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The poems collected here follow the implications of death, fears of failure and the hard cliff of existential doubt using the backdrop of relationships and nature.

WATER, LEAVE ME AS SALT

by

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Approved by

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APPROVAL PAGE

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
WHETHER I WOULD TURN AROUND.....	1
AUTUMN READYING IN FIVE PARTS.....	3
I. ....	3
II. DIRTY FISH POND I DISCOVERED IN MY BACKYARD .....	4
III. AFTER DISCOVERING A NEW SECTION OF MY YARD .....	5
IV. TO WHAT MAY HAVE ONCE BEEN A POSSUM ON THE WAY HOME.....	6
V. MY FIRST NORTH CAROLINA AUTUMN STORM .....	7
THE IMPOSSIBLE .....	8
WHEN SLEEP COMES SLOW.....	10
HAVING TAKEN ALL DAY REACHING THE SUMMIT I CONSIDER THE WAYS DOWN .....	11
SEVEN MONTHS AFTERWARD, THE WEEK BEFORE I MOVED .....	12
I'VE TRIED EVERYTHING BUT THE DRUGS WON'T PUT ME TO SLEEP.....	13
PLAYING TAG IN THE FIELD BEHIND THE HOUSE IN WHICH I GREW UP.....	15
RACCOONS.....	16
WAKING BEFORE THE ALARM .....	18
WHAT A HAWK IS TO THE GROUND .....	19
WISHING I HAD A SHORTER REFRACTORY PERIOD .....	21
I REMEMBER THAT OWL.....	22

I THOUGHT I'D ASK .....	24
CONVINCING MYSELF ABOUT NOT HAVING.....	26
WHAT IT TAKES TO DRIVE HOME THROUGH A FLORIDA SUMMER STORM .....	28
FEWER DAYS BEFORE SUMMER WINES.....	29
BARBAROS .....	30
BEING THAT CREEP IN THE FIELD.....	31
THE FINAL TIME WE DRANK TOGETHER.....	32
AFTER ALMOST CHOOSING THE SCENIC ROUTE .....	35
WHEN I THINK OF ALL THE HORROR IT WOULD BE TO BE AN ASTRONOMER, THE EARLIER ONES .....	36
CONCERNING DAYBREAK AND OTHER DESIRES .....	38
I WILL NOT LET YOU BE A CURSE.....	40
NOVEMBER, LATE AFTERNOON.....	41
I, TOO, FOLLOW THE WAY OUT TO SEA.....	43

## WHETHER I WOULD TURN AROUND

Day-worn, half-drunk,  
Paddleboating into Alligator Harbor,  
Torn fiberglass itches my left arm.  
The tide works against  
Me no matter which way I turn.  
I make for the exact center

Of the harbor, legs groaning  
The pedals, fat slick metal  
Swirling the racket in water.  
I try to wear myself out.  
Returning home  
I turn to see how far I've come,

Flashes of light agitate the water,  
Bioluminescence throbbing with  
The low pump of the paddlewheel.  
Rich blue thrumming  
Then sinking, sudden  
For its silence. I am reminded

Of galaxies colliding lightyears away  
Filtered and enhanced through telescopes,  
Like rare glass breaking.

The light is jigsaw, beyond the water  
Sounds are far off, the tide slows down.  
I cannot mark the violence between body and dark

Where one heat rubs another,  
Or how far the tide would drag me,  
How heavy is its deepening,



Whether it would let me go  
And head homeward,  
Or whether I would turn around the boat.

## AUTUMN READYING IN FIVE PARTS

### I.

Wet wood finally burns down,  
Smoke, aromatic now, sifts  
To the dimming tree tops. I hope  
To see a bat or a late bird  
Tire across the aluminum sky,  
Observe a small fire oranging  
As a returning hawk would—  
The bowl of bushes around my clearing,  
The warning blare in the updraft  
That bellies up, as if danger and destruction  
Were my only fixation.  
Here warmth has an interior and  
Altitude has only effort.

II.

DIRTY FISH POND I DISCOVERED IN MY BACKYARD

Spiderwork of a discarded trampoline frame  
Half submerged I pull it leg by leg out  
Clearing steel from the aperture  
While up from ambiguous green  
A bright orange goldfish, then two, then more blimp,  
The pond small, urgent.

