? Do you think?
Always seemed harder to surf without a surfboard.
Failures of reference, shifty variables

Near the equator. You & I both know I am

Talking about something without saying exactly
What it is, a fairly recent concern. I hope

This will take my string of seashells to impossible
Limits. On the other hand, it might just be this.

HE COULDN'T ENTERTAIN WAS THE HIGH QUANTITY

Darwin witnessed wolves transform into dogs, but what
He couldn't entertain was the high quantity
Of quarters with my dumb thumbprint fossilized
In the dust of Cheetos, this my trick to impress
My peers & romantic interests. I would squeeze
A quarter tight till warm before I would toss it
Up & just a bit out across the void into
The pocket of these baggy black jean shorts, flaming
Eight-ball patch on the butt. True, Darwin suspected
Our center to be molten lava, but he had
No hunch of the commotion inside of my head.
This kickdrum called a skull, my tense difficulty
With fear, distant notion of a bald king named Ralph.

MORE THAN SIX YEARS OLD

First day on the bus, I couldn't have been
More than six years old, yes, mother dropped me
Off each day of kindergarten, baked in
The loaf of her brown sedan, no A/C.

A single seatbelt, mine. But then she flipped
Jobs, from the Crisco plant to the psych ward
& no way she was rising so early.
So thus take the bus I did. Anyhow

That first ride, no seats are left, & yes, scared
I am halfway to hell. My little sack
Of bones, my little sack of ham sandwich.
My little sack shriveled upward inside

Till the dang kindest cowboy to this day
I ever met, a high schooler named Jude
He lifted me without a word onto
His lap, & no, not in a way creepy

Sexual, or uncomfortable, no.
It just was & I rode there like he must
Atop his horse & my heart sequestered
Its mighty pitter & my blue eyes brushed

Off its patter. I saw it right there through
The dusty window—the fattest turkey
In the whole county. Knew it to be true.
It ducked behind the truck Dad left behind.

SELF-WORTH IS SOMETHING

Hi, you must be a robust person.
Self-worth is something.
Grasshoppers elsewhere in the tall grass.
I like myself. I
Continue being just as nimble
& punctual as I
Can be, one who never dares leave
My home without hands
& feet. Last night I dreamt about *The
Jerry Springer Show*.
Specifically two memories.
In one, a dwarf leaves
Her husband for a guy named Hambone.
In the other, Gwar.
That messy metal band finds itself
Confronted by parents
Whose kids keep ruining the laundry
Insisting on fake blood
For customizing their t-shirts.
This morn, I remembered
Jerry Springer was once mayor of
Cincinnati.
Recorded a country album, earned
A law degree. Some
Things always change, are possible.
Roast-beef-colored car!

TO THE BARN TO GET SOMETHING

Yesterday I strolled out
To the barn to get something, the drill
Or maybe that pink putty, it turns white
When it dries, & the window was black, buzzed.

Overnight, three hundred
Or more flies birthed in the barn
& then the swarm swarmed the window.

Thoughts, these flies, headaches, pandemics--they sweep
The psyche, the window, this noggin, this nation.

I woke to a nuisance I didn't earn.
When I flushed the toilet, the sewage rose.

This is what I've become, squatting, shitting
In plastic buckets in the garage.

Suddenly it begins to snow.

I don't know how to say it, but
The cashier at the grocery has begun
To harass me, comments on
The length of my cucumbers, the girth
Of the chicken breast I buy
For homemade dog food.

Today she called me a skank, in question
Form & even worse, the shelves were still
Bare of toilet paper, matches.

Still I can't blame her, remembering what
I said here earlier
About thoughts flying, the headache
Of a pandemic, unknown
Accident or incident prior.
I zip up my coat & move on.

Once outside of an alehouse
In Muncie, Indiana, someone mentioned
Last night's Sugarland concert.

I said, *I heard they really brought the house down.*

A stupid joke, my goof-timed cheeking
At the tragic collapse of the stage.

A guy said, *My cousin died in that collapse.*
O fuck, I said, *Punch me.*
Free of charge, but he refused.

Surely, countless other accidents
& incidents I have forgotten, folks
I have disrespected.

I have lived a long time, made many moronic maneuvers.

Thomas Edison originally believed
The phonograph a tool
For recording voices, memos to mother, meanderings best
Kept secret, though necessary to let
Fly from the snout.
Not songs, no, he declared.

Songs are already recorded elsewhere, have to be found.

Here's how dumb & pathetic I am!
I still take one of my wife's hairpins

To clean my earwax, though I know
Lee Gerstenzang invented the q-tip in 1923.

THOUSAND-VOLT HUMMINGBIRD

Do not blame me for this
Thousand-volt hummingbird.

Despite its appearance

In the front yard, it is
Not Spring. Winter begins.

A man hollers *fuck you*

Over again, pointing
At each of his nine lives.

Cars passing, passing thoughts.

Thousand-volt hummingbird
Too close to my parka.

I am relieved lately

Knowing my head is not
Some felt satchel cupping

The metallic orb of

Consciousness, but rather
It is yet another

Object in the litany

Of existence. The toilet
Overflows to the hall.

Brown river of muck, yuck.

When I think I give up
The thought occurs to change

Myself with a jelly

Bean or two, the heart of this
Thousand-volt hummingbird.

It is beating so fast.

These thoughts rush in & fade.

A hiccup causes pain.

I HAVE FOUND MYSELF

Waving at moths
I have found myself.
Willow tree outside my window, you were going nuts.

I knew it would
Happen some one day.
Every third morning, the cat, she gifts a mouse, answer

Unclear, what is
Next. Do I kick it
Into the grass, do I pinch it between a doctor

Bill I will pay
Never, do I burn
It to ashes & sprinkle the ashes among those

Wildflowers, how
I hope you will me
Whenever something larger than me, it murders me

Then bestows me
At the front doorstep
Of something even larger. I buried it behind

The barn as you
Asked me. I returned
To the porch speckled in black moths. The porch was speckled.

Not me speckled.
Though if I stand still
They dot me like sure signs of madness.

OTHERWISE DIFFICULT TO RENDER

*And that is how I have cherished you—deep inside
the mirror, where you put yourself, far away
From all the world.*

-- Rainer Maria Rilke

A self-portrait is hardest to locate in a place.
Otherwise difficult to render.
Be it Beijing or the Smoothie King Center.
Your charming local deli or a dark corner.
I am prone to distraction.
Often via the beautiful or the gruesome or the disappointment.
Often a thing covered in fur.
A frame cannot contain it.
The reverberation of the aluminum reflection forced upon me here.
I am chased by a sense of deterioration.
I am a half-filled human mask.
As in, the person I encounter each day will not, has not, will not always be me.
Or I melt away.
That old dull argument against the ordinary, the opposite of fear.
The mirror calls me out of myself.
Or perhaps it beckons me towards the deepest pit of myself.
Induces a sort of trance.
I peel off the layers of my apparent dome.
Like rinds tossed into the trashcan.
A symbol of the poverty of a great raw longing.
I know I shouldn't look, but I do.
Up against the embarrassing nakedness of living.
I am smudged with makeshift habits & blurred desires.
I stare into my fish eyes, my little nose, my antiquated teeth, the dent.
O to translate my radical deficiency into something else.
To swap ordinary living for the spiritual quest.
To jot down my dreams each morning.
Otherwise, I witness & then it is gone.
The boundaries of the dream contain an image & whatever else might coincide.
Conscious, self-conscious, subconscious, unconscious.
Attempting to capture the lesser-known qualities of light.
My grandmother & I shared more than the genes for diabetes.
I am distracted by human relationships.
Even with the dead, even with myself.
Poorly handled objects scrubbed anew, fresh granola in the cupboard.
At the age of eight, I became a pretty little vessel
When the family discovered my ragged inner emptiness
Which I would still like nothing more than to fill.

HE HAD TO ARGUE

I spent today insulting him.
He had to argue.
I banged on the wall with my ball.

