



The D Poems

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Triggerfish

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The D Poems

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For Mickie

D1

A click and its likeness
can't change, curled
the way rain yellows
though you hold on
almost make out the grin
that could be yours

– it's been years, minutes
and even with your arms apart
you have forgotten the smell
the fleece-lined gloves
filled with dry leaves
half paper, half iron
half pinned to this snapshot
still bleeding from a thumbtack
and your shoulders

– you don't recognize the hand
left holding up the sky
to look for the other
bringing it a morning
ripped from wings and mountainside
that can't close or open
or dry :the rust
still waving, gutting the cheeks
whatever day it was.

D2

You spoonfeed the dead
half deaf, half lame, half
with rocks to defend yourself

though you wipe her lips
on the one dark lapel
cut adrift, leaning against

the other the way each mourner
will rest and for a while
try to remember her name

guess at it stone by stone
with the water circling overhead
till her mouth opens wide

– you throw coals into her throat
and from the snipped lapel
stuffed with sea-winter, cliffs

spoon by spoon the secret pact
where the last to survive
keeps something on foot still singing

something she can use – a comb
a bracelet, an old love song
louder! shoes, a small suitcase.

D3

Embedded and this statue
still tightening its grip
tries to revive the horse
expects its crumbling reins
to smell from leather
and crowding – you squint

the way the general
looks for a small thing
encased in a season
exactly where he left it

waits in the rain
for your black umbrella to open
make room for you
and under the darkness
hold the Earth steady

while his horse works its way
closer to this rain still wet
from the climbing turn
into ice and longing, lost

– its front hooves mid-air
shaking the stone loose
for its likeness even in moonlight
almost breathing, already
side by side that could go on
if it had to.

D4

From that first wave, ruined
wobbling on its back half weeds
half bottomsong, tormented the way clouds

still fill with seawater then veer
into twilight – it took the darkness
though you bend best you can

sifting the damp sand
as if you forgot something
– in the dark it's hard to keep your hands

from running aground, stranded
palms up, one to test for rain
the other for picking up small stones

already soft, almost empty
and between your lips
overtaking the dry endless cry

on its climb toward kisses and pieces
– one hand kept empty to cradle your mouth
the other drifting into lullaby.

D5

You fold one hand as if the wall
left without you, is crumbling
and this love note
beginning to yellow the way flowers
lead back the dead, the lips, a mouth

– between these bricks and morning
one hand reaches down
loosening another stone all night carried
from the skyline and back

as if it were used to moonlight, has trapped
a summer evening, a heaviness, the moss
almost familiar, the breasts, the cold.

D6

Once into its slow climbing turn
you lick the thermometer bare
see your reflection half sunlight

half leaning over – to drain
you roll on your side while the nurse
listens with her soft hand

for clouds, sifts your cheek for its shade
and you make your descent
mouth open from rust and glass

– you bite your tongue so the canopy
stays red from the stench, stunned
by the flash and thunder though the nurse

won't hear the raindrops
breaking open on your forehead, the sweat
that won't let you cool or land.

D7

You use this patch as if one eye
rants in the dark, could hear
and over some moonlit stream
stares at that place in the story
where the ogre, once upon a time
was a child younger than you
though one page will always turn back
by itself, cackling, wrinkled
useless – a little darkness helps

pulled close so you can find the thud
every cover makes when a book
shuts down and the sea
takes water from everywhere
– for a split second
you see half the monster
and when it rains, the other.

D8

Its back teeth worn down
on bones and bowels, not sure
how these graves became so daring
dragging stone by stone till far off
another mountainside is buried
still clinging to the grass

– this footbridge long ago lost
its confidence, propped sideways
the way streams will empty
and even the stones can't be saved
though its arch might still
take the chance, tiptoe across
so its shadow dangles
over the hole in your chest

– pall-bearers still use this path
and even on the way back
searching for a place to open
let loose from the dried grass
its dark mouth and whispering.

D9

And this gravestone whose fall sideways
became the first evening :the moon
still carries off each hillside
for more light and lasting water
and every night is nourished
on drift and losing consciousness

– you try to lift the stone
still dark and never enough rain
though this churchyard was gutted
for ballast and paths
trying to uproot each other, be born

as if this moon once was always full
would circle the sun like a god
to ease it, whisper drink
and your throat clasped and weightless.

D10

It's not easy for charcoal
– you wait for your birthday
where speed is always painful

let the grill lay low
till the air fits – this day
must have been much wider

separate from wood, left over
when some axe blew apart
and branches headlong, torn out

burning to the ground
– they don't see in the dark anymore
can remember only its color

though the flames will never again
come back, just the smoldering
to torment your eyes and morning

– you slow this wreckage the way all lids
are dropped face down, change direction
covered with smoke, with days and holding on.

D11

Lifted too close this leaf
fastens on your sleeve and dries
– it must know why one ear
hears sooner than the other
forces you to turn and climb
till there's nothing left
to lose, the sun
worthless, the air
limping, poisonous

– you hold in your arm
what every tree finds too heavy
throws out and even in winter
you pick up from there
crumple your fingers till their bones
want to live at the bottom
but only one recognizes oak
from when the moon fills up the sea
drop by drop and your knuckles
pounding against each other.

D12

Her ankle needs adjustments, puddles
for runoff :tectonic coasts
and one shove more

– though the splash is almost invisible
already summer the way each wave

migrates mile after mile and back
– with just a leg she detonates the place
for membranes and her reflection

till it erupts again, tilts the sun
sideways and around her glistening heel
just below the surface where the sky

somersaults from joy and expectation
as if every rock that never made shore
could be lifted in her arms

already singing again and her stride
touching down on mountain streams
– only water can understand this

broken in pieces :the path
for continents, for step by step
falling through the Earth.

D13

You lean against the way each evening
fills this sink waist-deep
though the dirt smells from seaweed

and graveyard marble -the splash
worn down, one faucet abandoned
the other gathers branches

from just stone and rainfall
– by morning these leaves
will lift a hand to your face

– you drain the weatherbeaten
the mouthfuls and slowly the mud
caresses your throat -you go

shaved and the gravel path
sticks to your skin, flowing
half shovel, half trembling.

D14

Its root right from the start
unsure, poking side to side
the way a calf will nudge
and the thick milk underneath
half summer sky
half a little at a time
though it's not raining

– you build the swing
float an old clothesline
knotted as if this branch
would forget leaf after leaf
its first Spring then another
scattered in all directions

– you bunch from in back
push so the flow when it comes
is still warm, already breathing
– your knuckles ache
– it's been a long time.

This rope depends on straw
and drying, holding on tight
to the dark breasts
hidden in the light between
your fingers wobbling across
the dead grass and continent

– it happens! your hands slow
stumble to a stop
and under the leaves
falling painlessly, waiting for snow.

D15

You dead must think this acorn
will collect you in a circle
the way some cloud
once collided with the Earth
– it's still raining :the pieces
trying to finish it off

– you like to hear the story
that has no place else to go
will bring you to the surface
though this hillside is still battered
by stones and you have to count out loud
on your fingers the evenings
the drop by drop till all that's left
is the sun – you don't have to ask
how it happened.

You listen just to keep warm
and each morning you hear
the same darkness, are sure the sun too
has cooled, that a single tree
rebuilds this cemetery
carries the gene for water
brings back the child
who took its first breath from water
where there was nothing

though there are voices that never dry
that want only each other, seated
around a small fire, shielded
from the wind by stones

– you dead want the Earth
to yourselves, blown out the sky
falling in one solid piece :a thunderclap
half marble, half for leverage
moving you closer, making room
drifting, staring, cold.

D16

Or the amazing rollover :your voice
alert, picking up speed
suddenly quits midair, overheats
on some word still in formation, stalls

– you lose the sound
look for the missing lines
though the deaf
have seen it all before

– you never learn! meddle
though the pages regroup in your throat
and their wingspread rusting shut
– you choke! it's that simple

– word on word so low to the ground
they can't be read out loud
break apart the way birds
are pierced by memory and feathers

– it was that gesture! one hand
fluttering and with the other
grasps for air and the pieces
hopelessly dragged to be said.

D17

Her death was reported for hours
on the weather channel
though it's not raining and you walk
slowly past the forecaster
who can't see you off some coast
the way a kitten just born
knows how to bathe itself
already curled over a saucer
filled with its mother and fur

– over the screen another storm
is forming, the clouds
come to an end, worn out
falling into the set as bedrock
never sure power will be restored
begin again as water
that will not leave the sea – she died

while you were petting the waves
still on the glass canopy
warming it, walking in front
letting it wash over your lips
so nothing can be said
that is not rain – her death

was on a map where a face
should be though no one
except the darkness that always comes
asked or held her close.

D18

This curtain is used to the cold
though the footlights are already dim
and gravity too has been squandered

emptied and from the pit
that sudden tap – for a split-second
you snow, hovering weightless

the way planets began in rows
inches apart from the darkness
– it happens so quick

each seat by seat as if
some ancient strand
tightened to become birds again

– it's no accident everyone here
claps, breathes without being told to
or reminded how one hand

kept its rare pinfeathers
and for the other
that first frost, apart.

D19

Face up and the urn
watches how this staircase
changes shape so the dead

can see and though its stone
is stained a green
nothing holds together

except the dirt
cupped in your hand
half open, half the echo

when one stream lets go
is dragged beside the other
– you don't climb the slabs

recast as an old millstone
circling overhead, holding off
the rot, the leaks lying in wait.

D20

Without a ripple this jetty
full steam and though whales
will clear their throat
the gull can't hear it's next
struts on bedrock that already
twice a day surfaces
spits out the cooling skim
from molten iron and salt

– you dive into these rocks
for more light, more lift
and your feathers struggling
with that first shriek
that lasts forever in your sides

– for a split second
you build a nest
as if seaweed never dries

– the stench from open wounds
is nothing, claws and now a beak
no hands, nothing

– only your arms know the plunge
from a soft, warm face
into her eyes and terrifying love
washed ashore, wait

wave after wave, expect
that sobbing tilt the Earth
never forgot – by instinct

you hollow out this rock
into its painful seasons
face the same direction and fly.

D21

This shallow dish dead center
though its glass is commonplace
shimmering into mist

– it's not the usual birth
or that fragrance still moist
from the womb, reaching out

to be born in the open
– you cool this tea
the way every breath

divides in half then half again
and again till all that's left
is snow – what you drink

already has your eyes, your lips
and between your hands
its scent ices over where once

there was nothing – side to side
you darken this water as if the moon
still rocks the Earth asleep

– you sip this darkness
let it stain your voice
your whispers frozen to the bottom.

D22

You climb and these steps spread out
in those rings trees still carry
under their wings

– you collect height
and at night two at a time
though the steps are chipped
the inscriptions worn away
staring off to the side

– they will be first
spruced back to life
and at the top you move the sun back
– crosswinds can't be trusted
always on the run, raging inside
close to your throat

– you carry up the dust
the Earth turned away, step by step
this wall all there is to lead you safely
against her eyes already hollowed out
as if in all this stone
there's no place to lie down
no room for your hand
that suddenly will open
and over your lips the stars
breathing down, count for nothing.