### III.

#### AFTER DISCOVERING A NEW SECTION OF MY YARD

To smoke out the termites  
I find in the forgotten woodpile  
I set to quick burn the wood,  
Smoke a buzz then a swell.  
The termites in their pulp  
Shuffle through warming  
Cards of woodgrain,  
Huffing cells reeking  
Of cold nights while,  
Wet popping, the fire slowly grows.  
I count the logs left  
Letting the fire dwindle down.

IV.

TO WHAT MAY HAVE ONCE BEEN A POSSUM ON THE WAY HOME

A brown sleight of fur  
Looking like a plastered mob of  
Finding a way to a warm den,  
Or softening tufts  
Of red shock and oily rest.  
So dependent this obtuse roll of curb,  
This dubious edge of grass safe green  
Gibe all earthly sweet,  
Like roots gone wrong  
Into a sewer, or the base  
Stink of efforts to cross the circus.  
Bone and meal swamping  
This idiot adrenaline dwindling, oxygen  
Dense in the corners and burping  
A blue dome above.

V.

MY FIRST NORTH CAROLINA AUTUMN STORM

The dogs air-raid the rainy night  
Then fungal their movements slow when I call  
Into the dark. I cannot tell if it is their return  
I hear or animal-breath wind wheedling  
Top down from the trees.  
Voice is violence  
And the rain baits the trees.  
I wonder if the storm were not to return  
If I became feral out here,  
Who would be the roar in the hunter's blood?

## THE IMPOSSIBLE

There was a merry-go-round in the neighborhood park  
Where my mother grew up, Johnson City, New York,  
The park was bigger then,

The field not so far from the playground  
To the pavilion, the number of trees was greater then  
But the carousel was grand,

The deep rows all a horde of wood,  
Brass a rich lacquer waiting for warmth,  
Pine and oak too bold to be glib.

The boom each wood horse made in circuit  
So heavy I wanted to fill it with myself, wanted to carry it  
Lagging around the interior of the pavilion with indigo thrum.

It was late, time for only one ride, so I had better make it good.  
They were all horses, I know, but I walked halfway around  
Until I had found the correct horse.

The whole edifice cranked with the start of the motor  
While there was a pause before the horses began to move.  
That horse could have gone faster, could have built more strength,

But I clung to the brass, not trusting its smoothness.  
The horse strumming so low it could have thrown me,  
Somewhere I had learned to tighten my knees,

Squeeze into a knot with my whole body,  
Even if the spinning was firm at the center  
I had not yet the ache to fly apart,

Then I did not think of needing grease  
Where the machine seemed slowest, of the stories imported to  
Fix the well-handled lumber or growing beyond the need to choose.

It did not do to look too close at the art,  
Revitalized color of a later repainting  
    Like practiced words learned in an older mouth,  
    Like my riding of it then was small.



## WHEN SLEEP COMES SLOW

I remain outside our house counting  
The dark flanks of clouds bellying across  
The sky like horses in the nighttime pasture  
I spent camping with friends.  
I went beyond the horse pasture fence once,  
Stood where the sky seemed biggest,  
Waited for a presence larger than mine to huddle in,  
Horses, un-nickering, with their hot-breath arrival.  
I pushed against that firm horseflesh,  
Moved them not with my strength  
Until the whole herd turned and,  
As if one motion, disappeared.

HAVING TAKEN ALL DAY REACHING THE SUMMIT I CONSIDER THE WAYS  
DOWN

I thief in these brown needles  
On the bulb of granite cliff-face  
Stomached up from the gun of the long valley  
I walked up; this late summer day  
Is thickening like old turpentine.  
I feel the boiled sediments in my muscles,  
Can smell the purpling esters that woods  
Release as answer in dark soil:  
I am drunk in the body-gully,  
The pines have brewed their alcohol in me,  
I am no longer salient,  
All the green I can speak  
Turns useless at the end of the day:  
The violet rush will disperse  
Electric and invariable.  
The mosaic schism that makes a day  
Has begun collecting, lagging—  
The cartridge of the land rolls sourceward  
While I taste of spent metal,  
Search-rough and instable,  
The somewhere deepening delta  
Cuts through my barrel-jut return.  
Beyond the further ridge are  
Dim pines and stones enough,  
Below me is the path back,  
The body-valley haste through the low ground.  
Sometime before the east a cooking fire burns.