I ran into the road.
He entertained the thought.
I carried the smell of whiskey.

He wondered aloud if the law had been broken.
I distrusted the government.
He sympathized with the bug on the windshield.

I sliced his thigh, got it over with.
He misses driving calmly together.
I developed a new tick.

I wiped my hands on his pants.
He was defeated by time.

SLEEPING GOT GRANTED SOME IFFY ATTEMPTS

I will admit the last couple decades
Sleeping got granted some iffy attempts
Mostly crying, juggling my genitals

Like chainsaws & never learning the point
Fossilized inside. Lately I promise

My darndest I have been mustering in
Attempt to sleep—meditating, no more
Peanut butter after midnight, I pulled

A quilt over my head, half-finished
By my great-grandmother, herself fully-

Finished, meaning she dead. So whatever
Essence of herself left as flakes on this
Fabric, she should share a thing or several.

The sensational secret to slumber.
Title for a book I'll never write.

BUT LITTLE COMFORT DID I FIND

The night hours did tick
But little comfort did I find.

I fell from the bed, half-bolted awake
Arms stretched out like Jesus.

Then I face-planted on the hardwood
Floor & I hurt my back.

The space around my body
Loud & blurry, I ride it like a skateboard.

I am a tumble, as frost begets
A slick hillside, an ancient hole.

I am a forgotten tune
Or sailed back pleas.

Shut it down, I say through my cold
Fingers to deescalate, to deflate.

Let's wake up & witness
How the colors mix in the morn.

Lots of bluesy anthems at first
& now browns, barbed wire of worry.

Don't complete them, then
Incomplete I sure am.

Don't reconstitute, then
Destitute I sure am.

Why am I this?
Why aren't I a pelican?

Who deserves a hug
& can this sandwich even care?

What a mess, what a man as I am
Covered in pudding.

Everyone else, they cry
Into their corn salad.

Is there a word for when it's not

Safe here, the howling quite loud?

I smell horribly from a day
That does this.

I might pick some flowers
Into the morn hours.

I wish this poem might land, but
Nothing but seized bits, ankled syntax.

You won't believe this exhaustion
Of being part liar, part dummy.

My hands stink & are this sticky
Like *O, this is what happens.*

The wife leaves, friends disintegrate.
Even my mother went, *Whoa.*

The blabber blurs, disrupts, &
Achoo...Sorry to lose you.

It was the deal, respect even
In the weeds.

Yes, sure, but
Are you there or not?

It rattles too loudly, I'm a foot
For trying, life aches too loudly.

I'm tottering on the edge
Of madness, not a new thing, but the grinding.

Time helps & honoring
My five senses (or more) helps.

Lemonade, it helps & sleep, if ever
It comes, helps, & tight white teeth helps.

Just letting myself squirm
Beaten by the sound of the taste of the worry.

This is real, a legit breakdown.
I am a done cracked almond.

IN LOVE WITH A GARDEN GNOME

The lost tourniquet squirrel
In love with a garden gnome
Is how I entered The Big City

Back then a good better bit skinny
& already blur-brained, but
With less words to situate

Why I felt so dang skitter-scattered.
A scratch of a self. When first arrived
I was disheveled, little

Bit drunk to be totally
Honest. I imagined I'd last two
Weeks, or sired by this desire

& selfishly, I'd hang out
The whole of my life, over-
Under at the time being forty

But as someone said, *Things change.*
Today I paused the moment between
Picking vegetables & washing

Vegetables. The wind blew
Hard, leftovers of tornados
In Missouri. Like a lightning bug

In the house, a flicker passed.
Once Michael offered lines on the road
Painted so terribly, so

Twisted, so tangled, we laughed
& laughed, me yelling, *HOW*, & Michael
Responding, *I DON'T KNOW* & that, to be

Honest, catastrophe of
Yellow, it reflected more
Than any painting I have witnessed.

A few weeks later my dad arrived.
He of the bones that honed me.

He of the humor that borne me.

I drove him straight to the lines, no clue
Someone had pulled the lines tight. My dad
He said, *Some beautiful lines.*

Voila, the disappointment
It floated away, or at least went
Elsewhere, how I've drifted elsewhere, back

Home to Indiana. Please
Don't say, *the middle of nowhere.*
People live here & I'm one again

In whatever capacity I
Blink awake—rust head, dust head.
Cuss head, fuss head, & so on.

SONGS BY TREVOR BORDEN I REALLY LIKE

I drive through a county I've never known before, singing one of the four
Songs by Trevor Borden I really like, which is more to say, these particular
Ones vibrate so excellently, the other good songs look like chickadees in the shadow
Of the tiger, & swept up in the collage of unfamiliar space, lyric spirituality
& one last bite of sandwich, I mismumble the words & pause the tape
& continue my thinking as such. When I imagine it, it only takes one
Variable to watch the whole house crumble, the hoagie scarfed into a variant means
Of energy, the mechanism I am riding squeaking & eventually unhinged, gone, erased.
My imagination paints the end of the world something like the boy
In a hat in the boat on the still water next to the barn
Of the painting hung above my grandmother's bed, after she had her leg lopped
Off, its own omen of end times to come. For then, I was there
To climb on the counter, to stuff her wheelchair in the van
So we could drive across the bridge & through the snow to the market
For gummy worms, to the park so I could dig earthworms for the fishing
Trip that weekend. Oh! *But what about the boy*, you ask. He is there
No longer, only the hat come to a rest in the boat on the water still.

THE POUND OF DUST

On the way to Texas at the end of August
The pound of dust, which each year escapes this body
It went whoosh all at once to expel the fibers
& filaments from the last go-round the sun, dead stars
Added to a confident field. I am too busy to bother.
Too experienced to keep on, buoyed to this damned caboose.

Once, to grow up meant stepping up to the front.
Dreams, at last, have taken on reality. A single cantaloupe
From Illinois is the father, or is it proper to
Say mother, of all the world's penicillin, once a miracle
Drug capable of ending everything including poor hedge trimming, but
Now it cannot manage the meekest of the genital warts.

O I may still be asleep after all. I am
Not one to be gracefully surprised. There it was, bottle
Of booze. It was obvious someone had confused my truck
For another meant to haul booze away from this wedding.
Mine was meant for flowers. Brendan was there & can
Tell you all about it. Turns out we are capable

Of more than these five senses, & no, I speak
Not of the sixth—seeing dead people, knowing it is
About to rain, bullshit detector, etc. I intend to be
Well-equipped to not fall down when approaching oblivion. My chin.
It has never let me down. I am the product
Of seven million odd tons of scrap iron & you

Can take that to the bank. My sense of smell
It is something compared to I remaining unhampered by what
Overwhelms. Even passing Subway is enough to make me quiver.
Even sniffing these begonias bequeaths groans comparable to murder, treason.
Worthless dandelions. I buy a sunken ship for my brother.
He could pass not a door without hearing a hinge

Echo like our mother lunging towards the toilet, could not
Eat a bologna sandwich without stiffness in his cauliflower ear.
Never once could he dare ask how my day was.

JUST YESTERDAY

Crutches sprout around the stupid city.
Just yesterday, you spotted a donkey

At the petting zoo pull one apart with
Its teeth, those thirty-eight repurposed moons

Acquiring something like pleasure, nourishment.
Then today, I discovered a hedge plant

Tiny crutches dangling in the hundreds
From its greenest tips. A family frolicked

Towards the bush & I shifted my vision
Towards the sunset. The prophet who lives

Under the Lamar Street bridge says we will
Find a pair of pairs—two crutches for you

& two for me, poked out of the sidewalk
Like feed corn—recognized & grand & in

The end, inadequate. If we are not
Careful, we might convince ourselves: saddle

Up & balance here forever. I must
Get back to the country, my mystic drum.

Be done with these synthetic habitats.
Urban clams, vibrating overpasses.

I hear the autumn's first snap of an ear.
A signal my family continues, is.

