

1968



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Introduction

I was born in 1956, so I remember 1968, the year of student riots and so much more.

The Silent Majority showed up in 1969, one of Richard Nixon's fantasies that became more and more real as the decades rolled on, until the USA of today looks much like the USA of 1850.

From the Silent Majority to Jerry Falwell's "Moral Majority" of 1979, to an invasion of Washington, with the usual spillover to Canada, not much has changed during my lifetime.

Not much has changed since the Enlightenment, where those who think have fought to wrench humanity from the conspiracy theories that have kept the few in power since the dawn of time. The divine right of kings, the chosen people, you know, those conspiracy theories.

The first poem presented here was recently banned by Facebook, the first poem that I've ever had banned. I join some good company.

Such a lot of fun this life has been.

Kim Taylor, October 2022

Oscar got in touch

Oscar got in touch
I would like to pose for you
would that be all right

Of course, of course

I want to steal your techniques
I want to learn what you do
I'm a photographer myself

Of course, of course

I have prostate cancer
and only a short time to live
but I want to shoot my friends

Of course, of course

I'm gay, and my friends are gay
but I want to learn your tricks
Are you sure it's fine

~~

Street theatre

A chilly morning
but she danced
her garbage bag
of belongings
on the sidewalk
She danced
in a white tank top
beside her bag
free and uninhibited
She danced
and I watched
~~

Cafe Company

Earphones and computer
she sat at a high table
her legs out straight
on the other seat

She was reading something
on her smart phone
and as I sat down
around the corner
I admired her bare ankles
in her white sneakers

~~

The Long Walk

He felt terrible
and he didn't want
to feel terrible
but she was gone

He walked downtown
as he always did
but the walk was long
so very long
He didn't remember it
so very long

He sat and thought
dark thoughts
about what he had said
and what she had said
and she had gone

And he left the house
"Let her find it empty
if she comes back"
But as he walked
he wondered
will she come back?

~~

Quebec Street 1975

Shoe stores
Angies Pizza
Furniture stores
I don't remember what else
It was downtown

And the Palace theatre

That's what I remember
about old Quebec Street
before the mall was named
Old Quebec Street
after Eaton's died

~~

Where I Grew Up

The kitchen was warm
sometimes the only warm room
in the house it seemed
On winter mornings our mother
would put our clothes
in the oven to warm them

In that kitchen
was the wringer washer
open tub with agitator
and rollers to squeeze
the water falling back in
The latest convenience

Gramma would dry the cutlery
into the drawer
of the walnut cabinet
one piece at a time
squirting through the towel
to fall into its place

There was a toaster
you put in the bread
and when one side was done
you would open the flap
and the toast would flip
and you'd toast the other side

On Sundays Grampa would cook
lots of pancakes
and we kids would compete
to see how many we could eat
I ate a lot
I was a hungry kid

A huge pot
of stewing chicken
with a tight lid
and Gramma would make dumplings
spooning in the dough and saying
you mustn't look for ten minutes

~~

The Cancer in my Bones

Both my elbows are bruised
a bit of trouble
taking my blood
three days ago

They have discovered the hole
that is in my spine
has grown since last year
and tomorrow

I will get a phone call
from the radiation doctor
to discuss this hole

This rude thing
that insists on growing
while everything else
has stopped, politely

~~

When I Die

When I die
I very much hope
that somewhere
a child is born

Nothing mystical
No souls migrating
No luck transferred
Just a kid, being born

~~

Once Again in Europe

As cities and villages
are laid open to the foundations
like animals being disembowelled
in preparation for dinner

I grow less and less interested
in the politics of this generation
I was born in a sparsely peopled world
not long after thirty years of war
and I watched as technology
prosperity and a revolution in cereals
prompted a quadrupling of people

So many people of voting age
so few of them remember towns
that look like burned over forests
black hulls rising from black ground

And the politics of greed
of power derived from division
that caused those dead towns
has not changed
not in a hundred years

~~

At the Computer

The last warm day
before the air turns cold
and I should be outside
Perhaps I will go sit
and write with fountain pen
and clean white paper

Out in the warm, fresh air
before being shut up
in the century old house
with its dust
and it's empty walls
to let in the drafts

But that would mean
a retyping
a repetition of thoughts
spontaneity lost
as I read the black ink
as I listen to my thoughts
~~

Hearing and Seeing

A bird this morning
a Jay calling
and I knew it
But I never saw it
although I looked hard
where it cried "thief"
But I never saw it

I remember you
in brief photographic flashes
Your young face
your form, your grace
but I don't hear you
over these long years
no matter how hard I listen
I cannot hear you
~~

1968 Galaxy 500

As I walked to the stairs
leading up to the apartment
I was careful not to look
at the cars on the road

Fearful that blue car
would not be there
I chose not to see

As I opened the door
to our apartment
I put on a happy smile
and said "I'm home"
and indeed I was

But no answer came
she was not there
and my smile
faded
~~

Sauble Beach

As my children grew up
to be strong and tall
the amusement park rusted
and fell weakened to ruin

In all that time
and every time
that I passed
I thought I might
stop and take pictures

But I never did
and now it is gone
swept away in days
the ground bare and ready
for condominiums

~~

A Letter From the Past

The postman rattles
the lid of our box
and I had an urge
to go collect the mail

But before I rose
I remembered that now
no perhaps-letters
from distant girlfriends
would be waiting there

Only bills
and advertisements
and perhaps a notice
of a package somewhere else
Of letters
there will be none

~~

My Faraway Land

The sound of an airplane
low overhead
but I cannot see it
By trees and cloud
it is hidden from me

I shrug and look away
losing interest in the sight
losing interest in where
it might be going
I no longer care

Once I might have imagined
that I was on that flight
to some exotic location
anywhere but where I was
being exotic to me

But now the simple waking
in a warm bed
to the sound of breakfast-making
is exotic enough
to thrill me to my toes

Those toes no longer itching
to travel somewhere else
This place here
This place where I live

is a faraway land to me

~~

A Family Name

In my family history
so carefully compiled
by grandmother and mother
In that history
there was confusion
Two children
different birth dates
but the same name

Were they a generation apart
were they actually cousins
Oh, said my mother
as she found the death dates
The first only lived a month
The second got his name
Perhaps a comfort to the mother
Or perhaps a name un-wasted
A good, family name

~~

The Comfort of Shoes

Want and hunger
are what I remember
Replacement boots
for those outgrown
given as Christmas presents
Wet and frozen sneakers
being what was worn
until that joyous day

The lessons of childhood
are hard forgotten
and in my closet are shoes
barely held together
but perhaps I might want them
some time in the future

You see my shoe size is the same
as when I bought them
perhaps ten years before
and I take comfort in the sight
of several pairs of shoes
in my closet

~~

There Will Be Pain

I will not live forever
this the doctors have said
and I believe them

Each visit we have
they say, "Any pain"
and I say no

There will be pain
or they would not ask
but for now, for now

I will live forever
I am three years in
into forever

~~

Borrowing Time

Ice cream and balsamic
on a cold, Fall day
as I think about the sauna
that I've warmed up

Today the kids
invaded the coffee shop
twenty at least
all at once

Such a colourful display
such a lot of years
they owned, these kids
I wonder, could I?

No, I suppose not
So I'll finish the ice cream
somewhat sweet
somewhat tart
~~

Crash, Everyone is Gone

Would I have a better idea
of who has died
if I sent Christmas cards
to all I know

Perhaps I would be told
when I no longer have need
to send a card
and a line through a name

Or would I keep the list
in a computer file
where those lost
would be lost

~~

Baldwin Street, 1968

Those ice drawings
left on a windowpane
frozen crystals of water
over the cold glass

Frozen designs of breath
the combined moisture
of an entire family
written on cold glass

It takes a certain house
an old house
with an old heating system
to create such wonders

Jack frost writing on the windows
No more, no more
windows are double glazed
with warm air flowing over them
~~

Danish Modern, 1968

-Eunice

She rests forever
in a corner of my memory
her feet tucked up under
as she leans back

Covering half the couch
yet looking frail, and tiny

A cup of tea balanced
on the cushion
where it barely deflects
she weighed almost nothing

And those eyes
recently lifted from her book
looking at me with kindness
as I enter the room
and take my place in a chair

Someplace where I can watch her
as she bends her neck
and reads once more
her hair swinging to cover her face

~~

In Her Blue Car

What is it
this memory
that I know her again
as if she were here
the day before she left

"Will you come back"
I said
and she answered honestly
as she always did
"I don't know, we never know
do we?"

So I keep her here
in this memory
of the day before she left
and so she came back to me
or rather
she never left
~~

No Letter

She sent me a card
from wherever she was
I never quite knew where
and it said
Happy Birthday
and she signed it
Love Euni

I have kept that card
forty years now
it lies within reach
because of those two words
Love Euni

~~

When She Left

-Eunice

When she left
her plant remained
and I tried
I really tried
but my thumb
has never been green

She knew this
yet she left the plant
Was it a bit of magic
As the plant slowly died
so would my grief
that she had gone

Or was it to teach me
that with half-hearted care
a thing like our love
would wither away slowly
until all that was left
Dead and dry stalks

That plant remained for years
on my windowsill
like some winter bouquet
dried grass and bittersweet
as a memento
of the glory of spring and summer

~

We Don't Like It

We don't like it
they say
we don't want it
this way
and I, union man
that I am
say
Strike, withhold your hands
do not participate
in what you don't want

And the silence
slowly gives way
to a voice that says
We don't like it
we don't want it
this way
and I, union man
I walk away
~~

Who Will Remember

He was the last survivor
she was the last of her race

We love the last
even more than we love the first

All that middle ground
means someone else can care
someone else can remember
but with the very last one

~~

No More Time

And now
a week later
that bruise
on the inside of my elbow

As if I needed the reminder
that I am not a young man

Not the kid inside
looking in horror
at the bruise inside my elbow
and the wrinkled skin
on my arm
the age spotted parchment
on the back of my hand

Let me out, please
he cries
I have so much else
to do
All the things
I never got done
All the things
I thought I'd have more time

~~

October at the Cabin

Outside the cabin
we can hear the wind
and almost feel the heat
being swept from the logs

Inside we have both furnace
and fire place throwing heat
and we seem to be winning
so far