SEVEN MONTHS AFTERWARD, THE WEEK BEFORE I MOVED

The backyard has become too hot,  
To the side of the house the figs ripen,  
Flaked terracotta scent wets the ultraviolet;  
This Florida day has become one prolonged temper.  
I wait for the afternoon storm to come, to pass,  
While just beneath the lead-banked bellow  
Of a Gulf cloud a seagull shrills further  
Inland, a tree frog croaks a late warning  
Of bodies seeking the end of their heat,  
The first cool breeze loosens  
A pine branch, crackles down through the trees;  
So still I can sense the thunder even before it passes.  
I should have found more ways to not fail you.

I'VE TRIED EVERYTHING BUT THE DRUGS WON'T PUT ME TO SLEEP

The drunken ones uncage.

Spines cut into turnstiles the in and out in and out wear of

Animal and human laws echoing circadian hollow have become boring.

The strategy escape of crow-wing mornings,

The tar needs of motives has lost its easy pleasure,

I need to stop with the late-night conversations;

I'm filled enough with wanting

Like the feathers flowing out of the gutter pipe

From the dead bird I could not reach

With the rake from the ladder,

Its unfinished smell venting into the bedroom because

The roof was not the hard-heart horizon because

The sky would only make itself known

As phosphine in the eye

While the ceiling sheetrock dusts the bedcovers,

Sinks in post-coital retrograde.

I wish I could say there was more to memory,

More than bodies shoving for more than a time

Behind the oyster dive bar on a pile of shells before they are made chalk

Or a too cold too dry couch, a discussion

*Where were we when or some dumb why gone too*

*Long*, how to summer through it all,

That any day now,

That the AC is an argument,

Inconsequential as the dent I beat in my car door on  
Some point I cannot remember,  
The sober spring of clearing a yard or recovering from the beach,  
*Don't settle, don't settle.*

Addition is a soft cloth, almost, without a hole  
Without filling up clever or necessary  
When I needed a walk to the park  
To sober enough for the drive home, to lessen enough

For the next logical step in this conversation for  
What we can say for answers  
In the uncut grass that seems to end every night  
And every goddamn momentum

Oh shut up about the parties missed,  
Should have talked, should have said more than could,  
Frankly split open the beer can tab need of street-corner  
Stopping like a murder of fluttering organs

All clamoring next in hot saunter:  
2 a.m.: Garbled like an east of trammeled crows.  
Tomorrow will be no different,  
Thief for the pleasure and the practice,

The taste of too late beer,  
After-thirst quitting outbound like gut projectile,  
Like I will give for being.  
Hope was a noun before it ever became a verb.

PLAYING TAG IN THE FIELD BEHIND THE HOUSE IN WHICH I GREW UP

Staccato with insect dare,  
Angles shrill to sudden game those muggy  
Mosquito-swatting, soggy-ankle nights,  
We were all carapace,  
A crisis aimed past each other.  
We knew each split-boned sound

No shadow stretched longer,  
Ribbed in the magnetics of our oh-so-then.  
We were fireproof,  
In our late-rain grass-blade volume.  
All hot limbs roundabout and cinematic.  
Too soon we played to win,

Exposed in that parliament of neighborhood  
Clued by fences we didn't own,  
Ours against the suburban expiration,  
All lead in the blood and the brain  
We, through sheer will, kept from logging.  
It was a time when consensus was an emergency.  
No parting should be without meaning.

## RACCOONS

When, in early night, while the dogs are out  
I am sure they hear or smell a raccoon,  
Probably a band of them, because  
Both dogs stop and look out into the  
Trees behind the house, their silhouettes long  
Between the smooth-lit grass and feral trees.  
I detect mushroom growth underneath the deck.

I follow the dogs inside, leaving behind the raccoons  
For raccoons have too much of damnation.  
They remind me of the odor of pent rain,  
How they begin in low, dark corners,  
As trundling clouds do, ponderous at night,  
Clouds like a pregnant bitch seeking  
To whelp in low bushes then abscond

Bumping and dragging her pups behind her,  
Leaving bloody membranes  
With ragged tallies of milk  
On which the raccoons will cast as if  
Those pink strikes were accounts of the stars  
Pinpricking in the bloat of their eyes.  
I have heard their voices: moist

Vowels a dull trowel in mud,  
Teeth snipping consonants off damp tree bark,  
The woody ritual of lumpy snarls,  
Their whinnies are the pale coal of galaxies,  
They purr like stray cats,  
A sound cinched and without compunction.  
But they remain.