D23

On a pedestal yet, naked
though it's the light from stars
lifted shoulder to shoulder

– you sift this snow
as if a lone flake was imbedded
trapped in the shallow breath

when her heart shut down
– path by path
you wear the sharp gloves

every mourner fills with stones
carves from the Earth
another marker, the kind you roll

over and over your lips
so nothing escapes the bitter snow
to open or answer or wait.

D24

This spider has it made
settles in the way each nightfall
tightens around the sun

then eats it dry
though these branches
are not that organized, their leaves

escape beside evenings
darkened with graveyard marble
already moonlight and no turning back

– you bring it a small blossom
half loneliness, half stone
to breathe for you

lowered into this web
broken open as if its roots
could reach out, tighter and tighter

swallow the Earth whole
and along each path sift
for this stone no longer struggling.

D25

Even the sky gets old
bent over, tries to hear
and what's left has trouble breathing

creaks and this weather vane
half fish, half by heart
turns its roof upstream

is breaking apart from age
and that dried in the bone
death march – you never forget

where each star falls
exhausted, the step by step
leading to a tired woman

and the room whose door
becomes impaled on the warm bed
when you enter.

D26

Struck from behind and the Earth
as if you could get away with it
– in the dark this yard

half slush, half mist, thickening
not yet another moon
though the dirt you skimmed off

has lost its hold, lifts
and from the shadow it drained
to make a second sky

only you don't have an alibi
– you were there – on that night
– beside this stone – plead loneliness

throw both hands into the air
– you've got the chance, now! dig
faster, this stone, another

the way each mountain range
can recognize itself in the marsh
in the smoking grass and river beds

– plead emptiness, say
you were building a dam, say
guilty! and fold your arms.

D27

The glaze from your stone
shelters this sink, carved
by its constant drip

for shoreline and more foam
– twice every day
I shave to make room

though my beard
never has a chance
trembling in graveyard grass

– I begin each morning
then again by going home
to mow, barely holding on

though each cheek
half blood, half
wandering alone

weighs almost nothing
except for the splash
that clings to your name.

D28

Even the dying wince, their stench
makes you gag – you can't ask
must rely on their skin
and its yellowing glaze
with just enough sunlight left
for directions back

– they languish at night
looking for what must be
those tiny rocks mourners leave
as if the dead could still
find refuge in a few simple words

placed near – the dying need this doubt
to go further, not sure why
their eyes once had such power
and now can't open to demand

where to make a boundary line
that's safe once inside
with all those stars, far off
not yet arrived
as still warm dirt and mornings.

D29

It's easy once a mourner leaves
and the echo pinpoints where in the ground
is the sound when the sun
first rubbed against this unmovable dark

– you dead learn early, the dirt
not yet grass and your mouth
once rain is again a mouth
as if there's some air left in water

nourished by pebbles
and between your lips
the grass steadies this headstone
takes a fix on where you are
and the constant harvest.

D30

And though it has no eyes
It thrives inside my shadow
– an invisible full-time mourner

step by step in the lining
– that's the deal, it eats
and I am calmed, my coat

kept warm by a parasite
fed on slow climbing turns and marble
– you can't hear its footsteps

flocking overhead the way stars
are huddled and the overwhelming cold
takes root in these gravestones

shoulder to shoulder
– it's easy to get lost
going down alone

while this microscopic worm
clings by the mouthful
as if it were saying the words.

D31

Attack and this hillside
shows its teeth :each stone
drips with saliva

and even the glaze
can't tell the difference
– you dig till the sun

enters at last
staggering the way each evening
is burned to the ground

laid bare in the smoke
all stones smell when struck
one against the other

and the dirt dragged away
still struggling
– you only want to share

though your hands won't dry
and each year less room
– you dig as if each hole

is filled with shoreline
could be held back
rebuilt from waves

from valleys and mountain streams
that whiten these stones
with cheeks and emptiness.

D32

And though your shadow just by cooling down
dries the way leaves bring back the dead
with not even a footpath
the snow can hold on to – cold

is how galaxies are held in
huddle weightless in the window
closest to the street, empty from the bottom
then wander off in the dark

flecked with gold :a star and its mother
still calling to the others from a window
and what sounds like gunfire
is just more snow throwing out its light

for the circling approach that guides
her shadow safely to the ground
the just above the branches
step by step torn open by their leaves
and on their back the pieces.

D33

Bent and yet this nail
follows single file, slowly at first
breathing its way back

pulling the well closer – you lean over
as if one arch calms all the others
and between your jaws another nail

dangling :a lone death counted in the millions
so it will mean nothing and the spared hole
left empty for company, gathers around

where your lips must be, kept open
till the hammer brings water again
circling down and this floor takes in

the ice from some monstrous pile
already elbows, knees :rivers
unraveling to chase your hand away.

D34

As if risk was still involved the group
doesn't move, struck head on
though the flash has too much sun in it
– the class wants the yearbook to command
flame with that relentless sound
only a chorus can ignite :a single voice
caressed by others and you almost touch
the face that once was yours, half
at a stand-still, half telling you directions
– its eyes left open the way every grave
puts together those small stones
left alongside :flawless voices
– a cleared mountain pass
letting you through where the Earth
is almost nothing in itself.

D35

Forget the instructions, the walls
should be painted first
pulled upward so the ceiling

curves and the gloss
half white, half emptiness
– you don't see yourself yet

or how you grip the brush
with just one hand, the other
slack till a slow climbing turn

waits to be born, grasping for air
– trust as if the corners

were already hollowed out
and the room kept not yet dry
grown safe with purpose and cradle snow.

D36

Still warm and the paint
darkening the way all walls
grieve – in just an hour

another coat though the floor
will cool first
lose its hold and the ground

– you're careful not to touch
where the corpse is listening
comforted with skin and bones

and gloss – over and over
that sing-along-song
where no one weeps

or remembers the words
and you let the roller drip
kept silent for so long.

D37

You make the grain stronger, add
and across the varnish the way rust
brings out the wagons

lets the nails know what's what
– you coat the side door
though its breeze left years ago

half wings, half in the distance
while the sky watches horrified
when a house opens from the middle

and overhead the rain on course
– you enter the horizon
through a skylight, closer

to hammers and the evenings
– load the only moving part
with helmets, breastplates, make it

glow and under this boneweary door
the no screech spreading across
your mouth and the threshold.

D38

Nothing, your mouth still damp
– you swallow and the sky
half voiceless, half shoreline

though one moon is just above the water
the other falling through your throat
draining from your cheek the no cheek

kept moist in the Earth
once nothing but water – still cold
and under your tongue its shadow

reeking from ballast and side to side
the way one sun dries in the open
the other already losing its hold

on this mist melting the salt
that's left on your arms, on your mouth
– Esther, these tiny stones

don't splash anymore, the seas
die out, howling in pain
while the shores alongside

are too far away
and nothing leaves with you
– you think it's footsteps, Esther

as if you still remember
their sound, being taken away
by a rain that never returned.

D39

Held taut and its wires
already invisible – you trip
and the radio rears up

stumbles, takes a bow
half puppet show, half
some hole in a dead tree

– you bait the radio :a Mozart tape
that lures even trees
– out in the open and they obey

do what music says, led
by a violin held up
the way smoke is told to face downwind

and the children form a single line
as if they were still giggling
– how restful it is to saw

and no one says a word
or smoothes back the fine hairs
inside these twisted branches.

D40

Despair has taken on the shape
each cloud leaves afterwards
– you reach across the hole

one hand crazed
a moon rising from the other
as if there were crossroads

and the sky winds down
into evenings that are not yours
– an unbearable headwind

weakened past sorrow, past drift
past sleep and your breath lies down
where nothing holds on

– you don't save the pieces, it's useless
– you look up and the air
little by little is led

past emptiness :the no lips
that are not a face, not a voice
and from your arms.

D41

The bay backs down once you begin
by counting the dead – your mouth
wider and wider with gnats

half plankton, half step by step
that will live on as beach grass
and undertow, dragging you

the way these gulls make pass after pass
circle the dying afternoon
in endless sorrow

– you walk till you're no longer hungry
though no sand flea last for long by itself
and every evening, by the millions

stars will drown so the sun
can feed one day more from your lips
left open to weigh down the sky

– you throw the Earth against it
holding it off stone by stone
that seep through your shadow

as if tears would close your eyes
with eyes and no one come near
or remember the numbers just as they are.

D42

These empties half windswept, half
crumpled and every day more body bags
– you think the candy wrappers, the receipts

so near the station would be allowed
and circle safely, cover the dead insects
the way bells still lower a wooden gate

when trains pass each other
– you know the sound, a rake
being dragged along the wet grass

as if the sun was still green
not yet the bits and pieces
that fall to these tracks as stars

– you listen closer and closer
till the ground takes hold your body
fills it after waiting so long.

D43

You sense it knows, the road
narrows, picking up speed
and off in the distance its curve

can't escape, plays music from the 40s
– you are somewhere in England
listening to rain on a runway

– had it guessed then how its years
would end, here in Nevada, four lanes
not caring where the winds come from

or the radio half airborne
half static, half already too far
though the station is still on the look-out

and clouds are overdue
even in the desert
– it must know, it has to, the hill

constantly turning its head
and you slow, begin to sing along
have one day less to worry.

D44

It takes both faucets and each night
you fill the sink the way mourners
set up camp – one alongside the other

swaying and your legs half open
wait till it's dark, kneel down
as if it was not your own

and it's safe to drink from the rim
beside the zebras. the leopards
– this lake won't freeze or dig up

your footprints from the falling snow
calling for help and in the cold
you wipe your lips on the wall.

D45

These petals taking command, the flower
pinned down and the work stops
– your breath dragged back

where it's safe and in your lungs
hides the way each sky is named
after the word for stone

for this small grave each Spring
the dirt adds to till suddenly
you are full height, your lips

defending you against the cold
waiting it out in your mouth
– they too want you to talk

to call them by name
say what they sound like
turning away, alone, alone and alone.

D46

What are they building, these stones
so close to the church
and all this milling around

– the ants aren't sure
how their mound will look
when it's finished, they start

with a next-to-nothing
set another over it
then once in place

anything is possible
– they hatch till the stones
whose common ancestor is the moon

with so little light left
though this dirt was over-hunted
for stones :without a sound

they keep the dead company
and from behind are carried up
without getting caught in the glance

at the darkness falling through
to help you find a place to die
alone – a stone tied to each leg

they will bring down
without a struggle, single file
one on top the other.

D47

On darkness and the sky
immense! fed with goodbyes
and your breath

heats its lips on this dirt
and lower – there's no constellation
named "Mouth" though you turn

on your side the way the Earth
each winter hides in the stone
closest to you, is nourished

by a nothing who stays in one place
feeding it these stars the sky
grown huge has no use for.