Almost 5pm
almost time for coffee
perhaps I will put the kettle on
and prepare the mix

~~

Window Coverings

Red squirrel darts
across the ground
under the window
as we fit the winter covering

Soon the mice will come
searching for holes
searching for food
for soap in a bad winter

Fly trapped between window
and cover
Maybe he will sleep
to come out buzzing in spring

~~

Cold Bed

Climbing into bed
cold, cold
there is a warm spot
just between my shoulders
Perhaps the cat
but no, the warm spot is gone
it was her arm
retreated to her side
and cold, cold
~~

Not Helpful

The vision of a river
trapped between concrete
in Kyoto, ten years ago

I was told my teachers
wanted to see me
but they were as surprised
as I was to hear that

Instead, I was dragged
in front of an official
to be told I can't do
what I had done
for twenty years before

The beginning
of the unwritten rules
The beginning
of the end

And I hope that my student
who took me there
under the pressure of a lie
understands, some day
the damage caused

~~

Miracle

Four billion years
I was dead
and then I was here

Twenty years later
Improbable miracle
I said hello to her
~~

The Labyrinth

Outside Wilmer
near the lake
we walked the labyrinth
thinking our own thoughts

I kept a steady pace
tried not to lose my balance
as I got closer to the centre
Mine, and the maze

Once there we gazed
on the things that were left
by those who came before

I felt no need
to look in my pocket
I had come with no goal
I would leave nothing

~~

Why Now

For months we knew each other
and one weekend
the camping trip

She was cold, and joined me
in my sleeping bag
Cramped, Cold,
I thought to myself

If we were heading here
why not last month
in a warm, wide bed
~~

Waiting

In the creek
beside the hoodoos
beside a bend
in the Kootney Highway
lie the same rocks
I looked at many years before

They have lain there
waiting for my return
I flipped one over
so they would know
I was there

~~

In a Cabin, Alone

I Don't stay in our cabin by myself so very often. The silence promotes naps, early nights and early days.

Falling Leaves

The falling leaves of Autumn
bring a special sadness
all their own

But you live deep
in a cedar bush
surely there are none

Come to the cabin
come see the brown
that falls to the deck

The cedars are preparing
for the winter snows
in their own sad way
~~

Alone

Alone,
the family drove off an hour ago
I have the place to myself
I've built a fire
and am making coffee

A big Thanksgiving lunch
so I'm having a can of clam chowder
for supper

Work on the book
work on the cabin
and some poetry
is in the cards

~~

Lorna of the Moon

I swore to her
by the moon's glow
and by a silver ring

I swore faith
and by the moon
by a silver ring
I married her

It did not last
a few years only
but I have sworn to no other
by the moon
or by silver

~~

She Wanted Him Back

She wanted him back
she performed the rites
sprinkled the oil
scattered the petals
and he came to her

I want you back
back to our home
back to our bed
I have called you back
to me

He nodded
it was fine with him
this return to the old life
he embraced her
and she felt his cold limbs

Did you miss me pet
He shook his head no
there is nothing to miss
under the ground
nothing to remember

~~

Scars

I look closely
at my index finger
the one where the doctor
burned off a wart

The smell of burning flesh
and the scar
That reminds me of the time
I cut out a planter's wart
on the bottom of my foot
Scalpels and tweezers

I knew a man once
who bit them off
and said
Be careful to spit
if they grow inside
they are very dangerous

Now it's liquid nitrogen
to burn off the sun damage
collected over a lifetime
on my poor bald scalp
No scars, I think
too bad
~~

Family Threads

My sweaters came
from my mother
and my grandmother
Worn by years
of girlfriends
owned now
by my daughter

She wore one today
my initials crocheted
over her left shoulder
Today my daughter
offered to knit me a hat
that included a scarf
Four generations

For yes
My lovers, my wives
have made things for me
the thread that runs
through families lies
in the knitting, the crochet
The sweaters handed down
~~

Twelve in 1969

Just too young
to make my way to Woodstock
to be invited to a commune
and live there
to meet Kerouac
out on the road
although I did my share
of hitchhiking

Just too young
to sit at the feet of Sartre
to be seduced by Anais Nin
to help Lee Miller
in her darkroom
But I spent my time
with chemicals and
the magic of a print

The streets of Guelph
good enough substitute
for Paris
Good enough
for a country boy
Freshly arrived in the city
~~

Hide, Son

Three years in a war
wounded deeply
a soldier's wife in Japan
a son abandoned
All of it reduced
to a cardboard box
behind his front door
Covered in dust

I often wished
the memories could be collected
put into a box
and forgotten behind the door
Each and every day
I could see the pain

What stories I could coax
a young son, so eager
to be proud of the old man
were horrifying
terrifying and one day
this wounded man said
If there's a war, hide

~~

I Never Met Her Parents

If I had only gone
to meet her parents
as my friends did
visiting her farm

If I had met her father
would he have spoken for me
would she have stayed
would I be passing the farm
down to my son

But she would never have flown
and I would never have known
the work, the life I have had
I would not be here
in a log cabin I helped build
thinking of might have
~~

The Sunday Decree

For most of a Sunday
CBC radio drifts
in the background
sometimes informative
sometimes simply there

But at a certain time
there is a shift
to the youth-friendly CBC
and they recap the scores
the top twenty
of their drive-time list

That is the time agreed
to turn off the radio
and find something else
This the Pamurai has decreed
and this I have done

In the silence
I wander out the door
onto a sunlit deck
I listen to the birds
Where I usually live
the chickadees say
chick a dee dee deee

But here, they don't relax
it is Dee Dee Dee
on one side of the drive
and Dee Dee Dee
from the other
Dee Dee Dee
Dee Dee Dee
~~

I See You

A friend I have never met
has written a tiny perfect story
to brighten my day
I wish I could share it
but it is not mine to share

So I will tell you simply
that it made me feel
as if I existed in the world
that someone sees me
That someone feels kindly
toward me

What better line
can anyone give to you
than the simple line
"I see you"

~~

The Fall

I Fell
I fell for a very long time
The rock wall
moving past
sometimes close
sometimes far away

When it was close
there might be a hand
an arm
a girl
Grabbing my hand
Trying to save me

But I was heavy
I was a big man
and none could stop
my endless fall

I still fall
but I am near the end
No more hands
I will die falling
Soon, I will stop falling

~~

His Chair

He sits in his chair
There are many chairs
but he uses this one
you can tell
by the way it is broken down
and has moulded itself
to him

The dishes are washed
a cup of tea beside him
a lap blanket over his legs

She found him this way
as if he was ready
as if he knew
and didn't want to make a fuss

The heat was turned off
He didn't know how long
it would take
before she found him

~~

Tell Me A Story

Tell me a story
she would say
and in the dark
under our blankets
I would start to talk

She would snuggle down
her head on my shoulder
her arm thrown across my chest
her leg entwined with mine
and I would start to talk

The stories were nonsense
mostly about mice with swords
or bears who have lost their tree
and have an itch on their back
but she would sigh
She would say,
Poke me with his sword
and
Scratch my back

I would tell the story
and she would grow quiet
and her breath would grow steady
and when I could hear her snore
like a kitten would purr
the story would softly end

~~

In a Book

Half asleep
sun in the windows
a fire in the stove
a book in my hand

I drift half asleep
and the book
falling to my lap
is where my mind goes

Characters stride and strut
as is their wont
and they talk to me
as we sit for a beer

~~

Coffee in a Lonely Cabin

There is coffee made
across the room
it has dripped into the pot
and I can go pour a cup

As I do, I refill the cone
and soon another cup
will be ready
That cup is for you

~~

Whose Room

So deep inside a book
he doesn't notice the day
as it slips by

The sun has come up
and gone down
and still he reads

Worlds within worlds
he looks up
not recognizing the room
~~

Isn't That The Point

He drifts up the stairs
to a higher floor
where the sun still spills
through a window

On the floor are weights
he chooses one
too heavy for his broken body
but isn't that the point

He lifts and as he lifts
he thinks I will feel this
tomorrow
But isn't that the point

~~

Convenience Store Woman

The customers drift through
the convenience store
as she imagines their lives

A business man
with a sly smile
must have a mistress

A kid, counting his change
from a poor family
all he wants is a Popsicle

That woman in a fur coat
with nothing underneath
has she been thrown out

The young boy
buying two pops
one for the new girl

And through these lives
our heroine moves
from here to forever
~~

Toward Elves

The moon has been out
almost the whole night
the last three nights
and I bet the bush
would be light enough
to walk through

But I haven't walked
a moonlit walk
between the cedar boughs
Quite aside from blindness
through unseen twigs
and the ankle breaking rocks
I would probably get lost

Moonlit nights
deep in the bush
are not warm and sunny strolls
they are dim shadows
twisting and turning
and luring you toward Elves
You don't want to meet Elves

~~

Another Beer

I sat across the table from her
in a cocktail bar
far from my home
I wondered who she was
and whether she would take me home
I bought another beer
and as it arrived
she said goodbye

At a long wooden bar
she sat next to me
and said hello
I answered, ordered another beer
although I was ready to leave
We talked for an hour
before her boy arrived

Deep in Northern Alberta
this waitress from Ottawa
said Giddy
and I, full of youth
and lacking sex for months
Wondered if this time
she would take me home
as I ordered another beer

~~

Hiding From Life

Hiding from life
when I met her
she hid under me
for many years
But eventually, as happens
she came out of hiding
she climbed out
from under me

I stood in our doorway
mine now
and waved goodbye
to my brave new woman
and hoped, if she needed
she would find someone else
to hide beneath

~~

Every Car That Slowed

More than anything else
as I was hitching
I wanted a woman to find me
and save me

To say, "Come with me
let's give it a try
it has to be better
than where you're going"

She never picked me up
and I got where I was going
without interruption
But every car that slowed

~~

In and Out of a Magic Wood

I once walked a magic wood
They told me it was magic
and I believed them

I laid my hand
on every tree
Looking for a nymph
a Dryad to take me in

To take me to another place
where I would not need
to wander through a wood
hoping to find a way
to another place

Touching every tree
and finding them solid
listening the whole time
and not hearing my name called

I turned around
walked home
but reached out again
to the trees along the path
In case a nymph
had changed her mind

~~

Older and Wiser

We walked through the town
to the harbour
and searched the shadows
but, being young
never found places
private enough