In the soft palette hours before dawn  
I will wake up with a dog on the bed  
Whining and barking in his sleep.  
I will stand naked before the window  
Staring down the street, yellow light on one side,  
Trees on the other,

Looking out beyond

The smudged glow of the electric drag  
I will know there is no close,  
No stitch holding salvation in  
That we are stuck in our fine-grained orbits  
And that the hanging dark-sides of the earth  
Will never recover from the horizon.  
We cannot return.

The raccoons will come up beneath my window  
And see me, nothing in common with the trees  
That hold the sky away from them.  
They'll watch until the dogs wake and shoo them away.  
The raccoons will depart  
To the muzzle of the predawn—

And when they die the dogs will seek them  
Out under their trees, drag them out  
To roll the falling fur off  
And come panting triumphant  
With stocky bravado to wait, bearded in vaticide,  
For their bath.



## WAKING BEFORE THE ALARM

I would see you there, calm complexion,  
Like the morning when we walked  
The still-cold beach.  
You strode into the water,  
The pink light cut the dark  
Creases of your wet dress  
And, as if to surpass the ritual,  
You bent to scoop the sun into a shell,  
Polished the light in the shallows  
While the ocean broke and settled,  
Sinking your feet into the sand below the waterline.  
There was a time I could wash ache  
Out of my hair like sea salt.

Some nights I stand alone outside weighing down  
The constellations by naming them,  
Counting beyond my ability,  
And if I could I would unbelieve God,  
Crack the reliquary of the stars  
To release us both from the weight of our gumption.  
You will come out and find me then,  
Lead me back indoors and undress me  
Before falling asleep.  
And in the quiet I sink low and clatter.

If only I could capture your yearning, bottle gravity  
The way children catch insects  
When late sunsets drop like sweat onto lips,  
If only all days could end in silence and fire.

## WHAT A HAWK IS TO THE GROUND

In the neighbor's little-used batting cage  
A red-tailed hawk struggles in the netting,  
Lichen-celled hunker all wings and weltering fear

Only not fear but a determined grouching.  
I walk to the fence, watch its wings batter  
Tighter and tighter in nylon

Each cycle of muscle stretches the net  
Almost to breaking. The hawk  
Knows I am here, though far,

Resting only to more frantically resume.  
The neighbors are gone, though only for a short time,  
And the night animals will eat the hawk

So I climb the fence,  
Make the long way around  
To determine if it needs my help.

Before it realizes my approach  
I can tell its leg is caught,  
Not a vital body part perhaps though

The leg has no interest in being left.  
Standing feet away I realize  
The only way the hawk will

Be freed is if I do it.  
But I do not want to.

It stands at an improbable angle,  
Feathers smoothing down,  
Net limp while it watches me at my creeping.

I stop, telling myself that to scare it will  
Break its bones, hand over to me claws and beak  
To seek my taming.

But its eyes, its neck and back are paused:  
I cannot tell where its wings and posture meet,  
I cannot tell which of us is idle.

I tell it what I must do but it has no  
Fury, no urgent concern, not even a glance—  
To acknowledge me would be to become itself tamed

A change comes over it all at once, as if the decision  
Had only to be waited on.  
It flies off, I watch its feathers turn into old iron in the sky

But the net is limp and tangled behind it.  
I walk to the net, there is an object dangling,  
As inessential as my presence there:  
The hawk's leg hanging.

## WISHING I HAD A SHORTER REFRACTORY PERIOD

She spoke. Breaking. Myself. Selling short.  
Turning. Bed creaked.  
I blued. She closed. Kept.  
Interior averted. Letting.  
Pick up speed. Blow  
Sound. Pace upends.  
Her mound. Mine. Spending  
Verbs for a time. Peace tightens. Our tongues  
Curling. Squeezed and bent.  
Resulting same. Name the quit. Hers. Mine.  
Quiet sin.  
Room uncoloring.  
Worn touch sweat. Her back. Absent.  
We won't. We bait. Waiting  
Insaned out. Motion made solid. Carved peaks.  
Roundness curbs. Between. Raw gap.  
Voices coppering.  
Fan on high. Light turned urgent.  
Door hinge other.  
Croaking open.  
Speech through a snail's shell.  
Cornering within within within.  
We're sleepless. Again  
Without liquid contact to fit the lowered spaces.  
All those positions cut irregular.  
We sprawl.  
Contours open.  
Space pooling. Now cooling.

