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Korai*(Caryatids on the Erechtheion)*

I am always falling in love
with women, real or imagined.
This time it's the photos
on the cover of a folder;
a gift from a friend
just returned from Greece.
Seen from behind, the caryatids,
their hair carefully braided,
pulled back, and tied,
their arms broken off
at the elbows or shoulders--
as if someone had been trying
to wrest their secrets from them--
they stand erect with mute grace and patience,
as they bear on their heads
the weight of the world,
like so many baskets
of ethereal laundry.

Tailspin Tommy

Make no apologies for not following their rules,
which are arbitrary, while you are not.
You turn the chair around,
get up to straighten the picture,
and wait for them to catch up.
They never will.
Meanwhile, in another dimension,
you pass through a door in a wall
where there was no wall before.
This is the world of Tailspin Tommy,
crouching in his leather cap next to a prayerwheel;
more like a large paper pinwheel
left by his adversary in a small canyon.
Not one to be hooked by serials,
you go away at the commercial,
and don't come back.
In the empty lot behind the house,
you fall asleep at the end of a game of hide and seek.
Everyone assumes you've gone home.
At supper time, when you don't appear,
your mother starts calling the neighbors;
the kids on the block to see if you are there
No one knows a thing.
Just before dark, more and more worried,
she goes out to search,
and finds you asleep against a tree,
your hands folded on your stomach,
the expression on your face
as if you're having the most pleasant of dreams.

Epithalamion

I've heard nasty stories
about you--
mostly to do with women,
and sense you've had something
to say about it,
but were too aloof to counter
specific allegations.
Now that you're dead,
and they've collected your poems,
I read them as guilty pleasures,
and search, though I pretend not to,
for your recondite explanations.

Eminent Domain

They created the lake by damming a stream.
The farmer who owned the valley
went off with the money to live in town.
Yet he still drives by the site
wishing he'd held out for more,
or never sold in the first place--
though it had not been presented as an option.
The signs left by The Army Corps of Engineers
detail restrictions on park use, next to explanations
for everything undertaken, including
photos of construction stages,
and a single black and white of the original homestead,
a wagon and hitched team out front.
One sign includes maps--
winding red, yellow, and green hiking trails
snaking up and down the hills around the lake,
like charts of the farmer's heart monitor.

High Lonesome

Think about the word *lonesome*--
few know how to use it well.
It's much more mysterious than *lonely*;
you have to have been there to understand it,
like Hank Williams or Jimmie Rogers.
Lonely you cure through distraction,
by walking down a street, entering
a crowded subway, making a phone call.
Lonesome seems a more permanent condition,
something like a landscape
that people can see right through you.
You have to be thin to be lonesome.
Lonesome is an ache.
Lonely can be cured by two aspirins
and a night in bed, by chicken soup.
Lonesome resists such easy solutions;
it can't be talked away.
You can make love and still be lonesome--
not so with lonely.
Lonesome is a long drive through the desert
alone in a red convertible,
whereas there's something pathetic about lonely,
as if, like boredom, you bring it upon yourself;
almost deserve it.
Lonesome leans in a doorway,
wearing a shirt with pearl snap-buttons,
and takes on an existential bent,
an aloof cool, a deliberate removal.
Lonely is Frank Sinatra.
James Dean is lonesome.

Bad Vacation

You text from the mangroves,
where you've paddled to escape
the two step-sisters
who smoke on the jetty,
hidden by the lighthouse,
then float on the beach,
where you had to walk out a mile
before the water finally
covered your breasts.
Sunburn, you tell me,
has trapped you in your skin,
like shrinkwrap.

Honorable Mention

He would have been the first to admit
to a general disregard.
The handful of ambiguous e-mails left behind
have been sent to those who still get paid
to figure such things out.
In the daily give and take, he inclined towards the take,
though, in the end, he had little to show for it.
While avoiding the corner bars, malls, and Facebook,
he conceded to a weakness for New York Times editorials
with morning coffee.
The battery cables to the teeth and balls,
left no external scars, yet he continued to maintain
that most of us don't ask enough from this life,
and simply go along.
His best friends, he complained, were bores.
One thought she could get through by keeping her head low,
yet already her speech was beginning to slow,
and she couldn't recall the simplest of things.
You just hoped to place or show, he admitted,
and if you stayed too long, the scenery would change,
the list of rules lengthen, and the voices you knew so well
would blur and all begin to sound the same.