YOUR ADVANTAGE

Leave it to me to be blathering on.
Your advantage, though who needs a record
Of any of this anymore. I can't
Read my own mind, let alone yours, far-off
Far-out blue fantasy, um, galaxy
Away. I hear the ding of the doorbell
Pulled from its white plug way back in the year
1996, a year some others
Remember with much more clarity &
Fondness than I. I tend to remember
I could not let you witness what I was
Becoming—part aardvark, part back-up third
Baseman, one-part optical illusion
Covered in dirt. This was before I knew
You, but also before I did lose you.

HEAD FROM A BUNDLE OF SKY

Like you, I was coerced into crafting my own
Head from a bundle of sky, clouds of perception.

Like an onion, my head, I am peeling it plum
Down to the center where my crisp intentions

& my harsh attention & latent vague memory
Dangling by my fingers in a silver chain net

All meet, noticing now how attempt & succumb
Live on the same haunted block. Like you, I feel so

Terrible for the guy or gal whose phone number
Gets cropped as the fake digits on this one program

Some made-up line interjected crossways right through
The episode where one cousin buys a handgun

As the other cousin remains still shivering
In a hospital gown, like the drooped branch outside

My bedroom window shakes, periodically
Aroused by the wind, the same over & again.

The phone number owner finds himself or herself
Every other day or so rising up from what is

Considered a most-prized comfort, pastel blue
Chair, & shuffles across the stained linoleum

To end the ring-ring-ring. This mess is all because
An intern did not check the number to ensure

It was not the least bit occupied & now
We, each in our own homes, spend all day attempting

To be present in what gifts us charm & some joy
As the forgetful intern chews some bubble gum

Oblivious to what trouble he delivered
Unto others, mainly the one mid-waddle now

Drawn ever-loyal up & towards the ringing
Coming from the kitchen, neatly right on schedule

& on the other end, you guessed it, me craving
A voice, a good bit flustered, every bit as kind.

& MY JACKET

For you, I tore from my coat
& my jacket, my layers stacked, limp against the window.
It is not like me to drag
Intimacy through such tedious days, crazy how odd

& unruly operate
In one's house. Rosy dew slinging its own moisture towards
Damascus, rosy witch of
The kneeling grace. I'm feeling cradled, so I sing my aches

Accordingly. I'm daily
With loss, time smearing & money doled out obstructively.
Also, I'm a jealous bear
Snatching pies. The echoes lament & the wildflowers glow.

I hide with timidity
For three days in tow. O you, practitioner of polish.
O you, lover of gold signs.
O you, law-abiding jewel so gleefully precious.

I might die underwater
& pickle. I doth lick the wick you lent me. My gorgeous
Genitals are not for sale.
Let's crash our rubicund hearts together & literally

My self-doubt hangs around, excising
A new appreciation into existence, window
Dropped to make the sleet stop. Sweet
Utterance of moral chords. I joke with goodbye to tell

You *stay*. I bow to your fears.
You no longer need to project because I hear you fine.

WRITTEN IN MY STALE BLOOD ON THE FRONT DOOR

It is what we found later right before we found some slumber
Written in my stale blood on the front door

Intended to keep storms at bay, but here today, the canvas
For my latest dose of poetic bullshit.

What humph screed in scrawl. The tiniest shards still shone like lost stars
In the room of night where hours earlier

I sat waiting for you, the windows blanketed with blankets.
The day scared me so bad that I had to

Cover the holes that let the shimmer in, to unscrew the bulbs
Till I realized I am still scared

Of the dark. I squeezed to make the bulbs, just twelve minutes ago
Unscrewed, go soft white again, but no I

Never thought to screw them right back in, the bulbs exploding not
With light but into pieces, small tallies on my palms.

Votes from the others: *Enough is enough. The darkness is not
The root problem. It is you, ya dummy.*

**INSIDE A THREE-BUCK COPY OF *SOLAR THROAT SLASHED* BY
CÉSAIRE**

American flag twenty-four cent stamp
Inside a three-buck copy of *Solar Throat Slashed* by Césaire.
What else is there? A sentence soared this way

Years ago, & now, it reaches over
The trance of the sound of the worms scaling each other to live.
I'm not any better, or safer, though

I persist, like the blind mouse mid-journey
To the door, led only by the chirp of his friend, the cardinal
Bowing so graciously in the blue spruce

My mother decorated each Christmas
& often forgot till April or May. These snowflake feelings
Unimportant. This, on the other hand.

HIPPOCAMPUS THEOLOGY

I did not see the sign on the door!
Hippocampus theology!
Session is full!
Do Not Disturb!
No shirt, no shoes, no problem!
This idea knows more than I ever will!
You hide all your important thoughts!
My mouth emits a sound!
Recollecting the first time we met!
You had sand in your hair!
They heard the whispers under the blanket!
I have forgotten as requested!
I have extra!
You have eggs without cracks!
Sympathy has a purpose!
I have a primitive brain!
I access my emotions via kite, buffet!
Welcome to Corpus Christi!
The alarm system is on!
I am!
I purchased pink sandals like yours!
Airplanes are my least favorite form of flight!
You found a part of my knee no one has named!
It was cold!
I have a suggestion!
The yellow leather chairs in the Executive Lounge!
The hippos never showed!
They saw you snorting tacos!
Developmentally-appropriate spoken-word poetry!
You must contextualize your groans!
Everything is better with friends!
Forgive my lack of balance!
You must choose!
So many eggs in your basket!
Many sounds you continue to make!
I love a glass of wine each morning!
That is a STOP sign!
You forgot to call your mother again!
This banter barter for greater balance!
Not now!
That beeping!
You try living inside a hollow fluorescent tube!
I am sunbathing!
I stay connected!
I hate omelets!
I love a good sigh!

One size does fit most!
I am about to scream!
Watch the flicker of the overhead lamps!
This is the beginning!
This is the extension of the olive branch!
Sit down!
Please!

TRISTAN COMES TO OUR SUPPER

I must not cry, even if
Tristan comes to our supper
Tonight though, might I tremble
In insecurity, yes.
Your tongue trembles, Tristan notes.

Tristan never says *achoo*
If an invitee sustains
An allergic reaction to
Sardines. So I feel antsy.
Boiled as he is confident.

But you & I will survive
& babble, partnered like
This. My tongue traces history
Through the circus—one trembles
If on the highwire, the

Aftermath of living at such
Rhetorical heights, messy
& you know what they say—thirst
Fires the light of the chest
For one more glimpse of the lion.

WHATEVER WICKED WAND WELDED

The skull proves it, the skull proves it
Whatever wicked wand welded, whatever wicked wand welded
Us, loved us, even if love for real
It resembles some knot on the tree's side.
The lumberjack says, *TIMBER*, for himself & me.
This is a metaphor like your bird tattoo.
Twenty-two separate bones join forces to protect
My split-tired brain & Ryan's dumb brain
& your scared brain & Ron's scarred brain
Except one or nine of his pieces might
Be missing from that accident when he went
Fishing & he leapt out of the boat
For the book, the first in two decades
Swiped from the husk of this town's library.
He leapt right when a loose log pattered by.
I feel chosen to hold onto this story
My own decade later, his brother, my best
Friend hugging that book tight as we both
Leaned one ass cheek against my cold bumper
The night we escaped high school, how some
Surface, a secret, a story, it finds itself
Shared in the space where we separate, & only
One-twentieth of one percent of the entire
Animal kingdom gets such thorough protection, even though
We all dare dive head first if pressured.

SOUND

First, there was nothing & then there was sight.
Sound, rest of the senses. You know it all
Changes. The house releases a smell warmer
Than before Uncle Rick died, more Yankee
Candle & less inside the skin of his
Son's first deer. His son's first deer fell, but not
Before sending a signal like a lost
Boat. Uncle Rick so cried that sound, perhaps
In need to relieve a mountain of pain.
Cut thumb in the morn's dressing. Distraction
From the drill in his head to relieve
Pressure. They gifted the circle of skull
To me, little hard empty eye, the next
Fact faced—I have a skeleton inside
Myself, not dancing plastic on the porch
In the late autumn. Yes, the logic went—
If Uncle Rick then so too I. I placed
It in my mouth & never apologized.