## I REMEMBER THAT OWL

### I.

Brown and gray rush,  
Cool in the dark hunkering  
Before a wider curve  
Took her low beyond the high grass.  
I could smell her hunting.  
Then, I did not need to turn  
My head to see the owl's trajectory,  
The way she landed louder than she flew,  
I did not need to know whether  
She caught her prey  
To perceive the between-ness  
Of summer and autumn,  
Even if I remember the angle and  
How withdrawing from the wet grass  
Was more than seeking  
A place to dry my feet.  
Later I would stay inside during  
Thunderstorms, in awe of the height  
The trees had above my house  
And when the fold of dirty clothes worn  
Days on end, the bareness of arms and excuses  
To spend outside, was life patterned  
And a borrowed mob.  
I remember the owl's appearance,  
Impossible as it flared away.

## II.

She sounds like the rainfall,  
She moves like the rainfall,  
Like so much taste in chill,  
Like the day after the first snow melts.

I want to be smoothed  
By the flow, bullied open  
By its long care,  
Like all the seasons rupturing  
At once to their edges.  
I wish I could still feel the cramps  
From being static or the hot-backed flutter  
Of lightning coming from the south.

## III.

That was when witness turned predator:  
The monochrome explosion of feathers over time and  
The patterns of entering or leaving a mudroom  
Slick with soil, like the screeching close of the backdoor.  
And all the ways back inside.  
I recall the many night birds I've heard,  
Or how little time was spent accounting for  
Hungover hours.  
The storm-fact summer-limbed momentum  
Of the wrong owl  
Was more like wings spilling over, too much  
Action in the short shallow bowl of myself—  
That is the difference in what I've become.  
How silent was that first owl then in that field,  
How its passage made  
The field less flat, less bunched.

## I THOUGHT I'D ASK

The sun will set soon  
And the whipped pig clouds  
Run toward their dark barn.

It is comfortable here by the ocean  
Where the coming crabs  
Will soon eat the last of the light,

So why not stay here in this pocket of sand  
By the gut squeeze of the sea litter?  
It is warm, and full

And somewhat obscene  
But I assure you that time here will  
Retain its wet claw grit.

Shall we uncork  
All this nonsense  
Of sounds and suns and waves,

Admit wine cannot fill the stomach  
Even at dusk? That we are all salt affixed?  
Forget the glass arithmetic that led us here,

It will soon look as ordinary as ocean.  
I think we are meant to trust  
The artistry of it all,

To give ourselves to crystal and gloating.  
But I cannot trust the series.  
Watch the gull, it goes home

Out toward the whaling horizon,  
The water is its own low ground.  
Pretend there are names here,

Pretend you and I survive the debt intact,  
That beyond the edge there is never madness  
Nor the need to release

From life undiminished,  
Somewhere past all of this  
The birds, the sea and the sand all

Oblige a single point. But  
You and I are stuck with  
The remaining indulgence, stranded with

This weird and stretched beauty,  
And remember that, too often,  
Escaped heat does not settle back

Into the place it came from,  
That an instance of light does not always  
Hold at its origin.



## CONVINCING MYSELF ABOUT NOT HAVING

Having made the choice  
Between absence and the bowl of oranges  
On the kitchen table I swear I am doing fine,  
Sitting around the built-in seats  
Discussing responsibilities  
Without theft between the oddly exactly set dining set

And what I can move on from this table  
With the need to get out the door  
With something of the intact tools of conversation.  
Looking out the window here is not  
The pause we look for, the dining set clanks  
Too familiarly and the chairs never set flush with the table.

In the backwards nature of memory I can recall being  
Somewhat slower to cool,  
Having chosen the long way because it was scenic  
But going fast through it because  
I am continue to pass the signage for home-going  
In the detour of the empirical hereafter.

I recall being long and fat with the happy end,  
With the scripted clowder of urges that we had so anatomical,  
The loose hammock between the trees or in the field  
Where we tried to fuck in the sloe-eyed circle-pressed grass,  
That bodies persists now in bed  
Excepting, of course,

Sleep into the husky back of her head  
Is not easier.  
All I remember is her green friction voice,  
The sticky concourse between the two easiest  
Portions of language and sexy monosyllables,  
I have learned to vary the bone structure while standing motionless.

Having made myself a man, as much as I can,  
Having separated self from that akimbo jungle  
The waterlogged serrations that soften and graft  
The buttered meats.  
I guess I can say I am fine with  
The frying coitus of our sparking ends

Deadening a few hours  
Or that arguments low to stillness in their own water,  
That I in some way in somehow  
Without arcing,  
For having such unintended plateau,  
Have gotten lost.