My Fields Cry Out To Me

Over this long absence,
this furtive journey,
these endless stops
on the scenic highway,
they call to me and say
cultivate us, don't leave us baking
in the exceptional heat;
we lack your ministrations,
your tender touch.
We have no wish to revert
to bramble, weed,
thistle, and briar.

Night Songs

There comes a point each evening,
as I sit on the back steps, just **before dark**,
eating ice cream after dinner,
when, because everything has become so still,
I think I'm about to hear
the primordial hum beneath it all,
the soul of creation itself, still resonating.
I sense it's just at the farthest reach of my capability,
on the edge between the real and the imaginary,
and I concentrate and listen hard,
believing this is the night I'll catch it.
Yet, it slips away, and I stand up
and stow my duffle bag of patience
on the top bunk of the evening,
and decide to go up on deck,
singing to myself a few lines
from a song about missing the one I love.
It's already dark when I get there,
and I lean on the rail, and watch the moon rise,
its light crossing space and ocean,
my pond and the back pasture,
and I end up listening to the bullfrogs
play a slow game of ping pong
with their one-note, banjo-resonator voices.

The Blue Bed In Philadelphia

The blue bed in Philadelphia
remains empty for the summer.
A neighbor has agreed
to water the plants.
You say the goats where you are
roost in trees,
while each evening, a co-worker
swims back to the village from the dig--
a route more direct than the road
winding through brown hills.
Your roommate, 5' 9", 100 pounds,
picks at what she eats,
and talks in her sleep,
mumbling about cholesterol.
I request photos of these,
and any mythological creatures
you may encounter.

John Coltrane Street

You can hear the howls of tigers and monkeys
when traffic is slow on John Coltrane Street.
Across the bridge where college crews scull
along the Schuylkill below,
two woman loaded with packages
step off a trolley in the middle of Girard,
and make their way toward John Coltrane Street.
In the dark beneath the overhead commuter rail line,
rusty concrete and iron pillars have been painted
with the faces of wild animals,
some of which have escaped
to John Coltrane Street.
In Fairmount Park, the redwing blackbird ratchets,
the catbird sits, while the starling *whees*
with the sound of the cereal-box ring
you blew on as a kid, living on what
is now called John Coltrane Street

Rowing In Eden
(Prompton Lake)

No one around here
gets up this early--
except the few
remaining farmers;
lights on in their barns.
Roads deserted,
houses still dark,
even the birds remain asleep.
Knowing these hills by heart,
she drives alone.

Moon still up,
trees reflect upside down.
The only sound, her oars
breaking the mirror of the lake.
She faces backwards,
heading into deep water.

After every two laps,
of three-miles each,
she floats the blades,
lets the shell drift,
and sips water
while taking in
her surroundings.

The faint horizontal
at the top of the ridge
tells her there's less
than an hour till daybreak.

(continued)

(Continued from page one. No stanza break)

Setting the skulls again,
she sits upright
to resume concentration—

recovery, catch, drive, release--
as close to one motion
as she can make it.

The rattle of the first
fisherman's trailer,
the glint of sun off a metal hull.
She knows the signs,
understands the demarcation,
and easing from the middle channel,
glides quietly into shore.

The Perils of Archeology

The flies bite at the archeological site,
while the audience for *Medea* in the ruins
gets siphoned off by the World Cup
projected on a sheet across the plaza.
In this sailor's town of dumpsters in the alleys,
spiders in the wells,
where your room is too small,
and the public phone stands
at the corner of the one noisy intersection,
the dirt road in becomes the only road out.
Sex offenders prowl the pebble beach at night.
Just beneath the surface of the turquoise bay,
sea urchins lurk with poisonous quills.
Your only escape comes
when the motorbike traffic dies down,
and, though you're afraid to be out so late,
having taken time zones into consideration,
you make the call to your lover
and put a good face on it all.