THE SKELETON YOU KNOW IS THERE

You harbor this impossible impulse to see
The skeleton you know is there.
No, not an x-ray, an MRI, it won't do.

You need to hold it like a bent
Tree branch, but know you cannot.
You cannot construct an honest pro/con list.

Your frustration is your discovery with this
Keeping your skeleton in, upright, cased in flesh.
You protect it from its own orange oblivion.

Steven claims his father died once
The whole family left the room, left him with her.
The hospice nurse remained.

But you see clearly—that hospice nurse re-entered
The empty room, him dying but not dead.
She clicked, clicked, clicked the morphine button.

He did it, Steven's father left this world
& ended in this poem, but only after she came out.
The lovely assistant comes out of the box & voila

She is whole, which isn't to say you haven't tried.

MY TRIPLED-PANED SKULL FUMBLES WHAT'S CLAIMED OBVIOUS

With a flick of the wrist, my grandfather shook the snow globe.
My triple-paned skull fumbles what's claimed obvious.
The inability carried by my grandfather in separating cousin from I.
Not in our looks or our lineage, but the deeds we do, the needs we undo.
The twine around the newspaper still fresh with ink pulled tight.
I lose track of what once resembled reindeer.
You drink tea in the other room.
My grandfather requests a blanket of no one.
The vision of my mother set to turn her father into a fake gold watch.
Her pile of nightgowns needs folds.
You sit convinced I am a child of echoes.
Spiritually half-petrified as I barrel forth into the field.
Then later I fall from the roof.
To be frank, I am not trustworthy either.
In actuality, I shimmied the gutter, balanced my chin ever so a bit & plummeted.
I dreamt the stars fell down & shattered the pocket watch.
I tore grief from the ghost's grasp, let my grandpa know he knows nothing.
I returned to me, the snow done settled within my northern orb.

AT THE BREAKFAST TABLE

I'm surprised they still allow me
At the breakfast table. Last night

I nearly torched a lamp shade
& thus a house, my house

In fact. How lucky to have
My own home in this day

& age, markets like they are.
Mornings, I am not often myself

Not solidly formed, slats for mouth.
Gaps in my head. Today requires

Much attention. Today requires I stay
Positive when the temperature is negative.

I learn much from Mrs. Butterworth.
How to stand straight, quite tall.

How to allow myself to be
Emptied to serve others. How to

Tend my own garden very well.
For her, I suppose, it's easy

The only life she's ever known.
Plus her garden is made of

Pancakes & waffles & butter.

A COUGH EVICTS A STRAND IN A SPLIT SECOND

My pillow exhales in contention, the panicked beginning to a day, Tuesday or Sunday
metaphorically.

A cough evicts a strand in a split second; it is surely yours.

I pinpoint the thin snake in the corner of my mouth, the sunshine glancing through our ordinary
blinds.

I carry you in my chipmunk pouch outside for the procession.

They must be burying someone today, someone today will be born, the first time one hears birds.

Maybe it is not yours, but in my union suit, the blues fade as I am confident I connect to you.

The strand dangles from my lips like poultry between the wires in the blonde's barn, seemingly
unending in its deathly depths, the misremembrance of an excruciating endeavor, the
brother in his red face grinding metallic stars into being.

The morning has erased the stars, the moon, the conference of symbols in the ditch; I cling
to the smell of tortillas, trailing alongside the errant honk wistfully unleashed as the driver
stretches for a fallen cell phone, far corner of the floormat; it rings that tune
captured by your black hair.

It is like you have serenaded another misadventure-in-weird into existence, even in absence, the
hues our lives blush into having over-extended our periphery.

Certainly you do not believe this.

When they shaved your head to give the wound some space, your hair returned sympathetically; it
was then you mastered the wail, the waltz, the whatever hum into aquamarine morning.

Do you still sing?

Suspicious markings, turbulent nighttime give way to the transparent earnings of slumber; the black
& white letters of the news skid into view, into use, collapsing the morning despair of
unknowing, bewilderment without the being or the wilderness.

Corruption of the unconscious is a necessity of jumpstarting the day; I string your forgotten thread
across my sturdiest fingers & begin to pluck.

In return, the lone apple tree in this yard darts soft noise across the meadow you purchased with
every cent the universe loans.

ELECTRICAL CURRENT THAT POWERED YOUR CASTLE

Had piqued shock, gobs of verve, the mysterious
Electrical current that powered your castle.

Queen, goodbye. The bellhop at the pink hotel
He misses you, the avocados now heard

The news: You went home. Non-smoking signs retreat
In regret, embarrassment, & worst, I slept

So well last night, no idea you found your next
Form, silver in the marsh, some tear in the eye.

To be in the car again, in that cloud where
You finish your cigarette, hold a mountain.

Saw an expectation in half. I will eat
A thousand ice cream sandwiches. Goodbye, you.

Your entirety prepares itself for turquoise
Spring, or maybe banish the bits & come back.

DOOR KNOB DING

Mine is the thing with scabs, every
Door knob ding, concrete scrape
Mid-scrap, scuffle, or skate. I show

The blossoms & blooms to every
Near eye in my room. Look
What happens as care becomes less

A thing stitched to an –s or –ful.
I am full of psych meds
& curiosity. The flakes

Hold no permanence, like I am
This biological
Architecture—arches punctured

By nails. My palms came with their own
Lines, lines I cannot read.
Taxes, child crossing the black road.

Sure as the cock crows, the windmill
You hear but cannot see
Squeaks a squelch, as one enacts rust.

SPAM

Dada was an accident, just like Dad & spandex & probably Spam. Not super glue though, panic & a streak of death.

A battlefield of open wounds & fingers voided. I glued back
The knob you ripped off the machine. I imagine I can

Hear you groan at my latest delusional attempt at historic empathy
Inserting grace like a polka-dotted feather stuck out the wing

Of a responsible adult. The flash you are about to see
It is real, clicked in Cincinnati by someone named Lawrence Furlong.

The photograph contains a sandbox, a small child solving a problem
Probably wearing a braid, & yes, it is a math equation

But no solution need not be kneaded, the experience as matter.
A human, like a machine or a photograph, is a series

Of factors, moods, lines, quite frankly providing numbers & shades, often
Out of sorts. An adult labels moments, indications, disruptions with feelings

Like *I'm disappointed I can't go inside that fence*. Instead, life does this.

YOU WROTE TO INFORM

She is not yours no more, how her dad collapsed.
You wrote to inform she left you & today
You called to tell me her dad left this world, but
Only briefly, alive again in a bed
Piped like a machine in a Picabia
Painting. The snow here, it continues to melt.
Melting a form of being still, still being
Simultaneously, how stupid. You find
Some love to send your feeling, maybe a thing
Wrapped in a bow, a book or sticks of jerky.
You considered sending a goat to offer
As sacrifice when the time comes & to eat
Together when the time comes again. O me!
I've lost my head in the medical waste bin.

BE A SHAMAN

I.

My wife suggests I might
Be a shaman, though I am covered
In white baking flour at four a.m.
On a Tuesday in this grand field
Of America. Last night I did dream
Of severed limbs hidden in the young
Rows of corn planted this year
By whoever my grandfather hired.
I've been angry at him & thus prone
To stripping nude, caking my bloated
Belly in his mud, an exercise
That becomes exhausting, a fresh delusion
That leads me to climb to the roof.
The mud causes my hands to slip.
I spent all morning no more believing
Myself a shaman, or much of a husband
For that matter. Instead, I write two ideas
For movies she can expand & then offer scones.

II.