D48

It must welcome this light
sent up, banished and the sun
overflowing still can't wait

till morning – you will open the door
for something you're not sure, make room
the way a tree rests its branches

higher and higher and the room
kept empty for evenings
on their way back, bone-tired

hollowed out, barren, cold
and the door take in
the darkness :the dying down

and the slow, climbing turn
for which there is no word
no sound or below.

D49

While the sun spreading out
in the light from your shirt
wrung dry, its cuffs rolled back

– shores are born this way
reaching around, even here
its sleeves are still visible

and in your eyes
that first emptiness
in all directions at once :light

takes forever now
looks for you as if it
was once the only color

and nothing to end the silence
the way each night the galaxies
gather up the darkness

begin the world again
and each morning
rests at the edge, half listening

half in the open
pulling it nearer, loose
and in your arms at last.

D50

No! an axe won't do it
though there's the need
to stretch out on the ground

– not a bow-saw, it shortens
the way logs once warm
will remember why music

strikes when it comes by
and the wood still not dry
– no secrets! in the open

flash this tiny knife
so the tree sees its reflection
while you carve out its heart

as if all trees once
were twins – two trunks
within call, cut back

by an endless arrow
passing through the Earth
and no one it can hold close

except the emptied sky
and lightning – this blade
can bring down forgetfulness

and all these branches
smoldering over the ashes
the shadows, the still warm dirt.

D51

Its power comes from this froth
– never mind there's no cauldron
to make sense, you drink

listening to bubbles work a cure
are healed when the fountain
touches you, smelling from gauze

and nursing homes – the old
have no choice, they let the faucet
run and for a while

wait at the sink for something
they're not sure
– they have no memory

though the drought is always there
shaped as a stone reaching out
for kisses whose lips are the breath

rising year by year from all water
and once in your mouth, by magic
becomes the word for waiting

with both eyes closed – you drink
what must be your shadow
floating off half foam, half waterfall

scraping your throat on the rocks
– all the way down a spray
made ageless, washing over you.

D52

And though the rain has left
tired waiting for the slow descent
become your shadow reaching out

when no one looks – to lure it back
takes deception! you cover the windows
with silk and drop by drop the walls

stay damp while the sky
loses itself in your arms
– it's not your usual clouds

and you jump, afraid you'll drown
one hand held out, the other
kept empty for rain and the floor

making its way back – it works
– your shadow already lifting you
feet first, on your toes

as if it sees the sky surrounded
by other skies, in bits
and this dark place you hide.

D53

You wipe the way the moon
once warmed the Earth
caressed your arm

with shapelessness
and the fever left over
from some fiery beginning

half shoreline, half
waves still flaring out
staking their claim

and memory – inside this path
a brain, left behind
to deal with the scent

smoldering leaves give off
– you sniff for stars
that have no light yet

only the fragrance stones replace
endlessly cover the dead
with leaves and these dried flowers

everywhere burning in small piles
– what you smell is a smoke
that can only remember.

D54

You can tell by the curtain
how the play will end, this sill
dusted word for word
till your ear slides along
the feathers and you hear
a door open the way
between the passenger's side
and just one wing
so there's a spin in the works
though under the hood
an old campfire is fed
live songs laced together
with stories about ghosts
– their smoke covers you
– even the tires
glistening, half wood
half songs, surrounded
by miles no one remembers
and the invisible shadow
alongside your eyes when the door
opens on the driver's side
divides the sky the way lightning
sees what's coming and the curtain
makes a gesture – spread-eagle
then climbs slowly
to become your arms
– you don't move
– from this height the sky
fills with some moon-lit constellation
still burning in the dark
– you can make out the beak
the claws clasping your lips
suddenly rock, lowered here
to watch over the dead
the falling birds
with not enough air to breathe.

D55

Inside the Earth an Earth
turning away the step by step
into morning -you wade

against this undertow, each wave
dragging you back with empty shells
and dying alone – you collect

a darkness till your hand
becomes the sun inside the sun
the slow, climbing turn

around her breasts, beginning
at the shoulders, the lips
the thighs grown enormous

lifted star by star by a night
made from stone though you
keep hearing the splash

deeper and deeper, pulled under
to dry, open for these shells
already halfway through

– you let the water think it heats
by itself, that your arms ran aground
were lost all along.

D56

You clank this pot, held
so no one can hear the salt
boiling in chimneys

fastened on the ocean floor
though the color green floats up
from every hole to become

a few degrees colder :you dead
are ravenous, your mouth stays open
as if it can swallow this ooze, lush

thriving in the water left behind
half sea grass, half starting place
– you eat to prune the Earth

who in turn cools down lets you die
near the surface and the stones
all along in love with snow.

D57

While the sun backs down
you rip away one flower more
not knowing where it lost hope
waits for the rain
that doesn't answer

– one fragrance everywhere
the same emptiness before the sun
did all that work for nothing
left only a single sky
and these feathers
falling through your arms
as rain and darkness

– you collect rain
a ceremony not yet a dance
and though you walk into each evening
you won't name it Here

– what you want is to be lost
forever asking where
as if a small handful
would dry, lose its hold
bury the drops piece by piece
and the clay pot once a birdbath
once so easy to remember and watch.

D58

And the Earth leans across
as if it was once a star
looking in the dark

half hillside, half breaking up
on the rocks filled with water
though there's no moon

coming back and the sea brings nothing
for the long, wooden handle
in every tree, every leaf

– she has turned to bone
for years tearing herself loose
the way this shovel gathers rust

going door to door and night
– you almost say her name
but it's too dark and your lungs

are swollen from her breasts on fire
in your hands – you don't dig anymore
make for her first breath a jaw barely open

already a mouth you can brush against
and bleed – you dig like a dog
who lays down and follows her.

D59

As if the pump for the well
is carving her shoulders out
and the invisible stone

you will hold when it dries
broken up among the ruins
though some rocks

still squeeze one hand
too tight and the faucet
cover you with a place

that can not rest
– what you grip will be this cup
left over from the first death

no longer noon but a cramp
for which there is no potion
only her lips falling from the sky

almost empty, worn down
clings to the ground
as minutes, hours, evenings

– for years one hand
closing over the other
already a shadow

half grass, half thirst
half some vague hovering
inside your throat

– mouthful by mouthful only cold water
at last in the open
pulled up and still falling.

D60

You still land belly-down
though the mailbox has no key
– what you yank is an envelope

and your hand already in flames
– why now these patrols
waving the children back

while you gag on the gust
and what's left from your hand
– why only in the rain

then headlong the way each step
moves closer to the sea
becomes those rocks that expect sacrifice

and where you can be found
terrorized by streets boldly in print
yours and theirs, waiting in the open

– you vomit as if its stench
could clog the wound all these years
between one letter and another.

D61

This bird must hear the blood
all day nesting in its gut
slit open to catch rainwater

draining some roof the way your hand
dries from the balcony half feathers
half seaweed – it listens

for waves, each one now motionless
bending over the other
-two deaths from one botched egg

though there are no leaves to fall
to gather more sky for the flight back
and you are singing alone, slow

getting the words wrong
caressing its belly with the same breeze
now bathing it – you rinse the blade

still sharpening itself on its shadow
back and forth till the sea
no longer reflects just one sky

stranded, unshapely – a monster
covered with wings already stone
clinging to you even over water.

D62

When this clock holds back
its scent has meaning
– even dogs are trained

for lies or no lies – truth
has a calm to it, by instinct
soothes this kitchen wall

flows underneath as bone
and sleeplessness you wait
for night to reset the hands

teach them honesty
practice till the weak one
hardens solid, smells

the way an invisible stone
can be trusted
lets you lower your head

against this darkness
falling out your skin
as silence and the nights to come.

D63

And the sun by a single stroke
broken into rain and forgetfulness
– you lift a child's bat

that still has heat to it, a ball
overgrown and against this mangy glove
stumbles headlong as further on

– this attic needs more room
the bases are full though you try
to remember the route stretching out

to dry the air Vaughn will need again
but not just now – what you store
is drought, drought under drought

– your brain half rock, half
drilled for this dust all these years
falling from thirst and leaving go

– tell me, who would come here
except to climb forever, not sure
why your steps won't go away

as if it takes all that time
to be remembered
and softly by its name.

D64

You work this clothesline
the way a spider puts its faith
in carelessness – the shirts

up-side-down, their sleeves
almost empty and your skin
struggling, already red

helps the blood along
now that your heart is useless
except for the tug

that never leaves the ground
forms a river pulling the Earth loose
for later – for now

this single rope, frayed :a caution
held from the towels
who still trust it, nibble alongside

as shoreline that never dries
that doesn't want its life to end
– from such a distance

you can recognize the sunlight
as water once, has the same sheen
that tires easily, is led across

becomes the moon itself, hauled in
and each morning half dust
and tiny butterflies who have forgotten

– you wait at this wash
as if the dead need more rest
and folding, bathed again

by the sun – what does it know
about risk or your shadow made clean
step by step and slowly behind.

D65

As if they once had teeth, your hands
nibble on apples half mud, half worms
– you eat only what falls to the ground

rotted, serene, made dark
by the welcoming slope into evening
– you pick the way every stone

points where to rest, has this urge
to be useful, calms your arms
still attached to the same mouth

and milky breath, holding on
– you share these twins with the sun
stretching out on your forehead

shining in its darkness from the start
and in your arms the word
for offering, for stillness, pieces.

D66

From six stories up the sea
gone, not a cloud – you look
though there's no horizon left

– below this abandoned lighthouse
cars, trucks, aground
– you don't remember rocks

not sure how to reach across
and side to side :shake hands
with someone, anyone, stir

the way every morning depends
on you to be useful
– from this window you look both ways

lean out – a forgotten room
lit even in the daytime
that keeps receding though you hold

one end from here and far down
a young girl is crossing in front
as if you could breathe without help.

D67

Half jack, half when the ace
finds its way back
and the vague stomp
each time you deal a spade

– you teach the kids
dead ends and random turns
half cards, half burial grass

– you say take the risk
bet! and suddenly the black jack
will fall to your knees
and dragged out the deck

– you deal with those dead sparks
from the sun smothered by pennies
the way each night is born again
as laughter safe inside this table

hid by a milky thread
and your eyes not yet ready
for the light or if the next card
is the other end you leave behind.

D68

This grass left for dead, the mower
idling into its slow descent
the way pilots are still trained

to roll and up-side-down
in the reflection you can recognize
the bridge being bathed in a river

older than those songs that help you forget
– it's not for nothing after all
– this aimless footpath

fallen from some tower though just ahead
is the wind itself
straining to lift a small cinder

no one uses anymore
was left in the open
still reaching down to be lost

in the flickering light from galaxies
– to be safe in your shadow
no longer struggling with the ground.