The Palace At 3Am

is an empty place made of wood
stuck in the museum's corner.
Birds perch on landings separated
by the absence of staircases.
At the rear of the garden,
the full moon's entangled
in the branches of a Joshua tree.
Lost trains of thought,
clouds drift through keyholes
where lips beg to meet.
Without furniture or hangers,
silk dresses slip easily
from shoulders to hips.

Second Avenue

I had a friend named Gary
who died of AIDS,
long before it had a name.

He lived alone,
in the building next door,
the one with no address.

As I think of him now,
the night is cold,
and the moon shines through
the window of his empty room.

For years the building
has remained abandoned.
Yellow signs warn
that it's been scheduled
to be demolished.
I know it's useless
to try and sleep
the machinery of the dark
will keep me awake.

Weather Report

What does she know that we can only guess at?
The underside of the overhead vault,
burnished trim, frosted glass.
She lands every time, feet first, just across the gap,
hands, accomplished hips.
The map divides the stationary inner calm
from the downcast,
while on the main line out back this dawn,
a morning dove, talons reading wire,
emits elliptical, mournful hoots or whoos.
The difference engine hasn't been built yet
to interpret these signs.
We question the irony of her statements--
assumptions delivered from the mainland.
Down or upwind of all this excruciating possibility,
we cower beneath the stalled front,
hunched over, afraid of where next
the lightning strike will come from.

Notebook Entry

Try to register the innumerable shades of green
on the tree-covered hillside behind the house--
crosshatch of detail impenetrable to the eye.
Add the neighbor's pond covered in algae,
a score of birdsong,
and painstakingly convey the sensation
of breeze and sun upon skin.
Conjure the overwhelming scent
of vegetation left to its own devices,
then the tilt of the grey clothesline pole,
a rusted burn barrel,
one blue cart, and the mottled cat asleep
among rows of lettuce in the garden.

Summer Storm

Thunder ruminates over the hills behind the house;
the lightning is decisive.
Never get stuck in assumptions, you tell yourself,
as you run from the pasture to avoid getting struck--
and *it's all assumptions*.
Except for the rain, everything goes silent
while you sit by the window, in the floral-patterned chair,
and wader through the storm's distraction,
In the end, a smoke-like mist crosses the pond--
as if from a campfire you can't see,
Birds take up where they left off,
the bullfrogs return to their basso continuo,
and a faint blue begins to break
through the dark sky in the south east.
You turn off the lights, open the windows,
and go outside again to start the day over.

Shrine

They're paving the one road
out of town--
hours of delay for the lines of pilgrims
in campers and RVs.
The mornings here renowned
for their healing powers,
lunches are prepared by celebrity chefs,
and served on weekends by notable politicians.
The less talk with locals,
the brochure advises,
the more enjoyable will be your stay.
Follow safety precautions and keep to
the designated cleared and swept paths.
To the right are the sites of atrocities:
gang rapes, ethnic cleansing, and mass burials--
official relics are available at the gift shop.
In the areas to your left,
documented miracles have taken place.

Onondaga

Lights come on along the shore
where hotels and a renowned
amusement park once stood.
The lake dead, no fish for half a century;
the beach unrecognizable from its postcards.
Even the industry which caused it all is gone.
Yet, as we hold hands at the metal bow,
the radar antennae revolving slowly above us,
the water dark and noisome,
the stillness of the evening is positively charming.
In the cabin nearby, the impassive Captain
patiently answers the same old questions;
this is what he always wanted to do,
saved for, scrimped on the kids' educations for.
You go below to grab a sweater,
while I, still warm and missing you,
continue to watch the shore disappear
until only the lights remain.