Later, many girls later
I would find a shadow
behind a tree
take down her pants
and she, all willing
would lift her leg

~~

Not Young

I wander down our lane
and head for a clearing
in the bush
There are dead trees
and we have no wood

But I have promised
not to cut trees
when by myself
I am not young
strong, immortal

As I think of my promise
to both my children
both of them texting
to check on me
I turn around
trees unharmed

and walk back
to make a coffee
To write some more
To do the thing I do now
Not young, not immortal

~~

Out of Bed

Not often
in the long decades
of my life
have I slept alone

Last night
I woke, as I do often
to an urgent bladder
and I was careful

But there was nobody
I could bounce and shift
as much as I wanted
Still, I was careful

No cold air
as I lifted the blankets
and as I came back
I swear I saw you underneath
~~

Winter Comes

How often have I looked
deeper into the bush
for the squirrel, or bird
who is rustling about

But each time I look
it is simply a leaf
coming down through the twigs
with a pinball sound

Even the cedar
are dropping their tips
getting ready for winter
rattling down rustling

And nothing I can do
will stop this noise
in the midst of the bush
I cannot stop this winter
~~

I Miss Her

I remember a night
where I couldn't sleep
a young girl across my chest
snoring into my ribcage
her arm thrown carelessly
across my waist
masses of hair
up my nose

It was certainly a sleepless night
until she snorflled and rolled over
and then I could sleep
a very disappointed sleep

~~

The First Sip

Wake and put on a shirt
against the cold
Put the kettle on
and finish dressing

Start the fire
that went out last night
then perform the ritual
of making coffee
A bit of oatmeal
in between pours
over jet black grounds

The mouth watering
at the imagined bitterness
of black coffee
Sit, eat the oatmeal
while watching it drip

Take the pills
and finally, pour a cup
and savour that first sip
black and bitter
as my heart

~~

Wake Up

The sky is rain-dull this morning
as I move about the place
sleepy-footed and blinking
I stumble from the bed
and try to wake enough

There is work to do
there is always work
and I try to wake enough
but cloud-grey skies
seem to get in my way

It's like pushing through surf
this waking up
like climbing a hill
like walking cross country
as I try to wake enough
~~

Frying Bacon

Frying bacon for lunch
I think of my grandfather
making pancakes on Sunday
He used a big lump of fat
the sort that made bacon
to grease the griddle
so that the pancakes
tasted of bacon

~~

Frying Bacon for Her

I thought it a rite of passage
to cook bacon naked
for the girl who was there
for the first time that morning

She would be concerned
she would say "careful"
and when I would jump back
shouting "I've burned my dick"
she would laugh

~~

The Lakeside Restaurant

Bacon and tomato for breakfast
and I'm a kid again
visiting the village restaurant
meeting my father there

I had a bacon and tomato
and pancakes
and the other men would laugh
"he's got a hollow leg"
while my father would smile

They called me "little Pete"
and I was happy
my belly was full

~~

Company Arrives

Is there anything better
than starting a leftover soup
and having someone else
say "That stuff would make
a great pasta"

The cans and leftovers go
back where they came from
and I say "That sounds great,
you'll cook it?"
Joyous day, even if raining, "Yes"
~~

My Magical Cabin

This place is magical
one night I put a bruised apple
onto the deck
and the next time I looked
it was gone, just like that

Now I'm afraid to go there
onto the deck
I walk over it quickly
to get to the shower
and just as quickly back

If you don't hear from me
for a week
come and look for me
Just stand on the deck
and wait, you'll find me
~~

The Downtown Mall

The downtown shopping mall
was a big thing
Everyone was heading out
to the suburban malls
so the downtown malls
were to save the towns

Ours was an Eaton's Mall
and they took a street
to build it
It was very exciting
and it got a lot of attention

But then the shoppers noticed
that parking was still a pain
you paid or you walked
quite a long way
and they went back again

To the suburban malls
where parking was free
even if you had to walk
quite a long way
It was a parking lot
and it didn't seem that far

And then Eatons went under
it must have been
the third generation
they always blow the money
and the downtown mall died
but later, the suburban malls too

Replaced by big box stores
where you could drive
from one to the other
none of this walking around inside
from one store to another
But wait, here's Walmart

You can get everything you want
just like Eatons
where you walk from one department
to another
pushing your shopping cart
Hooray!

~~

How To Make Coffee

When you make drip coffee
you can add more water
if the grounds are stuck
to the filter

But if the grounds have fallen
all to the bottom
you should not add water
even if you add more grounds
~~

Back to Bed

The middle of the night
a vague amount of light
to guide me back to bed
from my regular visit
to the toilet

There, as I lay down again
I looked across the bed
the blankets and sheet
the foothills, and the mountains
her creamy curves

From the faraway hills
of her leg
to the royal peaks
of her hip
and the sharp cliffs
of her shoulder

~~

Guelph

When I leave my town
and spend time in the bush
I catch the news from home
and each time, I wonder
if I live in a different place

A woman was just stabbed
in the back by another woman
and I wonder if it is the girl
who sits in front of the cafe
who was wandering in the street
thumping the cars going by

This has happened before
I go away, my town changes
but when I get back
it is the same as before
I wonder if the news
is from another place

~~

Port Stanley

I think, in my home town
they have finally solved the problem
There is a pier to the lighthouse
and the city kids come
and they walk out onto the pier
and they get knocked off
the waves being much more powerful
that they imagine, in their immortality

My father was a fireman
and he told me they would try
for about half an hour
just for the mothers
but the kid was dead
neck broken and drowned

Later, they put up a fence
with loads of signs saying
danger, don't go on the pier
and the kids would swing around
and the fishermen would swing around
and they all thought they were immortal

But now, every place in town
that will hold a car
is a pay for parking place
the town made lots of money
but I wonder, those who will pay
will they think "Disneyland"
and assume the pier is safe
Just another ride

You pay, you are safe, right?

~~

Salamanders on my Drive

On my drive is a spot
where the spring melt
and rains
make a small, no, a tiny pool
and in this leaf-lined pool
salamanders appear

They are brought by the rain
so I want to believe
like my great great thing
let's keep gender out of this
told me long ago
and I've put up a sign
that says "crocodile crossing"
in hopes that these creatures
will grow large

But by mid summer
this pool is gone
and I suspect the salamanders
are ready to combust
because that's what they do
they burst into flames
at least that's what my great great thing
told me long ago

~~

Presumptuous Poet

Having written poems
since grade eight
which would make me
oh, perhaps thirteen
I'm not too worried
about the process

I just read a poem
by a poet who is horrified
at being called a poet
and who writes
all about his process
and I thought "such a fuss"

I clean my toilets
but I'm not a sanitary engineer
not even a janitor
I wash the dishes
but I'm not a dishwasher
so why would I be a poet
if I write poetry

No, that's just being clever
I write poems
always have
more than fifty years now
but never once
did I think "I'm a poet"
I always thought
that would be presumptuous
Lovely word that

~~

Not the Banff Springs

I once soaked
in the Banff hot spring
the one now closed
because of rare snails
and I am terrified to think
that they will close my lane
if my salamanders are rare
so I never show anyone
the salamanders

We leave them alone
and they leave us alone
They don't know we exist
We don't stomp around in the pool
it's wet and cold and slippery
we leave it to the salamanders
and hope that nobody finds them
and declares them rare

It's not like thousands
will drop their bare asses
onto the leaves and say
what a relaxing soak
it's great, after a hard day
to just relax in this pool
~~

Fractal Stupid

It must be fractals
I mean, whole countries
act just like my redneck relatives
"as above, so below"
or something like that

I mean, whole countries
who act like they dropped out of school
because it was too hard
and complain forever more
that nobody wants to play with them

Even if they are jerks
who treat their wives like shit
and then say, "it wasn't me"
or "It's the way I was raised"
The rich ones are the worst

They have expensive toys
and love to show them off
and laugh at the poor kids
Then they wonder why
the chicks don't fall into their car

Too bad we can't just ignore a country
like we ignore people
although sometimes that's not good
The goofball down the road
and that country over there
might be armed and stupid
~~

All Things End

All things end
from a sniffing cold
to your life
and all the things you do
between being a "puking, mewling babe"
to an old, old man.

I am not sure if I can remember
anything that I've ended
jobs, organizations,
that I have not felt happier afterwards
Girls, now girls hurt
then and now

What can this mean
Perhaps love is important
and work, paid or free
is just work
and usually a pain in the ass
But a woman's ass
~~

Spike

My grandfather's dogs
were all named spike
When I was five
we got a dog
a lovely field spaniel
or perhaps just a mutt
and I said,
"Let's call him Poochie"

My grandfather laughed
and said,
"Let's call him Spike"
Spike it was
and some time
while I was in University
Spike was gone
~~

First University Job

I was a life model
at the University
my first job there
and perhaps my best

Show up
take off your clothes
hop on the platform
and pose

One teacher asked me
if I knew the discus pose
I said sure
having competed in discus

That was fine, she said
but not "The Discus Thrower"
and so we worked it out
and I thought

This is coming straight back down
onto this guy's head
But maybe a better pose
just don't throw the thing

~~

Was It Good Enough

How long have I been in charge
I asked Pam
Since the beginning
but how long is that
Maybe twenty five years, why
No particular reason

I ask her things like that
Was that a good class
Yes
Did it make sense
Yes

I asked Brenda not long ago
was I a good father
Yes
not absent too much
No
And I asked the kids
Why, they said

Just wanting to know
if I gave it my best
if I made a difference
if I didn't screw up
too much
~~

Another Season Gone

The bush is soaked
three days of rain
The cell signal is spotty
as if the rain
washes it from the sky

Once more I think
I've got to do something
about those damned decks
The boards are rotted at the ends
and slimy, oh so slippery
I slid and caught myself
coming from the shower

Today the shower has to come in
cold weather is coming
and the paint
must all go home
at least this year
I was less ambitious
and there's not as much
~~

1968

I found a book titled: “Call them Canadians”, a photo book with verse from the NFB, published in 1968. These are thoughts on that book and its photographs.

I have a lot of past, and not a lot of present or future, so my poetry tends to be of the past. This photo book was a delight to discover.