There is a man who feels destined to lead a group, what we'd call a cult, but he names simply a group, wasting much mental energy to distract himself from admitting to himself it is, in fact, a cult he wishes to lead. The thing is, he just doesn't have what it takes—the charisma, the subtle good looks, an IQ of exactly 104. The movie follows his journey, which turns out to be more of an anti-journey. Him dictating his doctrine that never gets its final period. Him proselytizing on the street, the unlucky days he so chooses—for example, the day of the release of the new iPhone, a terrible fog keeps most people off the streets & even when someone passes, he blends in with his off-gray robe. A bomb threat here, a near-plague there. It's actually the exact thing he's warning people about, but like I said, he just doesn't have what it takes to make them hear, let alone listen, to what he has to offer.

III.

There is a woman, who early in her life, say whatever is eight years younger than when the average young lady gets married the year this movie gets filmed, she gets married to her first boyfriend, probably an average-looking, average-intellect white guy named Tim. Tim, for the most part, is a great dude. He cleans the whole house every Tuesday, he plays baseball with her kid brother, he sings the cutest notes onto the foggy mirror in the bathroom after his shower, he volunteers & does not steal. Problem is, his occasional anger problem, bouts of psychosis, & tendency towards devastating mood swings reveal themselves to be the addends to the sum of bipolar disorder. Still, she just can't bear to leave him, so she starts a second family. New neurotypical husband, two kids, same ol' job, an off-blue house. She flourishes in all manners of life—professionally, getting asked to

be partner before she hits the fourth decade mark; personally, with a wide range of hilarious & caring friends; spiritually, guiding herself to a better understanding of her place in the world. Tim now lives in a cabin just outside of town & she visits every few days for lunch & even spends every other weekend there. We don't hear the lies she tells Tim, or the other husband, or the kids, because that would ruin what is otherwise a touching movie.

IV.

This is my recipe for whole-wheat raspberry scones.

It will make exactly nine scones.

First you do the whole preheat the oven (425 degrees)

& prepare the baking sheet (parchment paper) thing.

Next you whisk a cup of whole wheat flour

& a cup of the regular with a tablespoon of baking powder

& a quarter cup of sugar & a half teaspoon of salt.

Chop six tablespoons of butter into tiny pieces

& massage it into the flour mixture till it is coarse & mealy

Not much under the texture of an apple's bruise.

Chop a cup of fresh raspberries (or thawed frozen

If you live in a food desert like the failed cult leader)

& stir them with what you have so far.

Next add in three-fourth of a cup of ricotta cheese

(or cottage cheese if you're on a limited budget

Like Tim) & 1/3 cup of heavy cream.

Transfer the dough to a well-floured counter.

Sprinkle some flour on the top of the dough

& pat it into a 7-inch square about an inch thick.

A large knife may now be introduced

To cut the dough into nine even triangles.

Plop the pre-scones onto the baking sheet

I had you prepare at the beginning of this poem.

Bake the scones for about fifteen minutes.

You're looking for some lightly golden edges.

I SAID YES TO THE RISK

The canoe stood there, not yet carved from the tree.
I said yes to the risk. A young boy learned hearts
Live primarily in his skull. His aunt leapt
On the windshield of his other aunt's gold car.
Her hair, like spaghetti on a fork, twisted
The wiper blades. She screamed, *I'll pray for your soul.*
Who of us cares what time is on the clock?
He had a long-but-unfinished discussion—
If the word for throwing something was *chucking*
Or *chunking*, red delicious apples are for pies.
Not for lunch. The man, much older now, came in
A van to remove the see-saw, the merry-
Go-round. He claims he was the Wrangler Jeans model
Before Brett Favre. *I'm not done being a frog*
The frog thinks over there. *I'm not done being*
A dog, the dog thinks over there. Later, he
Told a story in first-person. It should have
Been told in third-person. In truth, he wasn't
Even there when the kid, holding the side
Mirror, skating on the ice, he fell. The back
Tire rolled over his leg, broken icicle.
The rooster in his mind says, *Little shits you*
Did your thing & then got what you had coming.
An image from his trip to Yakutsk, Russia
Where they arrange cold fish into nice bouquets.
I sit, a lunatic on my own mushy
Blanket, writing about a lunatic sitting
On a mushy blanket as the backyard thaws.

EIGHT YEARS AGO

Likely as it got dissolved.
Eight years ago, roots freshly cut, my next poem might have
Harnesses a decent amount
Of inward spiral, much like Kenneth Koch's "The Circus," mine

However harkening back
To my first poem of a rooster in the flower bed
Image obsession blossomed
Beyond its emotional baggage, stretching beyond such

Base lyrical tentacles.
That poem would share similarities with the essay
I told Andy I'm writing
Last month, following our nature hike with the birding king

One Victor Emanuel.
I promised myself I wouldn't touch my phone & forgot
A pen, so trusted my brain
Never the sturdy cup to catch, to capture, to contain

The facts fluttering below
His mustache like a hooded warbler in a cypress tree.
I cannot quite guarantee
This a bit of accuracy. Does he have a mustache?

Did we spot a warbler so
Particular? I do remember a single thought, *Can't*
Believe this is a relative
Of the pineapple, a quip quacked as Victor held the ball

Moss, cousin of the thick-skinned fruit.
I once thought, *I'm much like ball moss in your palm*, but I'm not
Sure the relevance these days.
Since then, I've eaten quail eggs & duck eggs, witnessed a baby

Doll foot gnarled by the charred mouth
Of a fellow grown man. Not me, now here in the middle
Of elsewhere. Since then, I wrote
The phrase *middle of nowhere* out of existence (come on!).

I refuse to say *love is*
In my cells, or my shadow is already disfigured,

Debunked. No, my next poem
Envisions in my lifetime, I'll behold a break-dancer

Head slide straight into a gold
Medal in the Olympics & yes, honestly, I'll cry.
It is what I do. I weep
When I watch what is truly good at impressive levels.

JACK RABBITS KICK UP

Six miles straight up, cirrocumulus clouds stretch like the dust
Jack rabbits kick up, scampering off towards whatever

Fate might befall them. Tossed & spit by the tires of a truck.
Tossed in chives & garlic & roasted on a spit. Tossed through

The air like the ball an only child slings towards the sky
Playing catch by himself & with himself. It is covered

In your spit. It was when I realized your hair doesn't grow
Just sits there like chickweed in the desert behind this shack

I quit hunting other animals, chewing flesh, bounding
With you right through the goat horns after some loose goat

With horns. I was squalling, a rock fell from my nose.

AN AWARENESS OF THE SELF AS THIS

The truth of self-consciousness, it is not
An awareness of the self as this
Single self, or any peculiarities summoned forth
By that orb falsely labeled as *you*
But rather it is the hard distinction
Of being aware of being thus noticed
By others as a you, living-breathing
Stripe of dream, capable of becoming covered
In hives, or polishing one's knives, sneaking
Some ice cream by the clock's glow.
When the tussled angels, the mortified martians
Report to their supreme leader, whom they
May or may not call god, what
Will they say of what was witnessed
Here on our patch of land? Woman
Reportedly flossing her bare feet, a kid
Appearing to be replaced by pigeons, man
Screaming in various phases--first giving curses
To an object he rammed his toes
Against, later he swung his arms wildly
Beneath a cascading waterfall, indoors, totally nude
Till finally nearly-nude in the snow
Head tilted back, shouting at the sky.
Two dogs this whole time chase burrowed
Mice beneath the ice, taking time to piss
On the Christmas tree stashed to the side.

RISING A SMIDGE

See, here it goes, entering then
Rising a smidge, turns on a dime.

A fragment of ash flashes by.
A sound, a smell, my damned tongue.

It sticks out for a taste, a speck.
They assure me this works wonders.

They tell me they guarantee joy.
I ask who is they & they do

Not say. The chimney sweep drone sings
Its striations. My chimney learns

A bit of self even itself
Forgot. My heart does a nervous

Flutter, skeptic in wolf's clothing.
I am no longer that kind of sheep.

O I DO CARE TO TRAMPLE GENTLY IN RETURN

A dove is stranded on the road towards Rome.
O I do care to trample gently in return!
In fretting, anxiety, I came to love the well-washed
Window. Do, do you find risk in my questions?