Erie Canal

Appearing at supper time,
we rise in the lock,
an enemy sub in the center of town.
Locals on the grassy bank eye us suspiciously,
smoke cigarettes and drink beer from six packs,
while resting on elbows next to sullen fishing poles.
Their dogs and children run through the parking lot,
stumbling over empty plastic market bags,
fried chicken and pizza boxes.
Somewhere past the brochure buildings
painted in muted colors, as if in a model railroad layout,
instruments tune for a concert getting under way.
Tourist interlopers, we line the deck railing,
and stare back.

Not A Night To Hang Laundry

Half the night long
car crashes on the Interstate
keep me awake.
There's no reading to get past it.
When things quiet down,
the full moon shifts
and beams straight across my bed.
Even a sleeping mask won't help;
the light causes my skin to tingle.
Despite the cold,
I consider going out to hang laundry,
or downloading songs from the Internet.
I can't help thinking
how cruel people are.
They leave newborns in the alley,
and shoot each other in the face.
There's no hell to reward them.
When they're gone,
others will simply take their place.

Alex's Retreat

Last night, Alex stopped by,
whom I haven't seen in years,
and admitted that he's never been able
to get traction in this world.
He looks the worse for it.
Tired of jobs that don't fulfill,
he's decided to take early retirement.
Living on social security and VA benefits,
he'll paint, only paint--
all he's ever wanted to do.
He said he's come to understand
how little he needs;
how people just waste his time.
The older he gets, he told me,
the better he becomes at leaving things behind,
the way an army in retreat
discards weapons, helmets,
uniforms, dog tags,
everything down to underwear,
so as not to be identifiable
when taken by the enemy.

Smoker

Illuminated by a bare bulb,
the woman across the street
sits on her front porch,
like a saint in an alcove shrine,
smoking cigarettes at night.
Sometimes it's the only light on the block.
She coughs intermittently,
causing the folding metal chair,
to scrape and creak on the concrete,
and keeps a carton in the mailbox
affixed to the wall behind her.
She suffers under her own rule--
no cigarettes in the house.
I've seen her there in February
bundled up during record snowfalls,
butt held between mittened fingers,
exhalations visible,
cigarette smoke mixed
with brittle, tainted breath.

Bad Faith

You become tired of yourself,
but it's not game to quit.
The sales clerk says
the new tweed jacket,
with suede elbow patches,
makes you look good.
You decide you'll persist--
like trying to catch a cab in the rain--
though it takes longer each morning
to assemble the prosthesis--
everything swims in a vat of slow mo'.
You fall asleep in the movies,
dreaming the allure of Formica tabletops,
polished aluminum coffee machines,
men in overcoats unwrapping plastic pie slices.
Having read the papers,
you quickly drift from conversation.
Through it all, you retain
the sense of being used
by something you can't put your finger on,
which may not be so benevolent,
nor have your best interests at heart.

Gravity

Why do we stick to this earth?
At today's general health checkup,
the medical assistant, after asking my height,
then measuring me, says, *You are two inches
shorter than you think you are.*
I cry, *There must be some mistake.*
She measures again. Confirmed!
Two inches less than I've been for decades?
She shrugs. No explanation.
Reverse growth? This is unacceptable.
My pants are longer? I am shrinking?
Where did the inches go?
Then it hits me: bone compression, gravity--
an invisible battering ram,
not so benign after all,
it gradually pounds each of us earthwards.
No wonder the sky has seemed more distant lately,
trees higher, more majestic, the stars unreachable.
And, I must admit, recently I've stood at store counters,
seemingly childlike, on tip toe, proffering my money
longer than usual before being noticed.

She Complained About His Books

She complained about his books,
there were too many of them,
they were always in the way,
too hard to dust and put back,
arrange and take care of,
(most of which he did),
that the house was so taken up
with bookshelves
there were no places for visitors to sit--
as if he cared for visitors.
He never mentioned the purple knee-socks on her skinny legs; he grew
used to them, cooked his best recipes for her, did the dishes, bought her
books for Christmas and Valentine's.
She said, *Why do you always listen to music?*
I talk to you sometimes,
and can tell you are listening
to music in your head instead of to me.
He'd thought she knew it was an affliction,
his type of asthma, that music filled
the invisible oxygen tank he pulled around
on the unseen two-wheeled cart behind him,
that it enabled him get up each morning,
to face the self-delusion, pettiness,
the unbearable unhappiness
that he saw around him.
He didn't tell her any of this
because he knew it was too late.
She'd never forgiven him for the confession
that Ryabovich, the main character in Chekhov's *The Kiss*,
was more real to him than most people he'd ever met.