In 1968

In 1968 I was twelve
I lived in Tillsonburg
in my grandmother's house
and spent the school year
in Tillson Ave senior public
Now long gone

Today I found a book
in the thrift store
a photo book
from the NFB
from 1968
and I recognize everyone

The scientist with the bow tie
the foundry workers
covering their faces
against the heat
The girl with the kiss curls
The men in fedoras
and the kids in carriages
I know them all

~~

Here the old woman
from the church group
in front of Ruth and Naomi
holding her Union Jack
Serious down turned mouth

And here is the new generation
with her tousled hair
and her knit sweater
looking impish
with a half smile

I remember them both
one surely dead now
one perhaps alive
but old now
One happier than the other

~~

School Days

The integrated desks
one in front of the other
in lines
You couldn't move them
if you wanted to

The boys, all quiet
for fear of the strap
short hair
books open
watching teacher

On the back wall
a line of flat caps
all hung in a row
and I'm there
filed under T
in the back row

~~

With Her Old Man

She is four
riding a trike
and she's in the pool hall
with her old man
who is shooting a game
Her trike under the table
she's got her plaid skirt
and her oxfords
and she's posing nicely

The old man
cigarette in his mouth
ash about to drop
onto the felt
is lining up a shot
and all is well in the town
he's looking after her
~~

Saturday Bath

A galvanized tub
we called it tin
filled with water
and warmed with a kettle
was what we had
for a Saturday bath

The pecking order
was never changed
oldest first
girls before boys
and the last kid
I was that last kid
shivered a bit

~~

Doctor Bell

In Port Stanley
I remember Doctor Bell
climbing the stairs
to see me

I carry his name
Clinton
like many kids from that town
and I was feverish

He checked me over
declared I would live
and gave me a pill
"Its a placebo pill"

~~

In The Schoolyard

Some of the kids
were serious
they hardly smiled
and we knew
not to ask

~~

The Broken Arm

I was a brave boy
my arm broken
But there were films
there were rarely films
and so I watched
my arm carefully laid
across my desk

I asked the boy behind
not to kick my chair
because each time he did
my arm hurt
Eventually the teacher
wondered at the tears
and the talk

The principle drove me
to the hospital
and I told him a joke
"I was in a traffic jam
but I forgot the bread"

My mother was there
taking the x-rays
while the doctor pulled
to straighten the bones
She told me she winced
when he put his knee
on my small chest

~~

A Photograph

The blur
the dreaded blur
a hand moving
or even a head

I see those shots
black and white
and that tri-X grain
and I know I'm home

~~

Return for Refund

A pop bottle
found on the street
could be returned
by a couple of boys
for enough refund
to get four mojo
and a bubblegum
that would be split

The comic shared

~~

She Walked Past

Sitting in the window
of the coffee shop
I glanced up
when she glanced over

Just the barest touch of eyes
but she smiled
as she walked past
Not at me, but a memory of me

And I smiled too
at the memory of her
of her eyes
and the rest of her smile

~~

Street Portraits

Young boys awkward
arms around each other
giggling and embarrassed
posing for the camera

And young men
sharing a laugh
shoulder to shoulder
in a shoving match

And the proper women
unsmiling, serious
their "get it over with" eyes
waiting for the photo

~~

No Backwash

Once cans of pop
and of beer
needed a punch
to make a hole

If you were cool
you made one big
and one small
so you wouldn't spill

Or you punched two large
so you could share
without passing along
the cooties that lurked

~~

Is It Like This?

Oh the dandy shirts
and the mop-top hair
Young men proud
Young men posing

Hand on hip
comb in his pocket
that uncertain smile
Do men smile?

~~

School Uniform

The greasers
Oh the greasers
in 1968 they lived
the boys who dressed
like their dads

Some of us were jocks
and some just wanted
to disappear into the wall
to be left alone
to grow up

In three years
we'd all have long hair
and bellbottoms
"Are you a girl?"
~~

1968 Nude

A nude
probably her first
taken by Vittorio Fiorucci
Poster artist

So obviously Montreal
the brick buildings
out the window
and her french mouth
on the windowsill

Her french hair
her downcast eyes
looking
to the sidewalk below

Peeling paint
under relaxed hand
light just catching
loose strands on her neck
~~

Lorna in Lunenburg

We pulled mussels
off the rocks
in Lunenburg
and boiled them
in seawater
for our evening meal

As we sat beside the bikes
I ate steadily for the calories
And I thought of you
sprawled half off the couch
that shabby couch
reading the paper

Legs half off as well
your hair spilling down
toward the paper
as you read the news
Were you on the couch
Were you thinking of me
~~

Nobody Posed

Nobody posed
in 1968
the women would look
directly at you
and never coyly away
unless asked

The best shots
were simply taken
"Hey"
Click
So lovely, so natural
not like today

Not when everyone today
has their favourite poses
endlessly practised
in the selfie mode
of their phones

And nobody minded
a kid with a camera
"Did you just take my picture?"
"What are you going to do with that?"
No, just a click
and a smile
~~

Elgin Handle

Not ten years later
I was in a factory
slowly going crazy
making tool handles
making myself stoned
on solvents

What else could I do
what other work
until tobacco season
Every night in the bar
drinking until closing
and three hours sleep
~~

Mending the Nets

The old men outside
on a cool fall day
the promise of winter

The old men outside
on an upturned box
mending the nets
as they come off the reels

Dry enough, that cotton
and the holes being closed
bobbins moving in and out
knots being tied
string cut with a bite

~~

The Fisherman

He lost a finger
to a gill net
and the winch

Now he's getting old
and he's losing teeth
but no matter

He drinks his calories
every night in the bar
and in the morning
back on the boat

It's not the drink
that will kill me
it's the lake

~~

Wood and Steel

Wood and steel
shipping and farming
in 1968 there were boats
but no global industry
so we did for ourselves

Now the oil
is too expensive
Not the price
but the price we pay
in drought
and lost coastline

Maybe 1968
isn't so far away
Maybe we will need
to go there soon
To make our own
mend our own
grow our own
~~

Making Do

Cans and jars
and cellophane
to wrap the bread

Empty tobacco tins
for screws
Milk tins
for stools
Not much went to waste

Wooden boxes
doubled as shelves
Empty bottles
returned and refilled
Dumps places
to be mined

~~

A Student Life

Euchre in the back of the bus
Slap fights in the cafeteria
Lunch down the street
when there's a dollar
in your wallet

Sports after school
if Mom will get you
It wasn't a bad life
without the internet
without the smart phone
~~

A Photo of Eunice

A claw-foot iron tub
and a girl
covered in bubbles
smiling up at me

If you'd told me
that in ten years
I'd be looking at her
soaking and winking

Daring me to shoot
and I shooting
capturing our life
in a photograph

So very much life
so much happiness
so very far from 12
from 1968

~~

In the Shed, Working

A coal stove
in the middle of a shed
Walls stained black
with soot

The only colour
a calendar
with pinup girls
two months
and four years
out of date

Old men
in flat caps
and younger men
in ball caps
having lunch
with black stained hands

Kid
If you're done lunch
go bring in some coal
We'll need it soon
it's going to turn cold
~~

The Terrible Mirror

Oh terrible, terrible
the images of your youth
the promise of eternity
the frozen time

Terrible mirror
each and every mirror
with the image of today
when an old man gazes
upon the future
of that boy in the photograph

So very often
I would tell models
"do your nudes now
when you're young"
But now I wonder
was I being cruel

To see those images
of their youth
in the first, full bloom
to be seen much later
to be compared
with that terrible mirror
~~

Unproduced

Such secrets in a photo
taken where life is lived
such small stories
revealed in the corners

Here a girl
by a window
with a chicken
and a basket of eggs

And look
just behind her sleeve
she is holding the chicken
away from the window

Those stories alone
make the old photographs
in the age of 35mm
so very real, so alive

~~

Mom Goes to Work

A window painted shut
last washed
three years ago
but clear enough
to watch you go

Off to work
to feed us
You left me here
on my own
no place to go

The long hours
until you came back
were not happy hours
I tried to understand
but never did
~~

Metadata

What need of metadata
buried in a digital print
When we could look
and by the size of the grain
guess what f-stop was used
and as for time
Look for the blur

So very many years later
oh frabjous day
the shooting date
down there in the corner
ugly as sin
Turn it off
look on the back
of the print
~~

Sailor Pancho

Knives and anchors
sailor girls
and Betty Boop
Sailor Pancho will do it
and do it painlessly

Come in, come in
his work
is his best advertisement
come and see
for yourself
~~

Buckles to the Side

How long
was that a thing
To wear your buckle
to one side

I know mine was there
for many years
there was a reason
I'm sure there was

The buckles were so big
that they would scrape the skin
every time you sat down
and you'd have a rash

~~

Something Broken

I wanted that girl
that relationship
so badly
but something broken
inside me
never let me have
my side of it

They came
they tried
but the more they gave
the less I had
to give them back
So very long it took
to fix what was broken
~~

She Fit So Well

She fit so well
into that notch
between his shoulder
and his neck

So comfortable
she never wanted
to leave that place
where she was loved

She brushed her hair back
and never moved his
she loved the feel of it
across her cheek

~~

Influencers

Where once we knew
the lives of the saints
of the poets and
the heavenly composers

Now we know each day
each meaningless, social day
of those who are famous
for being famous

I try as best I can
not to know
what the influencer knows
Because I know
it's not real

They are not real
despite their wealth
despite their influence
they do not exist
in my world
~~

Do You Believe?