## WHAT IT TAKES TO DRIVE HOME THROUGH A FLORIDA SUMMER STORM

She points out a dolphin to me,  
Says she wants to be reborn as a dolphin,  
I say, "I don't believe in reincarnation,

Or at least don't want to believe in it."  
I can tell that she sees my being a killjoy to be tiring—  
That home should be a water resting and a pressure

And every day should be a sunset over the ocean.  
But every act is in progress in the retelling.  
Surely as storm we end,

Must make ourselves so much more  
Than a moment caught over runny meat.  
"Looks like we may have to drive through that,"

She decides like a sound coming long over marshes.  
The sun's radiation is soaking into the water  
Lighting the silt in angles of brown and yellow,

Like fire through thick glass.  
Fish explode below, nipping at our dead skin.  
Every so often what I think is thunder interjects

Our chitchat just enough to give us pause,  
The ocean does not quite fill the horizon.  
I have started to think of the length of the drive home,

How storms never come back out to sea  
But stay inland and grow weak over us,  
How I, too, will return to salt.

## FEWER DAYS BEFORE SUMMER WINES

That her skin, that her hips, that her breasts  
Were overflow over everything:  
She is the milk that made the world—  
I want her milk into my skin.  
If I could eat sunshine off her,  
Wash in her glistening,  
If only I could claim her inside,  
But I am all outsides—  
The friction heat of fleshiness and  
Ecstasy of mud and stones that time against the wall.  
If only *only* were all I needed,  
Once, if only, to womb in *we* and contain.  
I expect any day now but I want neither of us to siphon:  
Give me, give me, oh just give me:  
She is honey before the bee.  
She is the round in the growing.  
She is the bottom of a bearing rich to turn, its harmony, its bellow.  
She is the opened dark in the hill, the glow that offers,  
The collision of colors' fluid rioting life,  
The interior that makes the seed wet.

## BARBAROS

I want a hut on a long-washed shore.  
The hibernating rocks,  
The sand squelching under cramped feet.  
I'll take some place on an old ocean edge  
Or like seaweed caught in a fjord's teeth,  
In a place grated by a seabed's sneeze.  
I want a place before noise,  
Before passion,  
Before witness snuck out with solitude.  
I want to wash in an iceberg's skim,  
To live by tidal trophies  
Bound up on silt-sucked banks.  
I wish to pause in a calendar of rough-faced stone  
Where there are no seabirds except offshore,  
Their cries arriving  
On the breakers between the rain.  
I will choose a home  
With a roof stuck in a sea-cliff mouth,  
I want some place on a turned-ankle peninsula  
Where hours will come in like dogs sniffing at dead things,  
Where moments will clatter out of  
Crab holes deep in sea mines,  
But not in mind,  
A place where amnesia draws in  
With asthma in its return.  
Give me haven where coast comes on itself,  
And idylls spring in pockmarked coquina.  
Give me a place beyond the mercy of an end,  
Beyond the redemption of a beginning,  
Where sand will comb my hair,  
Where salt shall wash my feet.

## BEING THAT CREEP IN THE FIELD

Was eerie, waiting like wanting to be in a meadow  
When in fact it was in an unclaimed yard behind a tennis court  
Where any passing witness could see it was sex,  
Or the desire for sex or the desire for sex and humid iron rolling around inside.  
Of thinking a place in a time is alone, is a strength and an isolation,  
That waiting until it was dark and free was nothing like  
Being globed and vital, only  
A curmudgeon between the enterprises of trees  
And tall grass and mud or soon to be mud.  
Come here like a newness recently roughed up,  
Like being damp from the knees down kept me lower, secure  
Before all the shitty decisions to get drunk here or stay sober with them,  
Should have said, "Bodies are the first source of absence,"  
Should have mentioned, "I do not do well in the presence of others,"  
Or, "There is no conclusion in waging a self,"  
Should have said something when you saw me.  
Just like staying in place, walking away should not have been easy.

## THE FINAL TIME WE DRANK TOGETHER

We are here together now,  
Pour some more so we can start  
A new area of discussion  
Or similar to new.

Let us give thanks, my friend,  
Here, with our drinks  
We can recite the differences  
Of what I have chosen  
And what you chose,  
Commune what is swollen

And what is emptied,  
In hubbub and intimacy,  
In hanging around a useless fireplace,  
And broken glass in trees  
And broken drywall that  
Dusts like a trailing conversation,  
The towing conversion  
Into something we want to be.