The Significance of Ephemera

You become lightheaded
waiting for the seasons to change.
Once you found all this isolation
desirable--
the white nights,
the space station overhead.

The Beauty of Xiaohe

Bird of spring,
buried in winter,
the desert loved you.
Perfect spectral
clay-colored skin.
Ski-slope nose, once broken.
Your red hair still combed,
delicate eyelashes intact.
Four thousand years,
the hot breath of sand wind
preserved you.

Haunt

Through this winter of half sleep,
dream disturbances persist.
One eye open to feed the fire,
lights off, you follow, cellar to attic,
cold trails, vapors,
transparent exhalations.
How long you watch
out the black window,
five miles of new snow,
lopsided, frozen lawn furniture,
last deer tracks almost gone.
In the neighbor's distant house,
mortgage-default abandoned,
a bedroom light
remains on all night.

Minding The Light

Squat, four-story tower,
Robbins Reef Light,
abutting the rockpiled reef--
Kill Van Kull corner
of New York Harbor.
Thirty years kept by Kate Walker
after husband died,
pneumonia, 1886.
Maintaining gears,
scraping glass for ice,
cranking the rotating lens
every three hours,
then rowing the boy and girl
to school on Staten Island,
she catnapped in daylight.
Four-feet nine, taking in stride
the more than fifty lives
fished from the bay,
she knew the call
of every ship in the harbor.
Preferring the water and the Light,
the elements—above all the quiet,
all her fears lay ashore--
streetcars, wagons, automobiles.
One trip to Manhattan,
she warily walked up Broadway,
as a nearby factory horn blasted.
The Richard B. Morse,
she cried out, inadvertently.
Long ago dismantled,
the ship sold for scrap,
the factory had purchased
the salvaged horn at auction.

The Second Decade of The 1st Century (For Bixby)

My neighbor of few words,
his back to me in the distance,
stands in his yard tending a fire--
piled winter brush
he spent the morning raking
into a circle.
First time I've seen him in months.
I know he's passed the winter
indoors,
watching the History Channel,
fuming over politics,
and how things in his country
no longer go
only the way of the white man.

The Undiscovered Country

Looking for a new place to live,
I am about to set out.
It is Spring, still muddy and wet,
but the temperature is predicted to rise.
No more ice in the corners of the eyes.
This morning I heard the first songbird,
persistent in the yard.
Unanswered, it gave up after an hour or so.
TV is filled with images of destruction--
people on rooftops carried downstream.
Reporters in helicopters wave to them,
but do little to help.
The government has shut down again;
only the politicians are getting paid.
I would go North but it is too cold;
South--everyone has done that already,
and it's crowded and vociferous.
The Japanese have resigned themselves
to living radioactively.
Decades ago (I don't know if it was a scam),
I put a down payment on a condo on the moon.
Still no movement on that yet.
I've heard there's an undiscovered country,
a place where you can start over.
I've purchased a map with GPS coordinates.
Though I realize it might be taking a chance,
I think I'll head in that direction.

These Late Eclipses

Seventeen degrees,
three stories up the lighthouse staircase.
Fragile moon, delicate as a bird's egg.
Two a.m. breeze. Bamboo chimes
rattle and clack a skeletal music.
Ever so slow, earth's shadow
casts a rust-red coat, a crepe-paper glow
across the full moon's surface.
Sitting on this narrow ledge,
in a kitchen chair,
I hear laughter, a man and woman,
talking low. I am not alone.
The voices carry across the clear air.
They could be miles away.
Again the bamboo rattles and clacks.
The calm stars--gleaming nailheads
fixed into a sky so black it's blue.
When I become too cold,
I go inside to peel an orange.