D69

I don't let you finish without help
cut short what you have to say
the way each morning leaves its darkness

for the end though today or tomorrow
your voice will slowly fall across
as moonlight and these tiny stones

– I butt in to become your mouth
your lips, your breasts – I breathe
through you not just this once

but with tenderness – a simple sentence
stopped so you can rest back to back
standing, exhausted, commonplace.

D70

Now that the sky is homeless
you make your own season
and each morning for just a minute

the snow is not mentioned
– even in summer you set aside
one window for tracks, covered over

and the wind hiding in bells
– you use this makeshift silence
the way a rifle is still aimed

with a deep breath and hold
– it's not for long, your season
sets up and from its rivers

a blackness flowing, gathering
first as a rain that is not the sky
– it's new for you, a sister-season

open and bleeding :a minute
rescued from the others
and at each funeral it shows up

ready to party, still young
though you cry out loud for a mouth
for the air that will not come.

D71

You shave so the rain
can't stop – twice every day
as if the sky were twins

half shoreless, half too heavy
and these rotary blades
reaching take-off speed

– you climb the way this mirror
fills with water, becomes some boy
shaking a tree, expects your hair

will drop safely in the sink
though Norelco claims the motor
runs even in a shower

– what does it know about rain
or accuracy or for hours
the absent-minded way your face

presses almost too close
dimmer, dimmer into that turn
there all the time on your cheeks

kept beardless :a light held back
at the far end where the runway
wants one from the few left to it.

D72

What more proof do you need! jagged
left behind – a beautiful stone
torn to pieces and near its heart

a tiny rock half drift, half moonlight
that blossomed to become the opposite shore
– all these years in the open

though every wave still smells from stone
the way this sea from its start
was never sure, even now a doubt

splashing as your blood or throat
or better yet next time at breakfast
reach out with just your breath

and god-like touch the boiling tea
hold up the evidence, the first wave
and the emptiness it counted on.

D73

Runners train by it, both my fists
and at the finish line
snap open the way each new moon

still unbeaten uses this flourish
to poke inside these stones
– you can't hide much longer

and years mean nothing now
dropping back from exhaustion
dragging the dirt behind

– wherever you are I can find you
handful by handful broken apart
for just two fingers calling out

and in front the unyielding ribbon
suddenly dark I can snatch
the breath letting me through.

D74

Even the Earth keeps its clouds
on the move though you have forgotten
all gestures begin with a train

setting out – you expect change
and the constant far-off glow
still trying to connect the nights

with nights once caves and distant herds
– you know how it goes, the grass
was always greener so you sit

let a million years slowly recede
till the ice carries you back
where tracks had already taken root

in silt beginning first as a creek
then trickling toward another
– you can hear the hooves

and along the gravel bed – be sure to wave
touch nothing! let your still cold breath
lie down beside you on its way for water.

D75

Look after this rock, it needs
your help, left on your headstone
where the sea has always come

for the stillness that lasts
though your hand never opens
as shoreline further and further out

– calm this child, let it nurse
and from your breast another hour
another sky – let it sleep

float up as mountainside
that is not a mouth
filled with that strange milk

all stone once was, what a heart
still does yet it will never remember you
or the empty cradle-song

half white-marble, half
breaking apart from want
– care for this flesh

that has your cheeks or perhaps
in the darkness it called you
by name without leaving.

D76

Battered though its wings
disappear under your eyelids
and more smoke – this lever

lost its touch, wants out :rusts
the way this wall is kept in place
pulled down on all sides

by old wiring and wrong turns
-always one slice that can't be saved
though you wear gloves

yank the smoldering cord
so that still warm jacket
is torn open, lets the sun fall

as rain and later -this toaster
reeks from your head thrown back
to see if both eyes move

and the other slice the North Sea
pressing against your hand
for a little more time.

D77

Though the sky comes to rest alongside
you can't tell just by a street sign
who the sidewalk is for – it does no good

looking around as if anyone wanted it
always raining – what you see now
is its descent held in your arms

as more rain and coming back with nothing
– she's not here, not there
– this walking you do, the way a grindstone

keeps wet and slippery
whose turns are no longer possible
– at least walk with an umbrella

that is not a flower – there's not enough
not in all the world enough flowers
that can walk by holding on to your hand

and the grave that you call to
is it what this rain does, too weak to stand
falling off as still more rain

– at least wear shoes! hide something
so when you let go a still dry stone
it will surprise her and more emptiness.

D78

Without the crumpled map your shadow
fills and the cold breeze
you puff into both hands – you learn

to sail the way this yard
pulls your mouth wider and wider
– any morning now the sun

will fall exhausted, standing here
in the wind where nothing grows
except a shadow, first as far off

then empty, lost, sent down
as if your lips would remember
its name, its sky, its faded Spring.

D79

You can tell this sink lost interest
though hour after hour you hum
another love song – it doesn't care

lets you shave, take over
half soap, half from that froth
– you are born already worried

and the mirror goes along :drain
is what mirrors do.
It's a little late for promises.

You promise you'll bring it flowers
that the sink will figure it out
– you say you'll stay all evening

the way one faucet is always rooted
in ice, arrives forever
and alongside carries away

the other and your face
helpless even now to flow
from your hands and bleeding.

D80

Under this fountain, half graveyard
half shoreline where her name
washes up the way each mourner

comes by sea, drops anchor
and the small stone holding fast
as if spray makes the difference

– you come here to crouch
though there is nothing to begin
except waves :night after night

eaten away by footfalls – what's left
is the climbing splash
millwheels will wring from riverbeds

– with just one stone you let go
and the sky sinks to the bottom
that already left for here.

D81

Up was never the place, this bulb
brought down by the same gunfire
flickering for years on the ceiling

though the room stays empty
grieving for a side door to open
on where the sky used to be

– what you hear is a jacket
moving closer to the watch
still on your wrist reaching around

in your throat and overhead
you can hear its minutes
seconds and you count out loud

as if one sun still touches another
breaks apart in midair
colder than no place else or darker

– you hear the breath
that can only exhale, the gust
held close, frozen to your hand.

D82

Between each breast a darkness
clean to the bone – always a shadow
the way all love notes are folded

over and over till all that's left
is the paper the nights are written on
half moonlight, half that black ink

the sun knows by heart :a wound
still fresh, flowing forever
as memory and stars carved out

shredded for one constellation more
that once belonged to the Earth
and always in place – between your breasts

trees grow, shaded paths and the scent
from when a shovel digs another heart
for another tree – you still use those hearts

as if night after night the sky
has not yet grown over
and even in the dark its stars hold on.

D83

You return with the pieces
the way each rock
needs more time, a place
close, almost your breasts
still heating the Earth
that asks what day it is

– it's Spring and your headstone
erupts with sunlight
though there's no fruit
struggling to open – only rocks

spread out, waiting forever
to blossom as your arms, your eyelids
that weigh nothing under ice

– you are covered
with a tiny sky
that has your patience
your restful thighs

– you become invisible
except for the grass
and the breeze from nowhere
after each try standing still
as if you were still frozen
were already too far behind.

D84

You brush the way ink
falls apart on a page
though your hair never dries

folded and unfolded, over and over
till an old love note arrives
in the crease you can't see through

already a floodgate
and across a river
that is no longer walls

or their shadows – you are washed away
by the lingering caress
your foot leaves underneath

as gravel :what all words hold back
when they say it was long ago
and her name as if she was here

in writing and with a simple splash
surrounds your still warm arm
already in two, half you, half everything.

D85

This cup must know its cracks
will never let go
struggles the way a spider
begins as a single thread
and water not yet water

– you sip so the rim
weakens from inside and the Earth
empties, lies motionless
left to hide among the afternoons
although you drink from the dirt
helpless to dry
without your lips under it

– this cup can't go on
and the spoon overhead
circling tighter and tighter
uncertain where to stop

– mouthful by frayed mouthful
you flow into a great river
already leaving
are carried along for later
as if the sky was once your flesh
won't loosen its hold
though you keep filling the cup
with flowers, sunlight
more and more flowers.

D86

You're never sure though the pages
fit – it's a small stove
used to walls that have no pictures

– it doesn't have to remember anymore
why sparks take such a hold
and little by little in secret

the way sunlight shields the Earth
from night after night the floor
that never really warms

– you keep adding flames
as if this old newspaper would still yellow
become leaves again and slowly

an invisible bird climbing immense
till there's no light left to breathe
only the stars, tighter and tighter

circling the sun to silence it
– each evening alone, hands held out
you set fire an endless sorrow

and the plume already dry
shedding its darkness on the ground
for later and your shadow.

D87

You spray always too far off
as if the sun whose only crop
is light and side to side

– you tune the nozzle
for that distant evening
when the first plow

cut open the night sky
and the Earth was born
with no turning back

– what you hear are streets
row by row, frail, their hills
allowed to fall

and without any shade :paving
is all it takes, the grass
made whole, already spreading out

and nobody dies anymore, your belly
lasts, covered with the same dust
all roads return to

for the slab smoothed down
by road crews and rakes :the black hair
beginning to stir, the breasts

become another heart
already trembling, filled
by a garden not yet green

torn apart by a touch
almost morning and roads
for the first time endless.

D88

Lost and without a wall you are unsure
what stays dark, what will move
once a flashlight is waved in front

and the plane in the picture begins to flicker
taking hold one hand all these years
dead, smothered under the frame

half dry wood, half morning
and though there's no sky yet
you are flying again

wobbled by winds no one sees anymore
making room in the fleece-lined glove
that can't tell where your fingers are.

D89

For the last time this overpass
reaching out and the invisible horse
half spray, half these cobblestones

that follow you around each corner
– four legs and still you stumble
carried up by the uncut flowers

you hold on to though this on and on
is already aimless, falling from rooftops
as rain and on your shoulders more feathers

– you are flying the way this street
loosens from its stones the weightlessness
that covers every grave and overflows

lifts the sky across – midair
you sift for runoff and from below
the unwanted shadows cling to you

– all these thorns :step by step
each splash fastens on just one foot
though you dig without any dirt or shovel.

D90

You fold this tablecloth, again, again
lifting her dress though your fingers
are hidden and turning colder so no one

touches your hand already frozen
fallen off between her tireless breasts
that still dance, offer you no other way

– you have to fold! smaller and smaller
the way each stone over and over
breaking in half to forget

by sealing this leak in the Earth
in this wobbly table and in her plate
a fork half braids, a knife

between the kitchen and the bedroom
as if she saw in your face her lips
melted down for yours

– you have to fold, make the table
disappear so you don't remember
the soothing lace, the smothered wood

– you have to trade! and this tiny spoon
that wanted to be a flower
picked for her cheeks and flowing again

folding again, over and over
till nothing's left in the open
not the walls, not the arms, not the breathing.

D91

Her shadow takes you by the hand
though darkness once laid in the wound
soaks through, festers
while the sea comes and goes
looking for more water
carries away the dead
mistaken for waves
for these cars whose lower beams
are honed on the curve coming in
for the kill, row by row
closer and closer, pass after pass
all night circling in pairs

– it's your shadow now
looking in your eyes, is sure
you are too far from morning
can't make it back
though the headlights overheat
chased off by the poisonous froth
from your mouth – it's your shadow
that helps you yell
the way an invisible anchor
is lowered and at twelve each night
splashes across the dry grass
half seaweed half on its side
calling up one mouthful at a time
to hold the sea fast and your hand.