Another glass, my friend, another glass.  
Let us wool over the ringing in our ears,  
I cannot stand the ringing,  
The red iron gush  
Like standing too quickly  
Or not reacting soon enough,  
Shaking head to nag violently out the  
Sobering stones we hear together.

While we're at it  
We can dip our hair in our drinks  
And with cranial jerk  
Shake our images against the splatter-hued walls.

Open another bottle, another bottle,  
I wish my fill, to be overtop and scammed,  
There's no time for the empty ones.

Another hour with me, here together now,  
For sleep will come to us later  
Later than the later for one of us.  
Change the conversation now that we can.  
Tell the time again, tell it with no handsomeness,  
No ugliness while there remains  
Chill in our bottles, easy heat we can still discuss.  
We still can.  
Pass around without being  
The sick at the end of dizzy.  
Together we are here without organs,  
Without the wet heavy inside.

My friend, a toast or two,  
Before the dawn  
A shot, my friend, a shot for tomorrow  
And one again when it is here,  
Here we are, my friend,

To finish the fridge,  
One for me and one for you, one more  
There must be at least one more—  
It is too soon to be finished,  
My friend, too soon to be only here.

My friend, let us piss outside,  
We'll get some air,  
We'll pee our names on the trees,  
Side by side, we'll make them ours,  
My friend, we must make something ours.  
We don't have to go back inside,  
Let's not go back inside,  
Let us talk a bit longer  
My friend, just a point to make or two,  
My friend, not yet,  
It is not yet time for you to go.



My friend, I know you must  
But until then, until it is too late  
Let us lie here together in the grass,  
Pretend we can see the Milky Way,  
Pretend endless galaxies will exactly pinpoint  
This small spot until a hard stop colds us done,  
And wait it all out, my friend,  
And wait it all out.

## AFTER ALMOST CHOOSING THE SCENIC ROUTE

Dark highway to Greensboro  
Buzzing apocryphal, orange-blip salvo  
Pylons, concrete barricades droning  
Neat, the busy radio-drag  
Soft-shouldered and sentential. Home  
Short circuits in the road,  
This onward scrolling has turned  
Pelvic between the hills,  
The redshifted dispute voices  
Up through the chassis.  
A dialogue careens out  
Taillight quick, the oncoming  
Blaze incandescent and asphalt flat.

WHEN I THINK OF ALL THE HORROR IT WOULD BE TO BE AN  
ASTRONOMER, THE EARLIER ONES

Who wrote arcs of stories and names like nearly flattened iron or the tin and  
copper of hips and war tools and gods and men made gods and the sophomore weary of  
being not the earliest

generation of stargazers and knowing that stars do not follow monogamous paths,  
knowing that they are prickly, if not quiet, mentors because they all have the rabid  
inclusion of death and

hot blood, their passage being as bright as metal breaking without quite knowing yet that  
that shocking kerfuffle is where metal and being solid on a place with air to breathe is  
from.

It must be awful, having the first language to describe that stars are only bland  
light above, only a light like a broken ladder with one leg and a few rungs falling through  
the dark hole the

earth must have fallen through. Mystery was always an easy way out and then there were  
whole kingdoms of those who relied on it, and paid the bills on it and would make me  
govern them (in

the gentlest way) by it while I knew that to do this I'd have to stare breakingly at the lens  
of the night sky until words like "beauty" and "the heavens" became an indistinguishable  
dull mass. I

would want to climb into the cool orbit of the light and the dark, to grind down my origin  
in all that veteran passage in all that silver myth.

Maybe after years of remaining awake all night and finding light at the edges, like  
a tongue-rolling patina that no matter how much I spit out will not keep fussing its way  
back in, I would come to

believe that I am touching a continuum as real as I am on earth, that each star's explosion is motion connected, the framework of the trip-trapping world. Perhaps, like patchwork irregularly

stitched, the changing sky is a pocket open on one side and somewhere in the white moron sky of the day is something either all light or all dark, or maybe not either all light or all dark but

something exactly center to every delineation that could be called the "Deep Center," and I am a measure to it.

But to have been an astronomer that early it would have occurred to me that if the patterns decay and stars fail, even if beautifully, and that if epiphany comes around with irregular witness that will

Be later than others and later options. The problem is I would never know how "early" I was to those who would be after, that looking into something beyond the limits of focus is the meaning of being stuck in the

orphanage of the middle of nothing meaningful. Maybe the night's sky is supposed to connect and become solid, stars are meant to die, not alone but simultaneously and the only thing keeping them apart is the tricky grease of our ignorance.