My secondary drug, I invent miserable reasons to call.
Persistence never soothes the mind, never stretches the illumination
Long enough to notice the chair has a spine
In it still. No more houses for the bad

Guys! Let them fucks live among the concerned
Teeth of the anchored village. Shame on the bums
Guffawing existence in the pain of y'all. Diverse swearing.
In the world, not so pure & in apology—

It is significant no one is innocent. Bye, Nancy.
Your lungs might obscure the heat in my vial
Of blood. An echo, firm & scandalizing, comes disappointingly
To drop down by my alternative garden—a farce.

An anchor guarantees death & no money—you say
Tata & with others fly beyond Rome.

FOUND YOURSELF BORN IN THE MIRROR OF YOUR MOTHER

You did not see him born because yet had you
Found yourself born in the mirror of your mother.
Like you & I, he had a mother, but other than
That he is nothing like me or what I imagine you

One day might be. He flails like a cure, one yet
To be thought through by scientists. He moves & bricks
Disconnect their mortar & shrubs turn purplish gold &
Alligators build pyramids, their teeth. Out of their minds

Most humans become artists, the type who learn
To wander the streets of Elgin, Texas asking
For a dollar to buy a piece of charcoal, a friend.

AROUND WORDS THIS WAY

It has always been enjoyable to toss
Around words this way, meaning over &
Over again slapped to whatever might stick.
Enjoyable, the word itself, is one, *unfortunate*
Another, often in tandem, often in competing
Force. The park shone lovely today, some
Ducks, their lacquered bodies of mucus, hope
& feathers, & their stuttering reflections all
Proof we are in a Mormon hologram
Which is to say it is enjoyable
To be here, though unfortunate to be
So bogged down by my particular illness
A particular form of a particular curse
Where my legs are rabbit legs
& my mouth once belonged to a wolf.
Speaking of cursing, I have been ill
As my father applies the term, meaning
Mad, for a decade now, frothing fuck-yous
From my wolfish grin ever since you
Let those men into our home &
They left raw chicken on the porcelain
Counter. Fuck you for getting me addicted
To Oreos. Fuck you for introducing me
To that internet psychic, he who loved
Me & then lost me in Bogotá
Among the black & white buildings. Fuck
You for ramming Frank out of existence
With your beach Jeep, the one you
Bought with my hard-earned plasma donation money.
Fuck you for that, too! I think
I have enough facts. Now I must
Go find some paper before this too
Leaves me as a hundred thirteen friends
Before & since have left me here.
It always gives me a feeling like
Death, but also a sensation like some
Bee in my belly, nude repossessed.

CRICKET NOISES IN THE BACKGROUND OF LIFE

It is something, something you must adjust to.
Cricket noises in the background of life.
Little chirps like scratches in the wood floor.
Dotting my phone calls, my morning cigarette.
The voice memos I record for my wife, six months gone.
I keep them to myself, a boy with a cricket in a jar.
He carries the jar around while the adults mingle in the yard.
I am so proud of these voice messages.
One small step in managing this blur brain.
Click record & let out the raw longing, cusped apologies, morsels of anger.
Cricket noises in the backdrop of life.
Except these crickets sound inside this house.
So loud & incredibly morose.

PRACTICING BEING ALONE

I have come untethered, am

Practicing being alone

I say in the parking lot

In a manner both alarmed

& unarmed. I am asking

For help, but the only friends

Near are a crinkled receipt

For tampons a boyfriend bought

For his girlfriend, an effort

To save their relationship

& a hat. *Not my damn hat*

I said to the cloud passing

Turning from a wildebeest

To a worn-out couch. *Story*

Of my life, I say to no

One, nickels in my pocket.

Life goes I suppose, I say.

The yellow lines agree, though

The handicap spot shut me

Out completely. A voice says

To bodyslam my uncle.

A vision projects my father

With hot grease all over

His face, his hands blanketing

The grease. Then I eat a slice

Of white bread, muttering, *I*

Am not a pigeon, between

Nibbles. These are not easy

Sentences to write, mostly

Because my hand is shaking.

My mind revs for relief

Of this isolation. I

Sing my sins into the tin

Can. Now it is the other

End's problem, whoever might
Still be listening to this.

FALL FOR IT

Someone left a trail of dinner rolls through the neighborhood, but I did not
Fall for it, did not waddle down
A dangerous alley, or through a door
Unlocked, hunting for more. Like cockroaches, I

Remain diseased, disordered, but it might be difficult to find a person to call
Me dumb. Anyhow, the cockroaches sing on
The ringtone that jangles when you call.
I do not answer & you leave

A message for me, to be returned at my earliest convenience, which is of
Course, that gap between our combusting
Love & boiling water for tonight's noodles.
Everyone is rising, just as one day

This heart will rise again, this time in the shape of a cat stereotypically
Stretching for daylight. No one can unring
The doorbell, can erase a haphazard voicemail—
Be it error, overt aggression, or once

Crucial to survival, but now, with the dust settled, seemingly melodramatic. Anyhow I knocked
The ice off your grave. You're welcome.
This janitor never missed a single day.

WE MUST FIRST DESCRIBE IT ACCURATELY

My mind is so loud, busy, full of life.
We must first describe it accurately.
Once the last frost recedes to wherever
Chill goes, come back, I need you. Now, watch me
React to magic. The importance of
Angles, the brass power of influence.
I keep telling myself if I describe
Accurately a magic trick—maybe
To the point where she joins me in weeping—
My wife will return, no questions queried.
Maybe the one where David Blaine tosses
The deck towards the window & the card
Previously chosen by the person
It sticks to the inside of the glass.
I can't explain it, but can describe it.
Maybe I should circle back to each place
We ever lived & tell the new tenants
All they missed there, both good & bad, some her
Perspective & some mine. Here is where I
Jammed a fist in the wall. Here is where we
Would put the tree at Christmas. Here is how
We would host: me in one room telling jokes
Her in the next folding empanadas
With the best of them. Here, here, here, here. Please
Come back here. Let us call a do-over.
I know what you keep asking yourself, *Who*
Can write poems at a time like this? We
Spent the last six years hiding knives from one
Another. Here is the spot she stood when
She found all the knives of the house in her
Backpack, I, zonked out of my mind, but knew
Enough to hide them where she would find them.

THE SIZE OF COYOTES

Before you were born, dragonflies are
The size of coyotes. They tangled
In the wild locks of your mother, curls
You have inherited. Face-to-face
You had to come with the razor-blade
Fact you are a minor character
In your own life, so youthful, hidden
In the shadow of this live oak tree.
Time discovers what one must know.
No one pulls a lever behind some
Curtain. Today I galloped behind
A coyote & stopped only when
I reached barbed wire & I returned
Ideas bouncing right off myself.
It's true—no one has complete control
Of what unfurls from their skin, the head.
Therefore, it is an illusion.
You once asked, *Do you know the new look
I'm after?* I did, but I told you
No. I did not want another thought.
Better thought: I want the coyote
To return, slay me, devour me
Till ants come, take the body over.

TUSSLE

Saved this point for our next theological
Tussle. Right around the corner is the afterlife
You so desperately anticipate, composed of the same
Goo as the hope I do hanker, clawing I
Did, straight out of Texas. It got so bad, anytime
I found a dead insect I had to bury it, the anthem
We had to sing. Hank arrived late for the burials
So I came late, too. It turns out, he showed late
Because I kept arriving late, opting himself for an eight
Extra minutes delicately holding his
Daughter, avoiding my assumptive void. These days, I
Startle at the devil inside, wearing fake horns, some tassels.

INTO THE CREASE OF ONE DAY

The cedar stumps trip me. I stumble
Into the crease of one day
Transforms into the next. Wakefulness.

It shines a particular light on
This night sacrament, insects
Sawing their microscopic boards, streaks

Across the sky widening like hips.
Never been here & never
Been here with another till right now.