D92

You've done it before, the horse
lowers its head heavier and heavier
– you know some wagon

is always getting lost, its wheels
rotted out, wobbling and pull
the same overloaded sun

– you know how it ends, the horse
falls on its side, the whip
criss crosses, not sure

how far before it can recognize
the road from the living
from the stomping in the open

desperate for the loose dirt
that flows back, taken in
as if an ancient sea

is still struggling in your hand
though you sift this still damp grass
for hooves, reminded over and over

by waves, and the evenings
now on their own without you
already know what to do.

D93

You constantly need watering
– from pity and these leaves
thumping the ground your heart

remembers the sound for
though there's no dry twig
to pull apart where the wind

still forks, unaware
it changed direction
to close your eyes

– you are watered by leaves
clinging to the grass
that fell from this same tree

and never dries
– all that happens
is their shadows taking root

heated the way a bird
is sure each egg
has its fire inside, will fly

with the bone in its breast
pulling the Earth apart
while you hold between your hands

a small stone already dead
brought down from a great height
and left to open.

D94

Your death seemed a neat trick
the crowd shoulder to shoulder
and in the center, eyes closed

as if some dirt makes a difference
knows how the first shovel full
is already spreading out

as hillside, as galaxies and echo
– without any string a tiny stone
pulls you back hand over hand

is charged the way this iron-sharp magnet
empties the Earth
becomes a flower, shaped

not by some restless butterfly
but from your dress giving birth
every Spring, half mist

half some child running underwater
and all that's left is thirst
for someday or another.

D95

You can forecast the rain, this Frisbee
overhead though one hand
is always weaker, holds on

the way your belly makes room
for flames, for lower and lower turns
that help you see in the dark

while the Night Star leads the others down
to drink in safety – a great herd
all night thinning out the air

higher and higher, higher and wider
and because the darkness is still water
you can't hear the sun closing in

crack open the smallest stones
for their light weaker by the hour
– it's a now-or-never toss

– you ask too much! it's not some ship
from space – it's a game for beginners
– you grip the Frisbee and the Earth

still can't keep its balance
is coming toward you as shadow
half way up, tightening around

your waist, closer and closer
around the fire inside
you were saving for feathers and later.

D96

It's time! the ache side to side
and across your forehead
the wrinkles split open

– the cramp comes into this world
as the tightening grip
that has your eyes, your cry

takes you by the hand
the way its shadow falls
exhausted, in pain and now

two mouths to feed though one
is still invisible and you
are never strong enough

to lift it, to bathe it
as if it needed lullabies
would grow into your arms

held up to be carried
one next to the other
– what you hear in the ground

is the cry birds have, made crazy
from watching the sky forever
hold down the Earth though this rake

leaves nothing intact, its handle
half unnoticed, half
from behind, holding on, held

by the still damp dirt
floated out for more room
that enters from somewhere

and everything around you
backwards and forwards, covered over
with eggshells and emptiness.

D97

Again this shrub each Spring
stirred by the same passion
its leaves never forgot

– one heart safely dead center
the other rash
brushes against your shoulder

and goes one from there
– they sense this bush
is pregnant, feed it blooms

and the root floats up
so the child inside is born
in the year-after-year fire

that returns even the dead
with flowers and thorns
drained dry for the later

– a splinter is enough
giving birth always to twins, one
a mast from an abandoned ship

the other floating downstream
nourished by the slow move
from leaf to leaf reaching down

as rain now that the shoreline
has disappeared and in its place
a fence, a gate and the outcome clear.

D98

Water doesn't help, to bathe
you leave the door open
unclog the room, let its breeze

drain and between the riverbanks
a sky no star can climb
without falling off in pieces

broken apart from emptiness
and the endless plunge
back into a sea half shadow

half some overgrown field
that reappears in the hallway
as dust and then nothing – after all

these faucets face each other
are not used to loneliness
or leaks falling from windows

– you have to trust these leaks
when inch by inch a hole
through another hole

that has something to do with a ledge
one behind the other
and cries for air, more air.

D99

It's not your usual watering can
emptied the way an arch
waits for the sun to come or go

– side to side into a distant sea
whose mending power
will cover the Earth again

though there's no tide yet
only the at-hand drift
you find in bones at night

longing for harbor to harbor
and sleep – you spray
inch by inch :each dose

half darkness, half overtaking
half while the disappearing wave
begins its cure.

D100

Under the horn and party hat
pinned down, half windshield
half in focus, half shoreline

tied to a red balloon
for the birthdays in every grave
– no one can say how it started

but you don't move, wait out the siege
the way light shifts sides
claiming victory for the others

who have given up, are going home
without the sea on their back
though this trumpet knows only power

and bestowal, splashes its warm air
among the dead, brings them all
another chance and you make believe

you're breathing when your fingers
press softly on the wheel
then rest at the bottom.

D101

They have no second thoughts
and still your footprints
inch by inch, gradually

made whole the way this shovel
lost its taste for dirt
carries in only snowfall

leaves its own reason at home
for a room that stays
close by, becomes those skies

one by one, done for, dives
on every path night first
– you dig for worms

as if one would tell you
or show you, or move your hand
or with the light off

a kamikaze cry for light
– you have no return
and step by step no morning.

D102

Its plume half green
half the way each leaf
lowers its head to drink

while this shaky window
keeps cool in the cellar
– for weeks its glass

rising, finally breaks through
though there's no waterfall
no raging flood or downstream

only cold air as if the dead
can be lulled to these shelves
sweetened by soaps, by boxes

and jars and cans
and nothing floats anymore
except what's hollow

once had water inside
where this underworld
whose steps are wood

rises leaf by leaf
from the sea
every wave is looking for

and though these pipes
were thrown about
between the docks and hulls

nothing's changed
– it's cold and you forgot
who you came down running for.

D103

It's hopeless! every nail
exhausted, falls over
as if the treeline

– there's not enough air
though the hammer, half
relentless, half turning back

the way all rescue begins
just below the horizon
for leverage – Casey

the nail you lift up
can be used again
– a second try to hold together

the same sky, familiar now
– there's hope – darkness
is what you're learning

for when a warm breeze
bends down to cup your hands
around the evening star

you will soon wait for
till all that's left to breathe
is a love song, one after another

– you pull out this nail
as if it were a flower
maybe tomorrow, would become

your voice, already scented
and in your arms
a beautiful woman is listening.

D104

You store in your mouth
the sky, for better or worse
the sun though her lips

flake off bite by bite
and each morning more leaves
found dead on the doorstep

– you eat the way these leaves
lose their way
still open their wings

thrown back as if the wind
once was everywhere
all the sweet water on Earth

on your lips clinging to hers
afraid what's down there
growing huge in your cheeks

filled with sunlight year after year
returning to the tree
that lost its fire

and somewhere inside a wooden box
calls out for stone :a single spark
to heat her bones with flesh

become a face again
and in your mouth the smoke
whose fragrance is her mouth.

D105

This dishwater – why not! cold
flowing backward will be clean again
though you rinse the cup

upside-down, slowly, wallowing
and since you are left handed
you have to reach across

till your skin tightens, grows
scales and once on shore
your jaws flatten, consoled

that the dead are drinking instead
are already flowers and each evening
becomes one more grateful hillside

waiting for rain the way all dirt
holds back the dead as riverbanks
– it makes sense! inside this sink

an overpowering thirst for under
– what you call daylight
was once eternal rain

and night after night you wash
this same cup, over and over
to start a simple fire.

D106

To lay bare this tent
you want memory
– on all sides a darkness

held down by rope
though one arm stays empty
for daylight, the other

locked in stone
while you unfold
the way this canvas remembers

rootlessness, winds and the Earth
going at it alone
wobbling, just starting up

– you need more rope
and the sky that leans too far
held back by sails

spread out for the rain
left over from when the sun
was struck by lightning

and the monstrous thirst
all stars are born with
though you tie each knot

already a flower whose roots
are planted in stone, held
so one hand never dries

drifts and this sea
end to end
a darkness into darkness.

D107

It doesn't matter how loud
– you are listening to someone
who isn't here, a love song

half covered with dust, half
moves closer as sunlight
brushing against her breasts

for their pollen though you
don't sing along, are clutching
a motionless flower between your lips

– even without the radio
you are breathed upon, the Earth
made whole from just two lips

and that first breeze
still circling the sun
– you are embraced! healed

the way each evening closes
is never found though in the dark
you can still hear it falling

and the echo helps you make sense
how the same kiss opens only one cry
when two mouths are broken.

D108

You limp and her casket
breaking open, its splinters
lose hold and this dirt

is water again, each ripple
wider and wider drags ashore
though the pebble you tossed

covers the sea with a darkness
that spends its life drowning
— a tiny rock broken off

from your step by step holding on
forever — you walk on water, close
to the crater's rim half wood

half storm, half where her voice
could be mistaken for moonlight
for the one stone more who in the end

is dead and you lift it
gently, lower it to your lips
as if it was a whisper, or a mouth.

D109

Open the lid! if you have to
use teeth :hailstones
left over from the winter making room

– inside the can
its paint spins backwards
covers a rot that never leaves

and when the carpenters finish
rust—you stir till winds
begin to warm from the rain

brush against your arm
pulling the sun closer
firmly on the sill

– sometimes it takes all Spring
sometimes a few weeks, the air
little by little growing mold

worn out though the year
that has nothing to do with love opens
before you can catch your breath.

D110

You never get all its air out
yet this water boiling
takes your hands along – shopping

is its secret passageway
lowered in front this display case
half glass, half with the sea inside

though your heart stays dry
begins to tip-toe past something new
in a box that is not a wound

– to buy is all that's needed
is your fingers squeezing the Earth
for its first river, its first raindrop

flowing slowly as string
no longer thirsty or old
or trying to lift off the lines

from your palm while you count out
one by one :a language
only the dead still understand

– you pay and the bells you hear
know all about how a bubble not yet dry
trickles down on your lips

floating off around the corner
and you can open your eyes again
– you don't hear the moon but it's a start.

D111

And step by step this cane
scratching the way the dead
plant their scepter in the darkness

– they never forget which end
takes hold so you limp along a path
or perhaps your shadow overflowing again

– they rule the ground, commanding it
to rise slowly, let you lag behind
while their castles drag you on

– even here there are nights
warmed by walls and longing
and one knee is always colder

– you make yourself lame
are helped into the turn
years ago pulled down to make room

for rain that no longer falls for you
only these stones that have the speed
are always in front, taking you back.