That I sang in the choir
of the Anglican church
did not mean I believed

Instead I believed
in the girl beside me

~~

You Get Two

If we're going to have kids
let's have six

She looked at me
for a very long time
and she set her hands
on her hips

You get two
~~

I Know Enough

You don't know me
you don't know my life
she said to me
And I agreed

But I knew
what the two of us knew
and I watched
as she told her life

I watched the threads
of two of us
The threads that went in
and came out again

I never asked
she never told
but oh my love
I know enough
~~

In Jail

Is it a mark
of rebellious shame
that I have never
been thrown in jail

About the closest
was the Ottawa hostel
which was an old jail
and I at an event

An Aikido seminar
where we poor students
drove up with a full car
and stayed in the hostel

Have I got that right
I hope so, it was long ago
and not all that notable
Go, fall down, sleep
~~

Car Rich, Food Poor

So many cars
in the laneways
of our neighbours
and on the road
in front of our hous

On the 401
the Queen Elisabeth Way
there are high occupancy lanes
which require two people
two
in a car
All the rest are only one

And it is supposed to be
a war in Europe
that has caused a shortage
of automobiles
A chip shortage
a labour shortage
some shortage

But with inflation
giving it all a price hike
Gas being too much
it doesn't seem too much
there is a shortage of cars
so people must be trading
food for gasoline

I wonder how expensive
it has to be
before I see fewer cars
in the driveways
of my neighbours

~~

The Relationship

As I drove away
she would stand outside
and wave at me
I could see her
in the rearview mirror

Then one day
I saw her drop her hand
and turn to go back inside
as I drove away

And finally one day
I looked in that mirror
and she was already gone
into the house

~~

Mrs White in 1968

I remember Mrs White
she would roll her tongue
against her teeth
like a third lip

She would take her pointer
and slam it on the desk
in front of whoever made her mad
and one day it splintered

Such a horrible woman
I thought
until the day she invited me
and another boy in class
To come to her farm
to stack the hay
and so we did

and afterward
we lay on the bales
we slid down
from the top of the barn
to the floor
pants full of hay

She fed us
gave us pop and cake
and at the end of the day
that long, hot day
she drove us back to town
back to our homes

~~

The Port Stanley Lift Bridge

-1968

The King George bridge
green mesh floor
and green sides
splits and rises up
to let the sailboats out

and when it comes back down
and the barriers lift
I would put my hand
into my pocket
and hang on to my change
for fear it would jump out
and fall through the mesh

Men died to make that bridge
it says so somewhere
and maybe their bones
are under the control house
where the attendant listens
for a horn from a sailboat
or a fishing tug

~~

At the University

The students
are well into midterms
and the smiles
are starting to fade

It's as if the heavy coats
of colder weather
are dragging the joy
from their lives

~~

Hail

Twice now
we have seen hail
and it's not yet December
not even November
I am nervous
I don't like hard winters

so I will start the sauna
and climb in this afternoon
to pretend it is mid-August
to pretend I'm hiding
from the heat

~~

Eye for an Eye

There on Amazon
the front page
the beauty items
is an eyepatch
on a lovely pretty model

Large enough
I think
to cover that black eye
from your god-fearing
(and none other)
husband

Lucky the lad
to get religion now
in these latter days
and not the past

Those old religions
when the brothers
would sort the man
who hit their sister
and he would hit no more
~~

Cold

Sometimes I get cold
I never know why
the thermostat fails
and I get cold

She would sit with me
blanket over my lap
and she would rub my back
hug me to her

If it was bad
if I couldn't stop shaking
she would put me to bed
and crawl in naked
to soak up the cold

~~

Angry

I have gone to bed
angry
and I lie under covers
trying to sleep
failing

I listen for the creaks
of the stair
the snaps
across the floor
Is it you
come to talk to me

come to listen
as I say sorry
as I say sometimes
I just get angry
Sorry, sorry
~~

What We Have

We have the past
for that is all we have
all we are
The future is its own
never ours
and the present
is uncertain
what is happening
is never known
until it is past

Let us then
know the past
know all we can know
and let us mine the past
to see what we have learned
Have we learned
Is there something there
for us
Something we can use
now
~~

Pervert

Eww are you kidding
you let her pee on you
that's disgusting

And I think
you have no boy child
to get you in the face

A cold air trigger
a perfect arc
and squeeze shut your eyes
~~

Sharing

Somewhere in the north
two Inuit girls
breathe into each other
Noises from the throat
echo in the mouth
the throat
of the other

This breathing
from one to the other
is what I think of
when you roll over
and breathe into me
as I breathe into you

~~

Understanding

The Earth bulges
too many of us
And rats that we are
in a barrel
we will fight

Atomic lightning
expected at any moment
Nuclear winter
to save us
from Global warming

I spend a few minutes
transplanting thyme
from the garden
into a pot
so, midwinter

I can brush the leaves
bring fingers to my nose
and smell
that herbal innocence
of dull-witted plants
~~

Baked Apples

Apples, peeled
and cored
set in a pan
Brown sugar
sprinkled atop
and into the oven
a gentle oven

Apple sweats
melts the sugar
and when all is out
and laid gently
on a tea towel
on the table
the smell

The kids
catch the smell
and approach gingerly
like feral cats
is it, can it be
Gran has baked
apples brown and hot
and there they are

~~

The Hunter

Our cat sits
on the backyard grass
tail lazily swinging

What is he looking at
Ah, there at head height
a dragonfly

And yes, it flies
over the cat
who is watching

No warning at all
from his seat on the grass
he rises up

And up, and up still
up as high as my head
higher than possible

And then down
wings fluttering
the side of his mouth

A satisfied look
a flick of his tail
he turns his back

To walk away from us
should we dare
We would not dare
~~

Bone Scans

The doctor's appointments
are sprouting like flowers
in the spring

But it is autumn, soon winter

And my uncertain scans
are causing some growth
in appointments
I hope, not in holes
in my bones

~~

Rye and Coke

Well aged whisky
(never finished the bottle)
a Collingwood brew
(aged with some maple
thrown into the vat)
mixed with diet coke
to take to the sauna

And the risk to my liver
resulted in nothing
no effect at all
I must have sweated out
the alcohol
as it went in
Such is the disappointment
of life

~~

About 1968

Some days I care
about 1968
and others I do not

Some hours, some minutes
I care about 1968
and others I wonder why

Student riots in Paris
The Tet offensive
Nixon is elected
with the silent majority
now in control
The Prague spring
and the soviet summer
Martin Luther King
Another Kennedy dead
Black fists overhead
in Mexico
and thousands of students
die

All forgotten
all lessons unlearned
and often I wonder why
~~

The Road

A young man of twenty
I would travel free
a thumb and a pack
and always, always
I would wonder why

Sick for home
almost every day
I tried, I really tried
but that joy of the road
never seemed to come
it was just the road

~~

Living Off the Land

Old faded yellow pages
One Acre and Security
Foxfire
Harrowsmith
all shelved somewhere
or lost
or burned in the stove

I had ideas about that cabin
and the ancient farmland
that surrounds it
but what do you eat
on a cedar tree?
Euell Gibbons said
you could eat a pine tree

Living off the land
was something I wanted
but eventually I realized
I wasn't going to forage
for mushrooms under trees
I was heading for the store
Let farmers forage in their fields
~~

When You Left

You say it's like tape
over an arm
stuck to the hair
You must pull it off quick

I reply, that pain
remains long after the tape
and the missing hair
reveals bare skin

Still, for the tape
perhaps it is good
perhaps with speed
the fabric remains intact

~~

No

Young, I was afraid
of the 'no'
Surely if I ask
I may be told no

So very many years
it took me to understand
that the one saying no
was me

~~

Contests

It is, perhaps
time to eat lunch
time to turn on
the sauna

Time to get up
out of this chair
and give my ass a break
let the wrinkles smooth

How long
before this chair breaks
Is it yet another thing
with which to compete

After all
that damned cat
refuses to die before me
and I can declare the chair dead
~~

Self-Knowledge

I stand up
and find myself
heading for the bathroom
(and not the bar)

Somewhere along the way
somewhere over the years
I have ceased being led
by my prick
and am led
by my bladder instead
~~

Singers

I have to admit
I am angry
I fell down a hole today
starting with Jacqui McShee
Maddy Prior
Linda Thompson
June Tabor
Annie Haslam
Sandy Denny
Sandy Denny
Sandy Denny
Kate Rusby

Singers, damnit, singers after recording was good enough
and before autotune destroyed it.

Shall I go on?

If you know, you know

~~

Her Eyes

A lifetime ago
I lay on the beach
beside her
and I looked
into her eyes
as sun shone through
her curly hair

Blinded I was
but never will I forget
what I saw there
in those brown eyes
never will I feel
what was in my chest
as I looked
into her eyes

~~

How I Hurt Her

She knit me a sweater
the colour of grey November skies
and like November skies
I was changeable

She was patient
and kind
and proud of me
and I wasn't

She moved away
I went to visit
and my next woman asked
that I not sleep with her

All I needed
was to explain
but like November skies
I changed without warning
~~

She Could Do That

She lay back into me
as I sat on the couch
and she half turned
to put her cheek on my shoulder

She placed her hand
on my chest
under my shirt
and with a sigh
she ran her hand
through the hair that once was

Causing me to catch my breath
as she raised her eyes
to see the reaction
she had caused.

~~

The Poetry Professor

It would be nice
if I could write a poem
about my poetry professor

Unfortunately
all I ever had
were English teachers
One who said
Cohen's Suzanne was a princess

Certainly not the professor
of my poetry
Still, perhaps one story

Many years ago
in my apartment
when my professor was there
having a drink
he made a pass
at my girlfriend

She threw him out
and turned to me
and said, "The nerve
making a pass when I'm leaving
why are all men so stupid."

Or was that some other
professor of mine
now it does not come clearly
now it fades into the past

~~

Flint

She had a look
a way of talking
that would send flint
flakes and shards
straight into my heart

What did I care
if I was bleeding
She was there
and not elsewhere
and the shards felt
like love

One day the blood
was gone, all of it
but I remained
not alone, she was there
and she was there

She cradled me
held me in her arms
and whispered to me
while with her finger
to my chest
she touched that blood
and then to her tongue

~~

Drama

She was lovely
men fell at her feet
and she picked who she wanted

Eventually though
she picked the wrong man
and instead of him dying

it was she
who put her head
into the oven.

That showed him
what he had missed
What she took away

And because he was
the wrong man
His feelings...

Well who knows
but the world now knows
just what he was
~~

In Walmart

See what I bought
in Walmart
A book of erotic poetry
isn't it wonderful
we can read it together

Oh joy my love
I said to her
How wonderful
a book of erotica
from Walmart

But in my heart
I was searching
and my soul
Did I get turned on
by women in track pants?