The Grain Elevators of Toledo

Gaping holes in their concrete,
stick in the mind,
the only features
in an abandoned landscape,
flat as a map
near where the river bends.
Behind the motel,
on the opposite bank,
diesels shunt boxcars,
keeping you awake
and watching out the window.
For hours in the dark,
a driver idles at the crossroads,
unable to decide
which direction to take.

Freight Train Through Tidal Marsh

Moonlight illuminates
the charcoal blue night.
Miles ahead,
three yellow diesels
tug this hundred boxcar train
along the raised bed--
earth and ballast.
Telephone poles askew
all lean to the same degree.

Black Friday

Unwilling to fill
the lapse in conversation,
on the upper east side,
the day after Thanksgiving,
we sit around the table,
determined not to reveal ourselves.
A helicopter hovers too near
the ungainly bridge,
as ships squeeze past
Paupers' Island.
Dull green-grey metal afternoon -
warm asphalt melts the snow
lingering on cars
and the grasses of the park -
Breaking the spell,
the downstairs neighbor
comes up for more wine.
Younger brother confides
the progress on his bagpipes;
cousin repeats the same old line
about hesitation before
the leap from faith,
while another bores
recounting his handicap.

A Road Of Red Ash

They left her at night
in an abandoned quarry
beyond the city limits--
endless stone staircases
leading nowhere.
Despite the rush of air,
the raptor's wings,
the knowledge that fear
attracts the stalker,
something sexual in the scent,
she followed the sound of her footsteps,
to find the way out.
As the sky lightened,
discarded truck tires in weeds,
and telephone poles all leaning
at the same angle,
appeared along a road of red ash.
People left a one-room house--
the women's makeup smeared and running;
the men carrying musical instruments.
She was thankful for anything familiar;
the lights still on in town.
It had always been her nightmare
to be awake when darkness turns to light--
the violation of some demarcation.
It took days to get back,
to sleep off the dream,
to wash out the memory
with endless cups of coffee.

Bluejays

All the fervid activity,
green and yellow,
of spring and summer
has left this season empty.
The birds have migrated.
The grass has stopped growing,
and the leaves have begun to turn.
Only the Jays remain.
Edgy, belligerent, heckling,
they'll stay all winter--
the spiked plumes of their helmets;
patrols of small centurions.
Their blues and grays will show up
like brilliant, misplaced flowers,
stark against the winter snow.

Treatment

The Cave Of The Yellow Dog

A family of Mongolian Nomads
disassembles their yurt.
They roll back sheepskin roof and walls,
remove wooden ceiling rods from center pole,
pack up thick rugs and painted chests,
a wood stove, and a ceramic Buddha.
A procedure perfected over millennia,
the dwelling comes apart as easy as a kit.
Taking to the grassland, everything in place,
(including a motorcycle), on six carts pulled by yaks--
the family is moving on.
You wonder where they have to migrate to.
A panel truck blasting political slogans from loudspeakers,
passes by on the cinderpath road.
Friendly-like, the family waves--
they could care less.
Earlier, the woman used her hand to drink from a stream;
the children played with dung.
The oldest daughter, seven years old,
galloped off to graze the sheep, but failed
to keep the mountain peak as reference--
the way her father had instructed.
She became lost in a wilderness of meadows,
one leading to another,
and eventually wandered into the settlement
of an old woman who could have been a witch,
or just an old woman—very old,
and healthy from never having been to a city,
never having eaten processed food,
read a book, or watched TV.
The woman fed her and told a story
about a yellow dog who lived in a cave
and might have been someone reincarnated--
until the mother arrived to bring her daughter home.
Later, the baby was nearly devoured by vultures,
but a white dog with black spots came to the rescue,
and was adopted into the family.