D112

It could be the lighting
has rusted along the cockpit canopy
though you framed this old photograph
as if the sky would never yellow
still breathing against your face
under the kitchen table

-you cringe for nothing! the worst
is to forget, not to hear this plane
taking off, turning the Earth clockwise
till it reaches from the cold floor
the boy still in fleece-lined boots
closer, closer, looking straight at you

though you can't recognize his voice
left so long for dead
it can't leave your heart
except as that sound a window makes
when it opens to let in some rain
you can't remember why.

D113

It's not a beautiful storm
– it needs more time, centuries
perhaps as sea birds

wingtip to wingtip the way water
backs up in the streets
half rain, half from memory

and everyone who died today
holding your hand
and not moving

– there's no more room
though the mourners
lash down the dead

who still give up their lips
trying to remember
safe in the grave

why each kiss now
has no bottom, nothing left
only the gentle breeze to come.

D114

To urge the dead you lift
a small gift, placed so the height
waits motionless alongside

though you can't sleep anymore
afraid once your eyes close
there's no turning back, you'll drift

as darkness into darkness
– you bring these dead a sharp stone
the kind insomniacs find

under the kitchen table
– they loosen each tile
the way flowers are pulled out

still drinking from your hands
on the way to the cemetery – you pick up
everything! roads, shadows, dust

and carefully face to face
as if there was something daylight
left out as shovels and weightlessness.

D115

Inside an ancient gesture this swan
spilling its guts though the pond
never overflows – only one bird

half sun, half longing to flare out
as if the first spark
came from the sky and still needs air

– you come here to breathe
and with one hand scoop the other
from the darkness in your mouth

and because death was done before
you wipe away all doubt
begin to sing till the Earth

circles you, sometimes on fire
sometimes rain falling as dirt
though you are no longer afraid

to clear your throat
– of course this swan is stone
as it should be and the fountain

is stone as it should be
and the sun buried an hour or so ago
under its shallow wings and your arms.

D116

This envelope never dries, her name
tightening a faceless turn
that has the sky to itself

– she is still leaving, rising
thinning out while your hand
still damp holds on to a curtain

that is not a dress
and between your fingers
wasted words, wasted years

wasted you – what's left
is a room half walls
half emptiness, half cold mist

as if there's not enough light
to sweeten this note kept naked
covered with rivers and your arms.

D117

It has nothing to do with flames
but since your shadow comes from the sun
it starts out as silence

already knows in the few hours left
another evening will flow
and once inside your bones

even more restlessness
– the sun will never be content
till it ripens you into someone else

bewitched the way your shadow
breaks with the past, is absorbed
and once in the ground, nourished

safe from predators and over time
even this moon will become a sun
ignited half by sunlight

half at your side while the night
in its sudden joy becomes a morning
you never heard before.

D118

All it takes are these stones
arranged the way the moon
still calms – madness

needs this care, both hands
smoothing the dirt
pushing a sea into place

as if its shore was already there
would recognize what will work
and what doesn't – you restore order

just by bending over a circle
though you can go further
till closer and closer each stone

overflows with hour after hour
pulled from the soothing bottom
as your lips and real water.

D119

Before the morning kiss this cup
must be heated, aroused
and full length in the ravine

its jittery tongue waits for the sun
to move closer, fill your mouth
as if every breath has a tragic ending

is covered in water made invisible
by tiny desert stalks
and something to hope for

– it takes hours, panting
till the light darts across
smelling from coffee

that asks what time is it
and the kiss that goes by
no longer evening or old.

D120

To protect itself this pond
freezes over, fills with light
the way the first mother on Earth

made it safely ashore
taking her child along
though you are still thirsty

cold, half ice, half comforted
by this ancient flower
blooming now as snow

– this knee-deep pond
once overflowed with power
could insist on Spring

would lean against the sun
till it begins to heat again
taste from salt and open sea

– you can look through
see where the straight line began
and keeps arriving

as if every cradle at night
is rocking in water
and the now invisible silence.

D121

With one grudging whisper
all that the sky had given you
– half-hearted

as if your first breath
could be returned
no longer struggling

– Dave, your feeble lips
are flickering
can hardly make out

where the night is headed
though to the darkness
everything is snow

is covering your pillow
the way you once imagined
what words were like

before the coming and going
– you didn't see, Dave
as words do

how the door to the room
was suddenly let in
no wider than this page

and the hand in back
stomping to keep warm
comes off when let go.

D122

But where is the river
– not one inch closer
though the will to win
has outlasted you
the way sunlight slows
loses out to the cold

– there must have been a wound
a rock and that someplace
the dead are waiting for
while you watch how the horizon
slowly ices over, carries you
into open sea where your breath
lies down on the darkness

and drinks from this half the sky
lets the other side take the lead
eating away at these stars
sprawled out as shoreline

– you are surrounded at last
clouded over by moonlight
and nothing but moonlight.

D123

It's the lane-to-lane
that throws their aim off
though for other reasons

you can't hold on, the map
too slippery and the climbing turn
is already opened much too wide

– even without the landing lights
the straight line is dangerous
tries to get a bead on you

the way stretchers lift the dead
who want only to move again
– take command! do in-and-out

or what chance do you have
with this constant terror
– a split-second stare

can break the windshield apart
and its slow, sunlit curve
all those years in the making

was not saved, its pieces
laid out as roadway and glass
and that half look over your shoulder

to pass on the silence
you were waiting for, already lowered
into shadow and the wings.

D124

Now that it's raining you can forget
– let gravity do the work
and this rake, half bare, half

at attention through the circle
that holds the Earth in place
clearing the path the dead remember

though these leaves must be wet
cascading past savanna to savanna
as primordial headwaters spreading out

so many years apart and always
there's room for more dead
whose million year old cry

will sound the same a million years
from this tree calling, calling, sleepless
– you don't need to find out

– it's enough when it rains
you can lean down and grasp hand over hand
without caring why or holding back.

D125

Here, there, the way silence
tows you below the waterline
and though you are alone

you're not sure where her name
is floating on the surface
or what's left

grasped by a single wave
that never makes it to shore
splashes as if this pen

is rowing you across the stillness
the dead are born with
– you are already bathing, half

from memory, half by leaping
from the water for flowers
growing everywhere – for you

this page, unclaimed :a knife
dripping with seawater
and your throat.

D126

Even grief is passing you by
though you waited in the open
had a fondness for calendars

– dozens! drying
the way ocean nets are dragged
behind the day after day

who no longer ask but come
for the silence snapping them up
to be picked clean in a room

opening everywhere as seawater
or is it already Spring
impatient, wants the bed empty

and though you don't move an inch
the flowers are generous
never in the way, come and go

with trust in their eyes
– rage is helpless here
has to listen for a change

how warm the dirt is
and under your tongue
more rain, how easy it was.

D127

Though the one you had your eye on
is rising north to south
the small star you thought died off

moves side to side slowly behind
the way an ancient blessing
still warns the absent moon

against those dark corners
all marble rubs across
becomes a single stone

that divides itself in two, here
an empty breast, there
the child is already dead

– you dress for this
bring the new scarf, new gloves
for what was evening once

was lullaby :the dirt
east to west, clumps
shining all around a place

already freed from the Earth
– new boots, new coat :a constellation
never here before, still cold.

D128

A single wave and the brush
has no room left
turns away the paint
already on its side
convinced it would give birth
has a place to go though you
were already used to breathing underwater.

One is an enormous number
crowds into this hallway
where the bulb happens to be dead
-with one stroke
and the still wet gloss
takes you by the hands
caresses them into boards
no longer separated from the others
-doesn't move
when you bring flowers home.

D129

The same dingy elevator
not in service
though to wish is the easy part
– once its doors are sealed
the gust likes it in the back
and you make good time
cut the sky in half :both doors
opening the way your foot
fell suddenly between

– you stumbled in front a butterfly
that no longer moves, its wings
folded over, changing again
into an evening spread out
from the bottom up
reaching across a road
that stays dark more than the others
lifts its dirt to your shoulders
and along the helpless buttons
lets it fall, bathing you
floor by floor, any day now.

D130

This flag, as the saying goes
smacks from the sun
so you salute, can use the shade

though by the time the parade cools
your fingers ache from holding up
a lovingly carved radio that once

was a woman whose voluptuous breasts
still feed you music from the forties
– love songs for common prayer

as if July, too heavy to bear
spreads out on every lawn
and by the 4th day you are listening

the way loneliness is fed, the Earth
turning you slowly on course
corrects for winds and nourishment.

D131

Going somewhere with you
is all it holds on to
– a single blanket

the kind the dead carry
over them
– you can't tell the difference

though you wish there were
– to warm is all it knows
and you are led under

till your mouth opens
looking for her
– to kiss, empty her throat

with your own – on faith
you stretch out
bring back to the room

her damp scent
tied at one end
and not the other

– with both eyes closed
you show her her picture
without thinking.

D132

The sky must be finished with you
– it's no longer raining
though these flowers take years
to dry, are still sprinkling overhead
as if the shadow holding you close
has forgotten its way back for dinner
is turning into air, trembling.

Without any wind facing you
the sky has built a cemetery
held endlessly in front
– a monstrous evening, half
mountainside, half broken open
for a hand that wants a stone
– what a hunger! breaking
the plates, breaking the table.

D133

So much dirt yet you cram
as if these seeds would slip
crush everything to bloom

the way you pick out a loose stone
hoping for an avalanche
and the yard covers with flowers

once your hands come together
so the ground can't move
or light up your eyes

because it's easier than sorting
– you don't cheat anyone :one seed
next to another and another and another

lowered so everyone
is put back piece by piece
and next Spring will climb out

to look for you
– you use colors! come dressed
waving your fingers

sifting the Earth whose light
is wasted in the daytime
counting, counting, counting.

D134

As if the sky could admire itself
rippling on the surface
the way each river that carries the dead

clogs with dirt and clay and you pour
flood the cup with tiny waves
that block the air from entering

are used to how your whisper
cools with its wings end over end
as lips and helplessness and the leaves

half tea, half trying to remember
how to drown – you stir slowly
the only thing you can do

to keep the sky in a tight circle
though you don't drink, just let the water
go cold, expectant, become more or less
the darkness it once was.

D135

The guy with the squeegee
has no idea how cold dust is
or why it's taking so long

for her reflection to cover the glass
with sirens, whistles, more ice
– he's nervous bathing the mannequin

half naked, half with water
fresh from your heart
– you're in the way! wedged

between her motionless mouth
and the shadow that is yours
– no matter how easy enough

you don't touch the window
ready to break open
wipe her breasts dry.

D136

Without any smoke all 100 watts
– a fireball! and you
face to face the way two stars

become one and morning
– you unfold this rickety ladder
till it falls into the ceiling

– a sudden splash and wings
begin to form from wings
and that slow climbing turn the dead

look forward to :you embrace the bulb
shake it, gently! make sure
if what you hear is a loosening

or the night sky that never heals
– you almost drown holding on
and the lake drained black

half overhead, half dirt
burnt to the ground where you
still follow behind – gone, gone

– in time you will dig a place
not too far, not too wide
for the rippling among the stones.