~~

A Ghost Lays Down the Law

I do not
she said to me
wish to become
one of your poetic carcasses

Do not write of me
let the past stay
where it deserves to stay
I am not some zombie to resurrect

Leave my story
untold
Leave your feelings
cold

I have no need to live
forever stale and worn
in your verse
I am not a poetic corpse

I left you there
so long ago in the past
Leave me where I was
I am not your wordy carcass

You think you own me
in the scribbles of your notebooks
but you didn't have me then
You may not have me now

~~

Into My Arms

She walked into my arms
and lay her head
on my chest
One hand tucked in
and one on the other side
of my chest

She was eating chips
and each crunch
each movement of her mouth
felt like my heart
was turning flips
Was it just the chips?

~~

Make a List

Oh the joy
half the pills
that keep me alive
have arrived today
and no refills left

Yet another thing
on a rather long list
and I think
"I should go for a walk"
but really, I don't want to
I want a nap instead

Just make a list
say the people
with very long lists
that grow ever longer
and want me to remind them
of things they need to do
~~

That Creative Silence

They say that creativity
is a delicate thing
needing silence
and bleeding discipline

Mine is not so frail
but honestly
if that cat doesn't shut up
there will be blood

~~

Three Times

I write a little
I read a little
and I wonder
if Pam will come down
for lunch

Three times I thought that
and three times remembered
that she is not here
and there is nobody
to join me for lunch
~~

Archaeology

In an old desk drawer
are artifacts of a life
my life of long ago

An address book
A pen she gave me
A ring, mine? No
too small
Her candy wrapper
somehow drifted here
a small book
also hers

Is there anything really
I can say is mine
or was my life hers
as it so often was

To remind me of her
were all these things
forgotten here
so that I could remember
~~

A Good Day

The way she
would wrap those long legs
and drum on my ass
with her heels

The way she
would ask gently
about my health each day
Is it a good day for you?

~~

Downtown Guelph

The sadness of this week
when they take down the walls
and all the street-side patios

With each bang and crash
of plastic barriers
into trailers
a piece of warmth
goes with them

The wooden decks
lifted now to reveal
the detritus of a summer
swept up and disposed
like so much trash

A friend met, greeted
and breakfasted
with promises of meetings
still to come

~~

How Things Were

So many nights
a shallow callow youth
I would pour my semen
into her

and she would know
it wasn't semen
it was the angst
of a young man unhinged
flapping like a hayloft door
on the remains
of a single hinge

She took it in and smiled
placed a warm hand
on my back
and eased my head
down upon her breast

If not for kindness
I may not have lived
to wonder
what her life was later like
~~

Hair Tucked Behind

I forget you often
my seventies girl
with your shortish blond hair

You took me to bed
and in the morning
made sure I was fed
Coffee, orange juice, cereal

So kind, so gentle
with your light sweater
and your jeans

I didn't thank you then
being a cool young man
I had no idea
what you gave to me

I thank you now
my careful listener
your hair tucked
behind your ears

~~

A Chance

The way she
kicked off the sheets
and lay on her stomach
one leg exposed
and half that ass
so very tempting that ass

I had seen the outline
of a palm there
and the urge rises up
but stop
a sigh, a shift
the leg disappears
and I have missed a chance

~~

She Was Silent

She was silent
from start to finish
from drunk to hung over
from tickles to groans
she was silent as a ghost
silent as a still, moonlit night
on a snow covered wood

She moved, all right
but when I finished
I never knew
if she had finished too
Never knew until one day
I realized she became ticklish
after she came
Each night of love-making
was followed by a stealthy tickle
~~

Clean

Clean, she smelled clean
and she captured me
with that scent

So very clean, she was
and I got hard
at the first hint of her scent

How was I to know
that she had just showered
although I should have guessed
~~

Kegals

I can do it, she said
I can make you come
without you moving
without me moving on you

Fine, I said
prove to me
that you can make me come
without moving on me

And so she did
she had learned her kegals
and she milked me well
and I apologized
for ever doubting her

~~

Fall Fly

Long past the time
where flies should buzz
I wave my hands
and think, What's that?

This time of year
it takes a while
to understand that movement
is not a mote in my eye

It takes a while
for my hand to rise
and flap in the air
where the fly has long flown

~~

Hot and Cold

I take off and put on
a second-hand shirt
or sometimes a hoodie

I am cold
I am hot
is it the hormones

Or is it the furnace
set too far apart
from on and off

On and off
like that shirt
as I reach for it again
~~

She Knew

As I'd walk in
I would often see
that round perfect
so very firm ass

She would be tired
She would need her sleep
so I would be content
to kiss that ass

Before climbing carefully
into that bed
so as not to wake her
Once, I saw a smile
~~

Anonymous

Do not look to me
for profound speech
I told her once
That cleverness
never once found me

I will write you poems
and I will praise your body
your perfect tits
your perfect cunt
your perfect look of shock

As you read your poem
and realize I have exposed you
to the very world
but of course without a name
you are anonymous

Or you will be
when this poem, if ever
it becomes public
Then nobody will know
that you once slept with me

~~

On the Line

In the winter
gran would hang the sheets
and they would freeze
I would sneak up on them
and tap tap tap
to hear the strangled thrum
of cotton sheets
frozen into bells

~~

Tillsonburg 1968

The bread man
would drive by
with his horse and wagon
around the corner
where Mr. Cole lived
the Janitor at the school
who would let us shovel
pea coal into the auger
to feed the furnace

And he would let us borrow
the snow shovels
where six or eight of us
would link blades
and run across the dirt
to scrape off the snow
for British Bulldog
Sometimes catching
one of the young ones
and dumping him
on the snow

And on very cold days
Mr. Cole would let us sit
in the warmth of the furnace
so much warmer than our house
and we would play chess
in the recess and lunch periods
So warm, so warm
~~

Manopause

Here it comes again
the sweat than announces
that I have manopause
the hormonal imbalance
that comes with prostate cancer
My body unbalanced

Even my ankles are sweating
yet I have done no exercise
Will it be mild enough
I don't have to remove my shirt
or will that clammy, sticky feeling
give me further chill

~~

Guelph Sunrise

The morning sun
hits the fume hood stacks
high above the science buildings
as I drive downtown
after dropping Brenda off

The sign saying the road
is closed to traffic remains
blinking at the top of the hill
as I drive over new pavement
down to the coffee shop

When I get downtown the sun
is hitting the armoury
and as I park
I am pleased to see Eric the Baker
is open for later treats

My barista knows what I want
and the window seat is open
if the sun stays out
it will be far enough over
that I won't go blind

My friend is on the train
before the train
that is leaving the station now
and the day seems to start
in a way I hope will continue

~~

Three Crows

Five more rounds
of radiation
and another tattoo
in a bid for a fifth year
Whatever this spot on my spine
it will soon be dead

As I walk naked
from the sauna
a crow announces itself
I look to find three
perched in the top
of a tree

I stop and thump my cane
on a board, dunn
to get their attention
but they are looking already
the first is silent now

I open my eyes wide
and send to them
come, take them
but the birds only stare
warning or waiting
~~

Green

The plants
that I have rooted
and the herbs
that I have replanted

Is this my usual fight
against the coming of winter
or the deep seated fears
of a mind in denial

Am I adding life
to a house
that will soon see death
or do I just crave green

~~

One Night

In a strange bedroom
with a woman I barely knew
yet I was unbuttoning
and unhooking
while she unbuttoned

She pulled my shirt
over my head
not bothering to finish
all the buttons
and it never occurred to me
to ask her last name

I was kinda busy
and then I was asleep
happy in her arms
and in the morning
Well, in the morning
I went to work
~~

Eternal Reward

What flowers do the dead know
only roots
Or are there subterranean fungi
that give colour and shape
to those roots

Are there other wonders
in that cold ground
like there are here
the glory of spring
the spare minimalism
of winter

Why then the longing
the craving
for death
and the rewards waiting there
for those who obeyed
those who ate lemons
to keep that sour face
~~

Wrong Cafe

I sit
I try to think
and like rain across the lake
I can see the conversation
moving toward me
the patter patter patter
that seems harmless
but drowns all thought
and washes the sand
off the beach

And here the music
one genre
one decade
Must be satellite
And it arrives
like a summer storm
loud enough
to knock words
from my head
~~

Rolph Street, 1968

Cinders rolled down the hill
behind the school
Glassy, half melted things
we hardly bothered to look
Clinkers, leftover coal
shovelled out of the ovens
and tipped over the bank

We could barely walk
as the cinders wanted to slide
and so we slid
down to the flat
How did we know
children that we were
the flat was the first river

We would use the creek
the Little Otter
as a walkway through town
all you had to do
was climb the banks
both of them

And anyplace in town
that my friends and I went
could be reached
from that creek bank
Creatures we were
black dust on our pants
mud on our hands

~~

The Boy From Over the Hill

He would lean
far over the edge of that well
and he would yell
at the top of his lungs
he would yell

Angry at the world
that kid took it out
on the well
booming echoes
drowning the voice in his head

That voice
of one who should have loved him
that voice
that never ever stopped
except when he yelled
down the well

~~

Pam Drives Me

Pam got up today
much sooner than she likes
To take me to Kitchener
to get prepared
for more radiation

Three new tattoos my daughter
to match your four new ones
Not quite as fancy
but they are mine
and they will help

Help to burn out something
that is on my spine
and growing
I want it gone
before it gets to the nerve
and kills my legs

Yesterday the doctor said yes
and today I was in the CT room
getting my tattoos
Pam waiting for me
in the hallway
and then she drove me home

Could I drive myself?
Of course I could
She drove me later
in the morning to our hospital
here in Guelph
for bloodwork and another visit

In between, and after
I had trouble doing anything
I am an old man
and the speed things happen
seems to confuse me
So thanks for driving me Pam

~~

Guilt

Guilt, always
when I take care of myself
Time to exercise?
Time to sleep?