Being one of those earlier astronomers would have been terrible, being enough past the tip of mystery but without the concrete of certainty to weigh me safe. To be *there* during *then* when the

astonishing was only a perception smaller, to know, as if by vague foregrounding like a shadow of a mountain (but not an actual mountain) that Will and Force were doomed to lose their

constellation, a curse that the true line that light takes is never quite perpendicular to the point I stand and all the means to reach and absorb all the history of heat and isolation were equidistant to the deep center.

## CONCERNING DAYBREAK AND OTHER DESIRES

The morning smells like a cold nail,  
Walking through the drying fog  
The air tastes like old bedside water.  
Away from the campsite

I could almost say I am alone.  
Bracken crumbles as I move through the undergrowth,  
The grass between the trees is a fluid of green.  
A red-tailed hawk interrupts the sky,

A woodpecker echoes wide and final.  
The squirrels will play in violence  
But now their movements are serious, all in angles.  
It is fresh clay making this morning cooler,

That makes me walk with an awake indifference.  
The pauses of the natural rhythms  
Alternates my walking as loud and normal.  
Maybe it is a little early for me

Or it is the pale sharpness of morning light  
But the light is a drawn circle on the ground,  
A cleanness a sawblade could carefully  
Key its teeth through. I cannot see the sky from this spot

But I could almost think this circle  
Is the castoff of a large body lumbering through a larger hub,  
If I didn't know better I would see dimension to the light,  
Would believe I had found the place where walking ends,

A plug in the earth's mantle—  
An invitation to fall through—  
A chance to drain out of the world—  
As someone with an entirety—

To turn my body into velocity  
To want to start everyday with promise.  
I need to hear a voice recalling me  
Before the perfect shape turns real.

When the sun rises above the trees  
And the earth has only its chalk  
That's when I'll know,  
My return echoing down the forest  
In yellow glow.

## I WILL NOT LET YOU BE A CURSE

When my son asks  
I will tell him nothing about  
The cold metallic heavy,  
The hard slug iron of the cranial seed  
And the blood-spoken burst.

I will not tell him  
Of absent caskets and cleaning crews,  
The letter I will never read,  
The insomniac debate that won't settle  
Or why you should now be red and I still love green.

He will not know of how I held him  
When I learned.  
I will not let him know of how rarely  
You and I shared a sober moment that last year  
Or of all that unloaded indifference  
In the steel-barreled nights that carved and wasted us.  
I cannot tell him when it all grew silent.

When my son asks  
I will not say that you taught me this.  
I will only tell him your name,  
About those early discussions  
Well into the night  
And that reversing words isn't a beginning.  
When he asks I will tell him  
About how drab death is now,  
How absent it is,  
How full of error.

NOVEMBER, LATE AFTERNOON

I hear hinge-creaking North Carolina winter  
In the trees as I walk home,  
The softening bark of my palms,  
Sting in my nose,  
Old-tool sunlight slanting,  
I taste wood-fire,  
I want to turn my lungs outside my body.

Told to rake leaves as a boy  
I would try for neat lines  
And one perfect mound,  
Comb over the ground  
Until the rake could not  
Scrape out the last leaves,  
And in that mass I could  
Calendar precisely my  
Burning muscles, smell the  
Careful heat gathering bodily in  
The leaf mound even after I'd finished with it.

There was a fire to the pile, a smoke in the labor,  
A need to build around the nucleus,  
To stop when only half-torn out  
Grass surrounds the mass.  
Even after I had finished I wanted to  
Know the center leaf, the mute  
Tine jamming the heap.  
I was energy between those leaves,  
And would have had the gumption to undo  
All that came afterward  
If only my tools were the right ones.  
I should have kept that pile intact forever.



Coming across such a mound today  
I stop quietly at its edge,  
Pick up a leaf,  
Place it in my mouth,  
Crunch it three slow times,  
And swallow.

## I, TOO, FOLLOW THE WAY OUT TO SEA

Skin is its own estuary,  
Flattening, compounded.

The curve of your upper arm  
Is the belly of a canoe.

Course by course,  
River by river,

Lead me out to sea,  
Leave me as salt

Dropping out of solution,  
The heavier of two waters

Caught below the denser boundary.  
There to be less than bounty,

Less than the kinder, inventive soils  
Beneath the bellying ache.