D137

Both hands and this ink
the way the dead are sheltered
-you fill the pen

with slowly behind
loosen those tiny stones
you still drink from :you write

as if this shovel
had carried away the Earth
into moonlight where mourners

appear underneath your fingertips
as words and rain and lips
-there's always a first time

-the ink would overflow
rush through the lines
left helpless on this page

-you hold on – why not!
-already a fountain
digging for the sky

its unfinished grave
and every evening
is an everywhere her heartbeat.

D138

This pot-luck maple
– a baby! and already
leaf by leaf collapsing

and though you bathe in ice water
your only chance
is from the silence

found in absolute zero
whose undermining monotone
is quieted the way a millstone

half streams, half churchyards
half that sweet blossom
every child is born as

carries around on its shoulders
the unfolding whisper
for heavier blankets, woolens – noise

ages everything! this tiny tree
trying to gag the Earth
with dead leaves and hillsides

– with its molten core
bubbling through the branches
and nothing is cold enough.

D139

And the sky by instinct
following you the way the last train
leaves for the day

though your eyes started out
as lips, took their shape
from flowers, have no problem

closing in the cold
– it's a touch and go cold
still evolving in the darkness

the sky backs down from
and all evening, lovesick
you begin the over and over search

for stones
– you almost loosen the sweet smell
all those years left out in the open

covered by night after night
as if the first frost
was imbedded in a single stone

– you need leverage :your shadow
folded for good, empties out your arms
whose hold on the Earth

is useless now, already snow
– you need a shovel, a handle, wood
that will thrill the dead, return

not too far away and backwards
slowly behind as if the sky is exhausted
gives up, leans slightly against

so many sobbing flowers
and stones with ice lifted out
in time to hear and turn away.

D140

You make a fist so the leaves
tighten though your heart
is already in flames

spreads out on the highest branch
the way birds are misled
by your eyes, fly in

to keep them warm
till there's no room left to sleep
and you stare at the sky

at what has forgotten you
passing by without any rain
though your hand has rusted shut

still at the controls
half broken glass, half scrap iron
half because you can't let go

the headwind – you were taught how
to lean against trees
that don't leave the ground

are still looking for your body
– you didn't die, of course
and trees too are easy to fool

but you did disappear
like the flashing button
from one sleeve rolled up

and not the other
– two fingers were frozen
before the birds cut them down.

D141

And though these rotting leaves
know all the timetables
you build meridians

half chicken wire
half ocean spray, a map
that has no rope, no dockside

– you log your position
by counting the drop in temperature
leaf by leaf

and because you have a scar on your arm
you rake the way a wooden boat
will sense leaves from miles away

circle alongside, its mouth
wide open, filled with dirt
already damp and rising.

D142

As if this tie could slow your fall
– full blown and yet each sleeve
expects the helpless rollover and flames

though your heart knows so little
about how chancy it is to breathe
spewing smoke no longer sea-blue

or dry – all that's left in this shirt
is the surrounding valley
that carries you down – you need more sky

and side to side stretching out
for a rickety bridge – you jump holding on
to a single knot huddled in fog and off course.

D143

As if the Earth overheated, flowers
rising to cool your grave
and thrashing against the rocks

the way fish must know it's hopeless
once water thins out, becomes air
and places you can't live – it happens

every August, mosquitoes looking for shade
and stagnant smells – you can hear the dirt
parting in front as they move closer

though you never get used to their swish
without those waves from when the sun
had no seasons yet, its light

dark green, constant and death was kept away
with stones and this hillside left here
to drain, too weak now even for grass.

D144

This calendar gets its genes, stays put
as if its yellowing pages
have nothing to do with fall

– the paper has already begun to age
though you wear a coat to bed
for those cell-to-cell signals

from dry wood taking hold, has the smell
frost makes when clearing the ground
to rest for awhile and your tired eyes

barely able, close to keep warm
no longer move just to move
– it's been years since you stopped

and each morning a grinding sound
disappears ahead, the sun
helplessly trying to melt

now that it's summer and the day-to-day cry
that begins in the Earth
all along reaching away from you.

D145

You're new at this
though in front each window
your eyes close just so far

are not used to a rain
that comes right up against you
won't move even when you make room

once you learn where to look
for the sky, for the shoreline
half gone ahead, half

peeling off and your fingers
clamp on to its sharp turn
covered with sand and thirst and death

— you never know
but this rain is dangerous
has saved its memory for last

put all its strength
in how to circle you down
as days and nights together.

D146

You were so sure! the boxes
sealed and no one
getting a bead on you

– wherever you're moving
it would be by air – not the kind
that comes from runways

but cardboard, corrugated
where its turbulence is hidden
at least till high enough

safely under your arms
still closing the flaps
and though the wings are taped

they're already breaking apart
held the heading too long
– you thought this place

would last out the month
not burn to the floor
become winds and your emptiness.

D147

There is no tunnel, you crawl
the way a turtle takes hold
and from the sidewalk a dry breeze

smelling from salt and two in the afternoon
– the crowd thinks the cup is for beggars
fill it so the air inside

will rise and you can breathe
one more time :a tide
lets you survive in the open

though one cheek is dragged
over the other till your mouth
becomes a shell – all you can do

is drink from it
do what skies once did
filled with thirst and emptiness.

D148

Without any flowers
you are still breathing
– without a throat

still eating the warm air
though what's left from the sun
is no longer blue

hides the way your grave
is covered with stones
and still hungry

– you could use more stones
a heaviness to become your arms
one for working harder

the other invisible
leaving your heart
lifts from the dirt

your mouth, your eyes
and the sky letting go the Earth
as if you weigh too much.

D149

As if it finished its last meal this log
sits back, waits inside for the stove
the way ashes roll over and all around you

trees are burning on rivers
that came from the first fire
still settling down as thirst

and the heady smoke flames leave behind
to be remembered by – from day one
their slow climbing turns, at first

threatening to gut the place and now
you can't live without them though your fingers
after so many years have become airborne

safe from the dangerous shadows all night
dripping between each breath and your mouth
left open – you pour in wood

to get death started :an arriving flame
surrounded by the Earth and tiny holes
– it's the only way you know how.

D150

Just a toy though the string
is still afraid, tied as if inside
a weightlessness is pulling it
closer and closer and can't let go
caged in on all sides
by the color blue and emptiness

– a trapped balloon, banded
the way all buoys spread out
and the channel lurking below
unravels as rain that has no water yet

– it's always been like this
at carnivals, balloons by the hundreds
coming from a single fountain
that never falls back

– you can't take in enough air
– your arms leak and you drown
in the overcast that has no shadow yet
not yet touching down in the cry
from your hands over your heart.

D151

You pick away at the Earth
as if your grave was filled
with the wait for flowers :one foot

already pleased, the other
still wrapped in dirt
weighed down stone by stone

the way fruit is ripened
keyed up and seaworthy, is lowered
into a wooden box

that never leaves shore
just the loading and unloading
though step by step

you overflow from a single rock
broken into twigs
coming by for your mouth

– you want to walk out, trade
make a deal tit for tat
the dry grass that has no blossoms yet.

D152

Night after night a paper cup
filled with hillside
and the makeshift thirst

that won't move an inch
keeps damp in an invisible mouth
where oceans are buried

– there's no place to want
– there's only take-out and the lid
is already closed

though it leaves some room
to lift the shoreline to your lips
– this coffee is flowing

from a darkness suddenly homesick
though you don't hear the mourners
or the grass splash over one hand

and with the other you open the cup
just to see what's inside
as if black still counts for something.

D153

You yank this belt
the way a leash
glazed with sweat

takes up the slack
– in front the mirror
your gut disappears

your chest rears up
as if a naked woman
is coming closer

– you make room
and if something creaks
it's just the growling

all night alone
so when you call out
there will be no words

except the constant tightening
to cut yourself in half
part waterline, part the wait

that can't stand by
letting you bark at the useless lips
the useless arms, the useless hunger.

D154

You hold the phone
the way all wounds begin
then tell you the worst

how their familiar drone
has to be cared for
kept forever under your heart

broken down into the night sky
– what you grip
is the unrelenting hum

longing for more room
for lift, closer
– it's not going to happen

– you need more time
so the bare wires
that once could fit into your hand

become silent again
and you are drifting
on a cold, clear day

left off the hook
as the cry
that turns into a chained animal.

D155

As if each wave was being pardoned
sent off the way the moon
was covered with these flowers
and harvests that even today
are just hours apart
allowed to leave

– the first turbulence on Earth
remembered vaguely as moonlight
that still needs to be held down
soothed, at first with dirt
then evenings, then stones
and the gentle splash
on its way to the bottom

– an ancient rage! what was spared
is this thirst for her eyelids
between your lips – the same undertow
inside every flower
closer and closer and in your arms
the sea who has forgotten everything
to get away with it.

D156

You put up the roof
creaking under each arm
as if this tree knows when
and climbs till its leaves
no longer heat the Earth

– you set aside rooms
for the roots that opened
into hillsides turning away
and with the last nail
you build hallways
the way river water
still carries off the smell
from leaves falling on wet roads
already along the branches :wave
after wave with no one in your arms

– you save a place for the door
to grasp this shaky house
and there will be children
all next Spring climbing out
and fruit that has the heaviness
from rolling on the ground.

D157

The wiring inside this bulb
wants only to stay dry
and along the night after night
the sun covers with water
that darkness brings from the sea
gathered around it as sleep
and falling to the ground

though the dead have always
held up their arms
and with their last breath
winding down the way rain
breaks apart on the bedrock

they stack over your heart
filling it stone by stone
used to the sudden weight
spreading out on the floor

– without looking down
you are towed across a darkness
still moist, that has no name
except its common cries and Esther.

D158

All that's left on the wall
is the sea – this wooden frame
year after year crushing its shadow

and against some reef as if a rock
once broken apart will lower the dead
barefoot, step by step to make the path

the sun uses for its descent into daylight
into the bowl, chair, stale bread
now shoreless, sent to the bottom

the way each still-life
is painted with that hungry brush
only a wall can take to its mouth

and crumble from emptiness
– you clasp what was a sail
whose only heart has shut down

adrift between your arms
smelling from the beautiful dress
almost touching the floor.

D159

As if the sun lets its darkness
take hold and night after night
your hand begin that vague ripple

from there to here – your arm becomes
some ancient wave and you can't stop
or slow the unraveling

or along each step by step
the stillness all light attracts
once it stands at the door

– you have no choice! it's hello
or be left, breathing in
just to stretch out and keep moving

– you can't be born
without these stars in motion
– you can't die either

though each evening brings you
another mourner, one alongside the other
nomads along the road where once

a dark sea covered the sky
set it adrift, first as a warm breeze
then the hillsides slowly over your heart.