Less time to care
for those who have less
for those who hurt more
and when I hurt

When the bones themselves
ache
I will feel guilty
that someone cares for me
~~

The Flicker

Do I live in the past
remembering the sex
remembering the beauty
of young women
who liked me

I ask you then
what else can I do
The sex is gone
the dick is limp
the face is wrinkled

But the mind
it is still 25
and the desire remains
if only a flicker
from an ember blown upon

This is how I know
that I am still alive
a poem, a book
a breeze on that ember
and the desire flickers
I am alive

~~

The Window in my Office

Each time the wind blows
a few leaves
scratch the screens
and I think
I ought to trim that bush

That bush which is a metre thick
or more
and tangled
The thought of pushing through
is enough to make me think of Liam

But I forget
and now I sit here
writing poems
and wondering
who will wash the dishes today
~~

Naughty Man

There will be two saunas today
The first is done
and I waved some weights around
did some squats
maybe ten situps
representing half hearts

Next will be a good sweat
made before bedtime
Perhaps, wicked
I will stay up an extra hour
and climb under the covers
at eleven

~~

Newest Project

Perhaps tomorrow
tomorrow perhaps
we will go to the cabin
and as we turn that final corner
down our long drive
I will feel good
about the absence
of a smoking ruin

But better
oh so much better
will be the sight
of the little cover
we built over the steps
to keep the snow off
Something made by my hand
and that of friends
all the more special for that

~~

Pain Tolerance

My shoulder slowly aches
getting worse
as I sit here and write
and I don't notice
until I realize
I am shifting my shoulder
trying to find that place
that position
that must exist
where my shoulder
does not ache

~~

Zoom Class

Drifting
dozing before a class
I am nudged
"Time to get up"
and once more
(I must apologize students)
once more
I hate you all
~~

Sneaking Into Bed

She came home late
she tried to sneak
into our bed
but she never learned
to walk silent
to move slow

Not that it mattered
I wake often
and when I woke
I could smell him on her
I could smell him in her
and I thought
I should remind her to shower

~~

A Poke in the Arm

I trimmed my beard
and now in my fleece
there is a hair
that pokes me
the inside of my elbow

Should I complain?
Suddenly I remember haying
throwing bales
onto the wagon
from the wagon
into the barn

I remember the feeling
of short fibreglass
stuffed into cottage roofs
on a hot summer day
and the thought
of the lake, so close

I remember chips of Ipe
and other woods
Wenge! chips and splinters
lodged in my forearms
to stay itching for days
Purpleheart in the nose
sneezing thirty times

I suppose a beard hair
in a fleece
isn't such a tragedy
and if I ignore it
long enough
I won't know it is there
~~

The Hunters

One last peek
at the cabin
and then the hunters
who will shut off the water
prepare the place for winter

I picture them walking
through dead leaves
or new-fallen snow
rifles in their arms
eyes searching, hoping

Not so far
in thirty years
has a buck fallen
or a doe
but each year they walk
through the bush
they walk
~~

Cold

Cold
straight through
chilled
and we have yet to see
our first freeze

fluffy slippers
bright red fleece
and another coffee
keep me from frostbite
keep me barely warm
~~

The End of October

The sun rises
as I sit and arrange my coffee
my computer and its dongles
and outside the window
the homeless are hard at work
pushing shopping carts
full of things
down the street

The commuters are off
to the big city
on the green trains
and this morning there was frost
on the window of the car

~~

Morning in the Cabin

The cabin is warming up
propane furnace
and wood stove together

I have finished my coffee
and realize the extra
is still hot, such a bonus

So I sit and drink coffee
while Pam is cooking
sometimes life is perfect
~~

Old Hippie

Taking the lettuce
from the plastic
a mass of roots
is discovered

Pam cuts off the roots
and tries two bowls
before finding one to fit

I am fascinated
Should we plant the roots
and see if we can grow lettuce
Like the old hippy I am

~~

How Clever We Were

Psychosomatic
it must be
after telling the doctors
my back is sore
everywhere
not one specific spot

As soon as they say
they will kill the spot
on my spine
I begin to feel a pain
at that very spot

Just kill it
as fast as possible
and then we will check
with scans and blood
If we were right
we can all smile
How clever we were
~~

Rooted

I have never liked to travel
and never understood
my Grandmother Edna
who went all over the world

From her small town
where she married and divorced
but kept an eye on him
where she also kept an eye
on their son

Perhaps she was so well rooted
she could fly away
and visit other places
knowing she had somewhere
to go back to

I have never felt rooted
never attached to a place
or to someone else
until very late

It is not the strange place
or the strange bed-times
it is that travelling time
those plans, those forms
all the nonsense of travel
That I don't like

~~

Horizontal Rain

The rain has come sideways again
I have not seen it
but it has blown up
under the metal roof
where the overlap is not enough
down the wall
until it hits the logs
where it comes out over the stove
and drips rust and dirt
that dries to a disguise
looking like spilled grease
from under the burners

~~

Always the Cabin

It is so quiet here
deep in the cedar bush
that each creak of the floor
each crack of the wall
makes me look up

What was that?
Just the cabin
And that?
The cabin
It is always the cabin
~~

Almost Supper

Pam drops a big pan
onto the wooden table
and inside
three large sausage

They were cooked three ways
she answers
Boiled, steamed and fried

And the parsnips?
Steamed
And the salad
Not cooked at all

I look up from my work
down and up again
she is almost done
She will call me soon
and I will go
~~

Hollywood North

The director figures he's done
this movie will end him
but he's spent the money
and the producer is a prick

The camera man figures
a thousand a day isn't enough
but his girlfriend wants to go
someplace warm next winter

The girl thinks this is her break
she'll get into the big times
but she's a little confused
about the crows

The leading man is bored
he knows this is the best gig
he can get these days
and he has another drink

And the crows
they are waiting for the script
waiting for the part
where they get the eyeballs

~~

Where the Warmth Is

I sit at the table
as close to the furnace
as I can get
and the fan blows warmth
a foot to my right
and toward the floor

I suppose I could set up
the card table
and sit right in front of it
but that seems a lot of work
and how much more
am I going to write
this evening

~~

First Night, Cabin Style

It's not that cold out
but the first night
into the empty cabin
is always a bit of a test
a matter of willpower

Once it drops
to twenty below
you will not get me here
I have been here
and I have done that
~~

Cold Spots

Once upon a time
Long long ago
I would crawl back
into my bed
and be met with cold spots
Met with sperm pools
on the sheets

Now I come back to bed
and am met with cold spots
on the sheets
but no fear of sticking
It is night sweats

~~

Brat Cat

Twenty years old
he doesn't trust his legs
so he climbs up on a chair
then carefully
gingerly
he puts four paws on the back
and before he falls
he steps one foot
onto the kitchen counter

He stops to crow
silly deaf cat
and we let him crow
He drinks from the dishes
proud that he's found
his own water
then he licks the butter knife

He investigates for crumbs
anything he can eat
and he howls again
just in case someone
comes and says "bad"
before lifting him gently down

But most often nobody comes
we simply let him yell
and so, after the yells
and a decent wait for us
we hear the thump
of old paws on the floor

Once more he has done it
Once more he has got away with it
we have not caught him
clever old cat
he with water in him
the taste of butter on his tongue

~~

The Book Nap

The back of my neck has warmed
and with the warmth
my eyes have grown heavy
Too late for a nap
Too early for bed

Not too embarrassed to doze
head nodding as I read
hands do what they like
And the jerk
the start
as I realize no book
would ever include that
~~

The Stretch

She walked to me
stretching her arms
over her head
and that crop top rose
exposing that belly

What else could I do
I tickled
as lightly as I could
trying to make her laugh
but she only grinned
and kept stretching

~~

October Tourist Town

Sauble Beach again
Tourists gone
Shops closed
the lake remains

Dropped in to Luscious
to see Daniel
to buy some treats
and get a coffee

We parked a bit
Pam and I
and watched the lake
as I drank a coffee

This is my favourite time
in a tourist town
only a few souls
looking a bit lost
~~

Where Heat is Delivered

Locked in for the winter
snow too deep to walk
no water
no heat
You have what you can cut

Who could know
just how much wood
can be burned
on a winter night

How much work
finding and cutting
dead dry wood
cutting again
and splitting

One learns quickly
the joys of city life
where food comes from stores
electricity through wires
and gas through pipes

~~

Like a Pike

She drifted close
and at the first hint
of arms opening
darted in like a pike
and buried her head
into his chest

Such is the longing
of young women
for the men they love
Nothing mysterious
nothing to say
about being dependant

She needs nobody
can take care of herself
but what she wants
she wants
and is not shy
~~

Please Read This

There are many
who read my poor poems
but of those
they speak
only deafness

Please read my poem
it is about you
can you not see
how carefully
I have crafted them

But they remain
a tree in the forest
fallen noiselessly
nobody to hear
nobody to read
~~

First Road Trip

A fleabitten hotel
yellow sheets
cigarette holes
but at least washed
at least that is the hope

Carpet moves, waves
best not look closely
three holes
in the shower head
still working

Rust competes with water
in the bathroom tap
and the iron seems to react
with the fillings in my teeth
but at least it is wet

She waits for me
on the sheets
she has put the lights out
says nothing of the room
I rub my feet together
before I get into bed

Nothing to be done
about the motel
but she is here
and I am here
best make the best
of it

~~

Was I There?

An image only
not a memory
it is of a monastery
of a bare room
and a hard bed

Was I there?
I remember the feel
of the bed against my back
What is this image
of a monastery room
with me in it

These images often come
I haven't kept notes
of my life
and so I have lost it
this monastery room
with its hard bed

~~

The Gift

The gift from her parents
of a single room
with a single bed
so whitely made
white sheets
white bedspread

Good night
sleep tight
a quick hug for me
longer for her
and they turn away
leaving us at the door

This is new
this is disturbing
how do I deal with this
Oh relax, she said
it's no big deal
they like you

And now I am left
to wonder how many boys
they have liked
before me

~~

My Daughter's Band

Halloween Animals
My daughter's band
is playing now
in a faraway city
under their new name

When did she grow up
she's been through three degrees
and lives with her boyfriend
so very far away
yet close enough

I hope the show goes well
I hope the kids find it
that combination of luck
and hard work
so that they make it
~~

I Miss It

My stomach
is no longer fat enough
to hold a tablet

It just took a dive
toward the floor
bouncing off my foot

It hit the soft carpet
and seems to be fine
but I miss my fat stomach
~~

Time

Almost 9 pm
time to stop writing
time to open a beer
time to eat a snack
time to sit with Pam
beside the fire

Time you see
for many things
Loads of time
Trucks, ships of time
and I comfort myself
with all that time
~~

She Lived Softly

She lived more softly
more gently
than anyone I had ever known

I would think about her
and she would be there
standing beside me

Did I draw her to me
or did I sense her there
and think about her

I never worried too much
about all that
she was there, that was enough

Sometimes though
she would be on the couch
and I wouldn't see her

I would make my dinner
and then notice she was there
and that night, I'd eat half a plate