At the top, I flap dull wings, a plane
Never to fly. The windmill
Canks its magnetic haw, a hoofbeat

In the mud. I ponder in circles.
I catch a glimpse of an owl.
I once saw you hoist a log over

Your head, heavier than it appeared.
The stumps trip me. I stumble.

EXTRA STRESS ON A STRUCTURE NOT UP TO CODE TO BEGIN WITH

March turned to April & my wife up & left me.
Extra stress on a structure not up to code to begin with.

On the worst days after she thin-aired, them ones on the plum edge
Of offing myself, instead I snatched fireflies

In jars, baby food jars, & I tossed them jars into the sky.
Sunset already settled in here / to see what

Might stick. Nothing. Like the kittens, I found them jars in the back
Closet that day. Fearing the worst of myself, I

Goodbye'ed the kittens at the mall, not comfortable to tumble
Into the afterlife knowing I abandoned

The kittens how she abandoned me with piles of unfinished
Quilts, crumbs to munch, goddamn kittens. Those small fire

Engines in the night. None of us predicted the mall would catch
Fire. The kittens' sirens let me know their return

Comes imminently, making their path back to this dusty farm.

ETCHED BY THE STREET LIGHTS

The fire truck glides over the holes
Etched by the street lights, the book I keep
Promising to read. I did not think
It possible, but I love peppers.

I once strolled ditches along my county
Road, but now I gallop patch of grass
To patch of grass. Like a parent, the
Moon returns each night, smells of melon

& hunts wildly for the volume
Button. I want to smash the street lights.
I want to shut my eyes so tight I
Can hear tonight's song of beeps better.

Someone's keys in the ignition, door
Wide open, old man perfects his text
With the keypad sound on, & the dog
Shits catty-corner on the grass patch.

The fire truck a mile away now
But I can still hear its latest cry
For us, *get the fuck out the way*. More
Important things in life than you, me.

DELIGHT IN BLATHERING TO HIMSELF AS HE BATHED

He is the kind of feller could drop an anchor with an amen, took
Delight in blathering to himself as he bathed

In the light of solitude. No one to counsel, the years to coin
He concentrates on launching new phrases, like detrimental decade

& elementary excuses. What else but to be enchanted
By the fragrance he could taste with his own fangs

Like a ghoul that still called its grandmother.
When we met, it was a hilarious hello, him standing

There in indigo trousers, indifferent to the pining
Jammed down our throats, trading of bodily juices, old-timey jokes.

Even without that, his was the kingdom of kindness
Where loyalty sustained the pleasure of lollipops.

Never been one for musicals or manicures.
Nope, but my next nuptials will include both singing

& treat-yourself glow, salute to my origins, operatic innovations.
Once I was nothing, a paperweight, but now have principles.

Once I was radioactive, but now, like you, face ridicule
For my touchy relationship to sanity, vague beliefs in saucers.

My oddity becomes tedious, tendril wrapped too tight
Around the bone. The universe handed me many uncles

They of the love of vacation, skeptical of variance.
I, on the other hand, welcome weakness, disengage

The hectic xylophone upstairs. His name is Xander.
We means y'all, a chance to yank division by the nuts

Zipper it up, & zap till we're all behaving better.

WALNUT OF THE METAPHORIC VARIETY

My therapist didn't show today, another
Walnut of the metaphoric variety.
Tough to crack, even tougher to locate. I'm left
To consult a poet, a poet once revered
For her observation, grasshoppers have huge
Eyes, but if you really slice it open, my eye
It could contain many grasshopper eyes in one
Engulfing gape. No one would dare call my eye huge
Ginormous, or large. My head, on the other hand
Many people have it called it huge. Those people
They might not be poets, but those people are right.
You, houses that don't get power-washed before sold.
I see you, I'm the same way, accepting this is
What I am—dirty, grass-stained, coated in a fine
Layer of mildew or mold. Instead, I wander
Past the For-Sale signs & the Vote-For-Me signs, the line
To cast my vote. I expected to stand many
Hours, read a book about bullshit, to hum on
Occasion. Instead, my old friend arrived minutes
Later & I let eight people ahead of me
So I might stand next to my old friend. Yes, I know
He might vote for my terror, against my other
Friends. He, himself, is a walnut, too, scraping right
Against the bottom of a shoe, a branch fell, too.

THE OTHER VARIANTS

It is how it is when it is not
The other variants, either unhemmed

& tattered like an old pillowcase
In the wind, or a turtle shell turned in

On itself. Why I tie my shoes
So carefully, why I speak of ethics

& the steps required to repaint these
Old cabinets so intentionally.

I double-check, triple-check stovetops
Back pockets, feelings that burble up so

Mindfully because elsewhere I am
Incapable & then the thrust is woe.

A calamity! Again! I am
Not mocking excuses, but offering

A context for a wider view, like
Binoculars to the bird with nothing

Like intention of touching the bird.
Often, it is hard to be forgetting

Whether I'm happy or overcome
Again with mania, sad or slipping

Into the lagoon of depression.
In these moments when the board is balanced

On the sawhorses, but before the blade
Goes in, I must harness the sharp talents

Of my strangest desires, must mime
The unglamorous, undefended quirks

I must not panic if at times it jerks.

THIS ONE

I once dreamt to live seven-hundred fifty-three lives inside
This one, but now hope

To draw this single out for some sixty odd years, a handprint
Of filth swiped across the white sheets of time.

None more. What would you declare the number one prerequisite
To be a person?

We can't certainly say it is being good or ten toes having.
Some form of stretching as a preference

Or talking good, or holds another's head. A head is alive!
Aha! There mine goes

& now I move on a little lighter. Like the fire burning
Outside this tent, I am so stoked to be

Alive. Energy translates beyond my palms & into this
Fire wood that traveled

Across many decades to reach us, but also to make me
Smoky & stinking, freaking glowing, bub.

TO SOLVE THE RUBIK'S CUBE

My ancestors turned entire lifetimes into trying
To solve the Rubik's Cube. One hand decides to lean
One way, the other flounders unconditionally.
I have seen the meme, the young boy holding the solved
Puzzle, but never for a second could I juggle
The possibility that he completed the challenge.

If not us, then how? My extreme zest for liberty
Often interferes with my fluctuating reach
Of authority, like swerving on the highway
Does not look good on a man of my stature, be it
The six weeks when I was the future mayor of this
Town, or the summer I spent homeless on its streets.

I'm merely a servant to my mind frame, I'm afraid.
My lips keep quivering for another bite of
That sweetness, the one you offered in the blue house
Some years ago & told me never speak of again.
O the calories I've burned fainting to forget
You. O the vertical dimensions I've mounted.

A feller like me, less of a man & more of
A depressed goat, believes as much as he can believe
While you hold your breath. Then he returns to obeying
The wishes of what cycles through his system, brain
Mostly. Truth is, I am fine, if fine is measured
In the amount of despair I can bear in a day.

WHAT IS YOUR HARD LIMIT ON THE HUMAN CONDITION

Now I am dangerous, realize so, & the problem is how to manage it, in the face of such knowledge.

What is your hard limit on the human condition?

It is a story of the blind spots in the recording device dissolved, hardware with software, salt into water, particularly the weight of stress on the brain.

It makes not ripples, but dents; the ripples come in the core of us; in it, I cannot talk in a civil way, cannot pander with the best of them, wander with the rest; also, the world is a problematic space.

Still wrestling with the old notion that there has to be some kind of demon, devil within; or, inflated reason in an unfair time, a so-called cognition control error; a notion that at eight o'clock at night I can't control myself; a thought my biology works differently.

The one that's doing the living is called the Horsehead self; the one that's doing the giving has no name for a sec; historically, we have been lucky in that the destructive capabilities have been heavy to wield; on occasion is enough to forever-fracture, though.

Averages don't answer the question, more is needed in tow; 50% of what I am doing, divides itself into thirds; oh & the sheer number of factors influencing my perspective, my perception.

I cannot rely on getting lucky forever; cannot merely hang around for the prospect; cannot gamble away my headstart, possibility, urge; cannot undermine the mind tucked under my arm; cannot escape square death.