D160

Once this bedroom door is closed the rug
deals in flowers, its dark scent
reaching up where your eyes
expect sunlight and miles away the heady whiff
from a firefly – already she's naked

the woman you just this minute
inhaled, a deep breath
who can't see, has to feel along the grass
though the dead still stake a claim

and never leave – the room is locked
with the fragrance stones come for
– it's a little room
a place you keep for yourself
so the door can become the distance
that fastens her arms to yours

and you wait for the pathways
to fall inside your throat
as the cry for footsteps
filled with kisses and fingernails

and the rug torn apart for rags
smells from loneliness
from the mouth you will gently place
over her heart and time to time.

D161

To calibrate this stone
you break the sun just so
part shoreline, part darkness
where the Earth survives
by holding on to your shadow
as if it had no mouth
and what you hear are seabirds
covered with cries that circle
as rain and dust and nightfall

– it's an ancient gesture
half salt, half waves
and nothing inside the stone
that can reach so far

yet you let it drop
with an undisguised precision
that blows open your fingers
and one stone toward another

that is not the sea
not the grass among these flowers
nothing, not the overcast all night
falling from some woman's dress
and you can't hear it raining.

D162

Gasping on air and salt
and though you can hear the soup cool
an ocean deep inside the Earth

is bubbling under your skull
exhausted – it's natural you wait
for the soup to grieve

louder and louder as if your arms
were coming too close – wave after wave
you scatter more salt

and across the bowl
that smells from rain in the beginning
– it's expected that you have this appetite

for reef, for a sea with a bone in its mouth
and along the coast the dead fingers
the dead lips listening for yours

tired from struggling – only soup
and even then a wooden chair
so nothing is forgotten.

D163

This scaled down backhoe, kept yellow
the way butterflies suddenly lose interest
though its hard-hat operator

likes the risk, touches down
and between the cemetery rows takes hold
as if once here was farmland

with no sunlight left, just these sites
half under construction, half
your jittery eyelids – you watch

how a crop is harvested stone by stone
and by instinct you sift – not here
not there, then try again inches away

shake your invisible wings in the open
alone, alone, rootless and for a split second
another night begins and ends.

D164

And though the snow still clings
smelling from breasts
– you are afraid sit down

stop short the way your mouth
no longer spreads its devouring glow
changes into water, then winter

then cups your hand
squeezing the sky into ice
then darkness – you dread

this breathing out loud
till it becomes fragrant
and lets the skin over your lips

listen as flowers
while your arms fill with arms
that are not yours, are covered

with shallow river water
flowing past you as moonlight
and this snow feeding the ground

on loneliness and mornings
already dead, shaping the Earth
fitting it deep into your throat

for the cry falling toward you
as kisses, as oceans, then skies
– you never had a chance.

D165

And now it's the sun
oozing, remembers
how these flowers
for the first time
stayed long enough
to grow a fragrance
though all you smell
are the stones
still cooling :a dark mist
imbedded forever
in ashes longing for rain
the way a consuming wound
still begins with a valley
and hillsides closing in

— you can't move
let these lingering stones
drip from your fingers
that have become a single hand
holding out a single hand
left open, trembling
dropping the Earth into pieces
and why not? you dead
need more stones
armfuls! more, more, more.

D166

And for the first time, begins
till even today all water
longs to escape with the sun

the way the dead have been taught
and once on shore
wait for the waves to open again

as flowers smelling from salt
and lips and readiness
– it's not by accident

blood at the slightest chance
will run away
though not every wound

can be traced back to the sharp turn
and circling down into stones
by the mouthfuls – you taste a sea

stained by faraway nights
and teeth then loneliness
and not one star is spared

– by morning the throbbing
is at home in your heart
brings it closer and closer

as if a sister sun, not yet visible
rises inside the months, years, oceans
and what you carry off

is the silence they once were
silent and covered with smoke
no longer struggling or grass.

D167

Loosened from the sand
then wing over wing
till the sky faces you
lets you choose one shell
rather than another
among the broken open
once seabirds.

She's used to it
grins to please you
keep the game going
cries when you cry
just by moving closer
saved between
the umbrella and morning.

You have so many cries
so much, making room
– you empty the sun
for its ashes
that circle her
as air and the part
that doesn't cool
you use for breath

for wingspan
and unending rock
crushed the way all sadness
weighs nothing now
– she says she thinks
she found a feather.

D168

Between two fingers the dirt
still greets these dead
coming by with open eyes
then rain that can't hold on

– this strange handshake
over and over warms your arm
though the sun fell short
missing the Earth

the way a hillside stops growing
if no one touches it
as flowers whose colors
can no longer remember

or face this arm
the one you bring too near
chosen for its memory
its power and sound.

D169

You still graze on engine sounds
on that darkness from some plane
at the same time each night
prowling and between your jaws

– you can't breathe
– the slightest sound
is ravenous, circling
then exactly overhead
thins out the air
the way this sky still devours
each star falling back
on fire, gasping for more fire

– you can't take it anymore
jump! though sleep too
is painful and you stagger
night over night
far from this rickety bed
hidden in smoke, black, trembling.

D170

With her name in your mouth
more than a word, a morning
and everywhere on Earth

at the same time, in daylight
though once every year
you eat an apple in silence

as if a whisper
could pull the stars down
closer and closer to one another

and from your mouth a second sun
that has no shadow yet
would warm your lips holding on

as mountainside and one last look
at her eyes that tell you nothing
– this apple you drag nearer

is also a word, has your voice
your useless jaws, your darkness
next to her breasts and around them.

D171

It's evening outside the burn unit
where this snapshot grafted in place
still cools the gutted page
has absorbed its memory :the album
all night filling with smoke
though the engine stopped and you
are standing alone, smiling.

To the side a faithful tree
with no leaves and those goggles
don't help – not yet but someday
a dependable dressing you will hear
years later as this tree still young
hear there were summers and rain.

Someone is working on it, a paper
you can eat in the open
and once in your bloodstream
rolls around and around
with all that laughter you forgot
as warm as if yesterday
– you must be having a great time.

D172

Though over the doorway
an old horseshoe clinks
empties inside a single nail

keeping it warm – a small room
a stove, the iron pot
covered with a ceiling

used to a door
that opens and closes
for no reason at all

collects what's around
left out for good luck
then winter

– even in the cold
you sleep on this kitchen floor
with its invisible nails

and creaking side to side
the way the sun is struck
one morning to the next

then back after the burial
– a clear advantage
– you don't give the sun a chance

let it burn as the faint scent
from oak flooring
– you have to make it work.

D173

As if you could untie each finger
let go so your fist
would drift till it's empty

the way all roads lean
and once into the turn
you check for snow and falling rocks

that never fall except as sand
and salt from ocean mist
and those bonfires all night

lit along the shore
– with just one hand you fight back
wring from this curve in the road

the huge truck rushing past
filled half with water, half
with seabirds, half with another sky

hacked out for more mountainside
– you are forever finding turns
that come back to you as dirt

overflow with its darkness
its thirst with no room
not a breath, not a word, nothing.

D174

This feeble kitchen match
leans the way a magician's cane
strikes the stage in flames
doves and all, shaking more dust
from that same darkness
each match shares with stars
left behind, in there somewhere

and your chest snap open
for those jack-in-the-box flowers
stretching out, confident
the dirt is warm, has no other use

– you will explode, give up everything
become an offering and the ice under you
weaker and weaker set out
for any minute now and your arm.

D175

Again this curve comes loose
– head-on with the hillside
lifted into your arms

though you dead still listen
for those cars stopping by
in rags, emptied as if a flat

would make the difference
become a bubble, breathe
the way a stone will fit

inch by inch into your mouth
guide the Earth safely down
to lay your fingers on

– you sift for leaks you can use
over and over, facing you
the louder the better.

D176

In the cold you blow on it
give it branches then roots
spreading out to pull you closer

– it's hopeless! this wooden bowl
stays empty, is watered
with whispers while dirt everywhere

goes on lifting as the endless thirst
that makes all wood human
hunted down the way you say goodbye

with a cry that's not a song anymore
not overhead though the bowl
is just for show, a little something

where nothing keeps its hold
on cradlesong – you lower it
till it disappears and you drink.

D177

Inside this glove its fleece
pressing against the ground
keeps it warm even in the daytime

– what's left for a pillow
touches her cheek the way your hand
reaches slowly across

though it's no longer needed
will work for nothing
just to rest as a quiet mound

giving birth and the snow
is used to it, covers her
with a makeshift lullaby

that lifts the dirt
for your arm going nowhere
then shoulder to shoulder.

D178

Once you reach the window in back
the chair pretends to be in place
circles lower and lower

though it's you who can't keep up
and the rag, sometimes alone
sometimes holding on

– you don't open the canopy
afraid a breeze will come too close
lift the shade, take what's left

room by sunlit room – the rag
already wiping your cheek
smelling from smoke and inches.

D179

Wherever the nurse touches you
more gauze is needed
though the shoreline stretches out

the way your blood here to there
drifts off course, not remembering
why the sea motions not to move

let your arm float on the few drops
still beating – you are wrapped
in salt, close to being buried

absorbed by a sharp rock
and what feels like rain
is the handful that has taken so long.

D180

And though your shadow still broods
the camera is used to not knowing
how near you are, following

aimless and alongside a crater
that is neither the center
nor the sky your eye remembers

is already shut, measuring
what comes out, what didn't
– you don't have to group anything

or anymore – there's no film
it's missing, stars are missing
today is missing, the ground is missing.

D181

Head-on and the shield curves in
till the wind is powerless
– you can see through and lift

becomes possible though the battle
has no name, just this map
wingtip to wingtip, unfolded

heated by some hillside
beating under the hood, working
the thermals – you smell smoke

but no one is listening
no one will get in the car with you
or along where this road

used to turn, then for a few minutes
didn't move – you don't touch the map
you don't need the room.

D182

Helpless on the ground this dirt
is already salt, then darkness
though your mouth belongs

the way each winter your shadow
thaws as the flower
that no longer talks in the open

or wanders off to become the scent
that hides in your heart
and melting candles – dirt

is useless here – cold
is your shadow now, buried
in the darkness moving across

– you can barely hear the cries
watching over you, covering
this unbearable Earth.

D183

Disguised as mountainside
– all wing though the sky
can't let go and all evening

updraft – the sun thins out
becomes red then black
dead on the ground, choked

as if every climb is made from dirt
keeps its hold till the air
takes root and you drift

without moving or water
– you hound this darkness
by mining it arm over arm

and around each stone
your arms held in
picking up speed – the sun

dangling from your teeth
and the distance
that has forgotten how.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Simon Perchik, an attorney, was born 1923 in Paterson, NJ and educated at New York University (BA English, LLB Law). His poems have appeared in various literary journals including *Partisan Review*, *Poetry*, *The Nation* and *The New Yorker*. His books are:

The Elizabeth Press: I Counted Only April (1964); Twenty Years Of Hands (1966); Which Hand Holds The Brother (1969); Hands You Are Secretly Wearing (1972); Both Hands Screaming (1975); and The Club Fits Either Hand (1979).

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Jeff Wall, "After Invisible Man by Ralph Ellison, the Prologue 1999-2000."