Song Of The New Bachelor

Full and white as soap,
taking forever to rise,
the moon entangles
in the branches of the Cypress tree
at the rear of the garden.
I keep the TV on, sound off,
to watch the weather.
Despite the call for rain,
I'll leave the laundry
on the line until morning.
Now that you have moved away,
each night before bed,
I apply your vanishing cream,
and glide from room to room
hands in my pockets,
my shoes echoing
on the bare floors.

After The Rain

In the pause,
after rain,
the smell
is the same
as on the first day
of Creation.
The sun
comes out,
fragile light,
shimmering,
in the damp air.

Take Your Family, For Example

Take your family, for example,
and mythologize them.
They are like any other family,
brothers and sisters,
a mother, father, or both.
Be specific and general at the same time.
A religion will give something
to work against,
a framework of symbols.
With all the flaws and accidents,
the mistakes everyone makes,
blow them up larger than life size'
Universalize them,
at the same time as you claim them
to be exclusively yours.
This is the way great tragedy is made.
Turn the idiosyncrasies, the particulars,
into literature, but don't belabor the points.
A death in the family always helps.

Antonioni's The Passenger

Jack Nicholson ends up alone
in a small hotel in southern Spain.
Late afternoon, he sleeps,
while a wooden ceiling fan
rotates above him.
Someone enters the room.
Using a silencer, he shoots
Jack Nicholson in the back of the head.
The camera moves away from the bed,
and out through a window,
where it pans slowly, full-circle,
taking in a boy rolling a metal hoop;
an old man strolling near the wall
of an empty bullring.
Then, someone is whistling.
Gradually, it becomes evening.
The camera turns toward the front of the hotel,
as the pastel lights of the sign over the entrance turn on.
The owner, with a heavy paunch and mustache,
comes out and stands on the front steps to smoke a cigarette.
He doesn't realize someone has just been killed
in one of his rooms.
The camera pulls back.
All you hear are the regular sounds of evening;
indistinct voices, people walking by on rocky dirt--
a car starts up and drives away.

The Bearer Of Small News

Next to my mailbox,
he holds up for inspection
the capsule of nitroglycerine
from his shirt pocket.

*Doctor told me to take this
at the onset of my next
heart attack.*

Up ahead the dog waits
in a soft spot of new grass.
Often, she just keeps going.
Except for the coldest days,
he walks each afternoon
up the long hill
to his daughter's house.
Sometimes, the dog arrives
hours earlier,
because the bearer of small news
has paused along the way,
to talk with the drivers of stopped cars,
or with those like me
who've come out of the house
to pick up the mail,
and find him bent over,
hands on his knees,
huffing.

Friday, June 10,2041

Despite the eager birds
that woke me too early,
I think I slept well.
Bad dreams had taken
the night off.
Yet, I could find only one shoe
and walked around in it
for hours.

The Way My Brother Lives

Hundreds of miles he drives alone,
to the house he is building in the woods,
and works each day for a week
insulating the place.
At night, eating Chinese
from a takeout eleven miles away,
he sits on a fold-up camp chair,
and reads *Zarathustra*
by battery-powered lamplight.
Back home, the washing machine
rattles through its cycles,
while he responds to e-mail.
A singer on the radio repeats:
*I beg you to forgive me
for something I've never done.*
That night he goes out,
to see the Space Station pass overhead--
*a distant, visible, star-like light,
moving southwest to northeast,*
according to the evening news.
But the sky clouds over
and it begins to rain.
Comfortable in the cab of his pickup,
he decides to wait anyway,
until the moon comes out--
by then it is too late.
Near dawn, a racket of crows
bickering in the neighbor's yard
forces him up early.
As he drives to work,
the moon persists,
pale, effaced coin,
visible in the morning heat.

Five Strings Only

She has stolen his guitar,
the one she just gave him.
Left with his old one,
five strings only, none attached,
he says he'll get *by--*
Play it slide.
He shaves his head
to crate a halo effect,
to give an aura
to this creature of endurance.
The new song talks
about a snake skin
found in the road,
near the desert gas station
where they met.
Even the rattles have left
their perfect impression.
Soon, all he remembers,
is a sloughed-off image,
dry and crinkled,
harmonics that ring and fade.