Clearing the space, it is not a philosophy, or an ethics, as selecting to is.

The foundations of dealing with reality—doubt, awareness, juice, poignancy—get lost & found, exhaustion in the fold, which is an odd perk; much like you, I don't believe there is a shred of deniability of guilt, no comma between.

My adaptive delusional symptoms, an essence to deny my mortality, this is consciousness on a time table; slim chance I will make it, a breathlessness into final peace.

MOUSE IN A DICKENS NOVEL

Today is quiet like a tit-
Mouse in a Dickens novel, extending
Itself for a piece of bread.
To be or not to be
Disintegrating in the mouth of such
A great creature. I am great
But there are many things greater
Than me. An exclamation point, pint
Of Kentucky. Comedy, it does exist.
Medicine does exist. What it is
To perform whatever task one does
To occupy oneself in the desert.
In the eyes of some god
Carved into the belly of some
Broke-down car, like a balloon
Some hand drew a smiley face
Across, tender enough to not pop
But wild enough to be found
Interesting. Fuck your city. I'm going
Where the goats outnumber the humans.
The plants hope in stark colors.

GELATINOUS GOO

Once I believed I was mostly
Gelatinous goo, then it became clear
How my body is a hillside
Dynamited again & again to let

People through, in. I make room.
Then the people leave for new
Acreage, safer climate, fresh passion, but
The room still there, hill changed.

A treasure chest at the bottom
Of my dentist's aquarium, I spew
My weird views on friendship, multiple
Realities. Is there such a thing

As unreality? I am pretty sure
The world has always been ending.
We just started to pay attention.
It is why I like yelling

At animals, give unto them what
Is ours, our problems & hypocrisies, grievances
& guilt. Just by the sound
Of my voice, my dog bargains something

Is broken. In fact, I can
Hear myself pulling apart at night,
Ligaments from limbs, knobs from joints.
I'm aging like a fine vine.

Yet why do I feel obligated
To a world I didn't choose
To join? A hatchet enters stage
Left, making this all null, void.

IS DEATH THE ONLY REASON

I keep on living.
Is death the only reason?
Smorgasbord of assumptions & tactile encumbrance.
Tapestry for the not-forgotten, what is left behind.
Jean shorts quite shortened.
Bloody towel stubbed into the mouse hole.
Piece of sun I stripped from the sky.
Eros means love.
What focus it takes to make something, anything.
The ruckus I create.
Where there is love, there was an idea, ideation upon ideation.
Not of suicide but of going back before the time.
If the blood bleeds through a poem, it finds no true sincerity.
Every holler echoes.
No need to witness loss of faculty or fecundity.
It is easier the way you've chosen to do it.
Pretend me a man of rubber & you a great cinematographer.
Bark cues to the crew of your most bitter dreams.

THE DUST RELEASES THE BLINDS

Brimful of sizzle, you turn awake.
The dust releases the blinds, as do I.
My panic might never again, the tick quenched quickly.
Like my farming urges, the quarters dance in paper cups.
On my lone rubber band, I sob a sad song.
Too soon to twirl, through with much enjambment.
Beyond *mistaken I must be*, like the window
A bird blindsides, believing a beyond.
When dew forgot as water, the lost scientist evaporates.
Like loose pills for the dog, like a heap of heads.
Hummingbirds at my neck, the afterlife waiting.

MY DOOR LAST NIGHT

The blue swan of misery came to
My door last night, less wanting hand-outs
& more hunting the spark of flame
To begin its dinner ritual, evening eat.

I've been telling you for years that
I am not one for mornings, that
Ancient hole where the residue of dreams
& the blinding dust of mourn mingle.

I've been listening to you ramble on
For years, what works for you, glitches
Un-glitched when you reach or guzzle quickly
The water on the counter, hope fizzing.

The blue swan of misery stood in
My doorway last night, its velvet tongue flicking
At the corners of its dry mouth.
A match, nothing to strike it against.

HOW IT FELT TO BE ALIVE

Pearly gatekeeper asked me
How it felt to be alive.

Each day, I confronted the real
Possibility my kid

Becomes a stand-up, poet
Or blogger. Blabbered sorry

When my tossed-out Christmas tree
It blew into a yard not

My own, across a public
Path, way down to the nearest

Mall yet to close. Mid-level
White male comedic actor

In the early 2000's
& I never appeared in

A darn episode of *That*
70's Show, thus myself

Became mighty disappointed
In myself. Also I did

Become terribly depressed
But for totally different

Reasons. I know what you are
Thinking: *Surely he'll never*

Come back for his gold(ish) watch
& in some significant

Way, I already have, thief.

YOU DIED

The moment the world was learning
You died, I was on my knees, exorcizing
Vomit across what I thought was
The sea, or perhaps a blue dog, strange mammoth.

Well, actually, a toilet.
My stinky joy blown away, substituted
Revisited banana, sad
Epiphany (for elsewhere). My eyes

Like ice on the windshield morning
I first read a poem of yours. I cannot
Remember which one. A poem
Comes forth with any number of titles, three

Thousand twenty-seven at least.
How to continue now in this here flow chart
For the still living, click-clacking
Away on this instruction manual, my own

Attempt at wakefulness, fuck's sake.
This has to stop—dying, switch, cycle, swallowed
Tooth. This poem-in-response block.
This swarm of chickens slowly peck at my head.

Whole feathered cluck. That, the last noise
Before my own heavy turquoise lid. Plain drain
Plumber's crown. Heartache's great flush. Clack.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to all my friends & family for the visits, phone calls, & correspondences, for making sure I stayed alive to finish this manuscript (including, but certainly not limited to): Zach, Sadie, & the Hunter boys; Josh, Kaleigh, & Violet Lee; Jess Counsell & her crew; Jason Arnold, Stef Pape, & the Arnold boys; Tracer Towner & family; Clark Moser; Darrin Eaton; Marie Ponce-DeLeon; Paz Pardo, Enrique Lozano, & Elias; Johnna Henry; Cody VanBuskirk; Larry Nutt; Dan Kelich; the Murray family; Jamie Crawford; Jesse Bearden; Matt Spencer; Judd Faris; Tim Durr; Eric Mattson; Hannah Margolin; Lacie Patterson; Heather Collier; Eric Clow; Laurie Saurborn; Brendan McLean; Melodi & Marie Smith; Teri Tan; Lynn Cowles; Morgan Jackman & family; the Tyner & Gobble families.

Thank you to the artists that kept me churning during this process / processing: State Champion; Dean Young; Mary Ruefle; Landon Caldwell; Anthony Ray Wright; Sarah Shook & the Disarmers; Pete Holmes; C.D. Wright; the Felice Brothers; Maria Bamford; Abraham Smith; Ada Limón; Francis Picabia; Bill Burr; Will Alexander; Ross Gay; D.A. Powell; Phoebe Bridgers; David Berman; In The Face Of War; David Blaine; David Bazan; the creators of *King of the Hill*; Mei-Mei Berssenbrugge; Lucie Brock-Broido; John Ashbery, Kenneth Koch, & Frank O'Hara.

Thanks to the folks who gave me places to go to be both myself & someone else: the Elwood Disc Golf Enthusiasts; the Anderson Disc Golf Club; Power Barn; Sam Harris & the Waking Up app; all the guests & friends of the FUTURE BARN podcast; Bill Simmons & The Ringer network; & the Windmill Tavern.

Thanks to any mental health professional that has held my wobbly head, both figuratively & literally, over these past decade, especially Ruby Jo Walker.

Thank you to my ancestors & my teachers for the guidance & the gifts, including most recently, Fred Tyner & Tony Gobble, & most historically-significant, JoAnn Tyner & Ricky Gobble.

Thank you to the most supportive & patient parents around, Jeff & Tamie Gobble, for accepting all my parts.

Thank you to the light that's gone away, Diana Lynn Small, for the years of loving & the lessons of leaving.

Thank you to the light that always stays, Ginny Bug, for being a badass dog.