~~

That Black Hair

She liked clean, white sheets
and so I would try
to keep her out late
drinking with me
So that when we got there
to my place
she wouldn't see the bed
wouldn't see the black hair
that might be on
those white sheets

In the morning
in the morning of course
I was screwed
but that was the morning
and I usually had a class
to escape to
~~

Alive in 1966

God! What was it like
to be alive in 1966
to be ten years old
with an eternity
stretching out before me

To have that much time
to have seventy years
even if I never saw myself
older than 23

What was it like
to know there was time
to waste
to spend
to grow
~~

Getting Colder

On the door
to our crawlspace
was a hole
for the hose

I put a flap
on that hole
and each visit
revealed something
had moved it aside

Not needing the hole
I nailed it shut
only to find something
had chewed the edge
of door and frame

~~

On the Beach in 1968

We had blankets
and a jug of wine
and we stayed out
late into the evening
to watch for shooting stars

You could see them then
without satellites
they would flash
and disappear
and not come again

We stayed as late
as we dared
under the blanket
drinking the wine
hoping our folks
were asleep

~~

65 Baldwin Street, 1968

Going up those steps to bed
I made as much noise
as I wished

Knowing that some time
in the night
I would have to get down
without a sound
to pee, and back up again

If I were caught
there would be trouble
so I knew every place
on every step
that was solid enough
not to creak
if stepped on just so
~~

Thick Stone Walls

I was always cold
in that apartment
She was always in bed
long before I was

Such was her kindness
she would sleep on my side
so that when I slipped into bed
and sometimes into her

The sheets were warm
and she was warm
and I learned to go to bed
a bit earlier each week

But never so early
that the sheets weren't warm
or that she wasn't warm
and waiting up for me
~~

I Dreamed of Her

When I slept with her
I dreamed of her
as if through my arm
wrapped around her
I absorbed her thoughts

At first it was sunny
for many months sunny
and then a bit of rain
toward the end, storms
and then nothing

She threw my arm off
and pushed me away
I stopped dreaming of her
The cold winter descended
onto our bed

~~

Knives

She carried a knife
in her boot
but she never told me why

My knife was overhead
in the door jam of my room
I couldn't tell you why

~~

Living Up to You

No one has ever said
will you write a poem for me
And those I have written for
never want to read them

I understand, I really do
I have read poems
written to me
and was embarrassed

Every one
was too much
who wants to live up
to a poem

~~

Halloween Monsters

The little monsters
more than usual
have come to our door
and wanted candy

Brenda is loving it
she gets up to give
and the cat takes
her chair, Meowwer

They are having fun
I suppose
but having fought
my computer all day

I'm a bit irritable
~~

Scarred at 15

What is this book
It says love poems
but it's first love poems
the poet young
so very scarred
by so very little

But even one hurt
is one hurt too many
don't they say
If you believe that
you will have poems
lots of poems
all shouting "Youth"

And why not
we old folk
are so scarred up
by love and life
that we can hardly feel
the offhanded remark
that hurt so much at 15

~~

Holy Smoke

She came in from her run
sweat steaming from her skin
and I thought she was holy
as in holy smoke

I know I shouldn't
after all, the new pope
doesn't strip to the skin
after the white smoke

But what goes through my head
seldom made sense
when I was with her
Pope or no Pope

~~

She Stayed

She never spoke of love
or of us
Never spoke much
at all

One day she stayed
and that was it
Nothing decided
I was short sock space

She never asked me
about anything at all
just did it
I never thought to object

And so we lived together
Somewhere in there
she must have given up
her own place
~~

Sorry

It was tiring
being with her
and it took years
to learn the trick

I tried, really I did
and nothing was any good
She found fault
where others found gold

Years it took
before I understood
nothing was ever right
so I learned to say sorry

Once I did that
I was done
my obligation complete
Fuck up, say sorry, forget it
~~

The Day That

You can't leave a place
you've lived in for years
A place where you leave me
and all my detritus of life
without forgetting
a few things

A small book
a stone, found on a beach
perhaps a hair brush
long unused
a photograph
tucked in a mirror

And you are gone
packed and gone
but those small things
are still here
still amongst my things
the things you left

I find them suddenly
unexpectedly
and I reach for them slowly
so as not to disturb them
touch them softly
with a finger
and remember the day that
~~

What Time Does

The anger that lasted
for weeks
that burning resentment
the outrage at betrayal

Later, with time
that anger passes
and a certain resignation
takes its place

Then one day
many years later
you stop, shock still
you stop and think

I loved her
I loved her so very much
Nothing is left of anger
Only that distant longing
~~

If You See Her

A friend from long ago
met on the street
asked me about you
And I could not answer

You are gone
is the best I could do
Where, When, Why
I had no answer for him

Well that's a shame
he said, and he meant it

If you see her
Tell me she's OK, I ask
~~

Space

A stillness
a peace
a short time
with nothing demanding

My time my own
Silence
a space carved from chaos

Ten minutes
with nothing to fix
Ten minutes
alone
~~

The Love I Own

I haven't much time left
and what I have
I want to spend well
I went to the cottage
and nothing was broken
nothing needed repair
so I added something
Three minute's work
but so much more satisfying
than two days repairing a deck

I sit and think
of the love I own
Not really the right word
but I feel like I have it
So much that I'm content
to let those I love
move in and out of my sight
without worry
without being jealous
of their time
~~

A Long Skirt

A long skirt
and her legs tucked up
in a big soft chair
Like an old black and white
from 1968

I see her now
she looks at something
out the window
and I look at her shins
as they emerge from the skirt
and as they disappear again
underneath of her

~~

Makwa

The Makwa comes
from a giant Manitou
killed through a maid
and ten brothers

Each Makwa a piece
of that giant bear
each bear a part
of a greater whole

I feel them all
padding through the bush
all of them laughing
at that night on Haida Gwaii

In a tent, asleep
but then awake
Makwa snuffling around the edge
wondering if we were good to eat
~~

She Seemed Content

We lay in my bed
not for the first time
but this time
she lay still beside me

She did not dress again
and leave my room
but lay still beside me
and I began to wonder

Would this be the first night
we spend together
the first of many
Dare I hope

I put my arm around her
and closed my eyes
and she seemed content
to remain

~~

The Coat Room

We found ourselves
in the room with the coats
the party loud
outside the door

We had not slept together
but it was agreed
that soon we would
We agreed by glances

And there was a bed
somewhere under the coats
Soon we were under the coats
and on top of the bed

Well, she was on top of the bed
I was on top of her
and we learned about each other
is the most basic of ways

Learned, that is
between guests arriving and leaving
We held still, held our breaths
until the door closed again

~~

The Very Devil

Did I expect different
That this girl
so shy, so demure
when she was dressed
would be the very devil
naked and in my arms

~~

Was It Worth It

Was it worth it
that long pursuit of the man
who refused you
saying a virgin wasn't wise

Were you offended
your pride wounded
at the thought of his denial
of what you offered

And so came the night
you had him in your bed
was it worth it
did you see then what you had

Because you had him
Did you know he was that man
one who would do
what you asked him to

Was that what you wanted
as you drove after him
did you want his devotion
or was it simply pride

And when you left
when you threw him away
did you think at all
about your chase that day

~~

My Journals

If you had asked
a year ago
I would have said
my journals were there
all my life written down

But it wasn't true
I wrote through my whole life
but mostly just notes
on martial arts
I was learning

My confused life
of love and purpose
was chronicled, poorly
only until that time
when a woman lived with me

Then what time did I have
to write about turmoil
It was either smooth sailing
or I was in a panic
and agony

There is no space
on a page
for the argument you are having
right now with her
silent or screaming, right now
~~

Settling

When was it
I stopped hoping for all
All the love you could give
and settled instead
for all the love you would give

Where once I yearned
I burned, I learned
that all the wanting
all the need in the world
would get me nothing

Instead I settled
and settling is better than not
For what I could get
what was given to me
and that was enough

~~

Slow-wit

What was I thinking
to miss what was happening
He moved out
and then she moved out
and I had no idea
what I had done

Slow-wit that I am
It finally dawned
like the very end of time
so dim it was
That she had gone to him
and I was left alone

Is the rest of the story
very important
I don't think it is
except for curiosity
What was important to me
I knew why she left
and why she came back

~~

The Innocence of Moonlight

I wake beside you
and look at your face
bathed in moonlight
as they say

The innocence
the ease I see there
so much in contrast
to the frowns, the scowls
of the waking hours

~~

I Never Asked

I never asked
who you were with before me
I figured that was impolite
and I didn't care anyway
As long as you were with me

I never asked
who you were sleeping with
while you were sleeping with me
I figured you wouldn't tell me
and I didn't care anyway

I want to ask
who you're sleeping with now
but it's been too many years
and I don't know where you are
even though I care

~~

Advice Unasked

I heard she was getting married
and I wrote her
I told her marriage was a mistake
and she wrote back

You have no right any more
to tell me what to do
you who hurt me so
I can't believe you wrote

I will marry him now
he is a good man
so much better than you
Please don't write again

And now, I wonder a little
if I was right
If it lasted
Idle curiosity I suppose
~~

No Ice Maiden

Was she so much
of an ice maiden
There were boys she knew
who told her so

Ice maiden
She wasn't the best I've had
but she was far from cold
on a winter's night

And some of our fights
were so fiery hot
I would lose control
of the car I was driving

~~

Another Path

There is so much
that I could have done
with sixty years of life

And yet
I can't think of a thing
that I'd rather have done

I lived in turmoil
I lived in strife
and lived through it all

If I'd chosen another path
there would have been strife
and maybe I'd have lived

But that wasn't my life
I wanted what I got
and still want what I have

~~

Leaves on the Floor

We track in the leaves
like we used to track sand
when we were kids
and ran home bare foot

The sand we figured
was gone from our souls
but not from the tops
of those childish feet

Now I am older
and now I notice
and each day I think
I ought to sweep

I did once
not so very long ago
and was told quickly
that I didn't do it right
~~

Nothing to Do

In my deepest of hearts
I am afraid to admit
how often I think of it
of being not alive

It has become an old friend
who visits often
and one day
I may let him come in

But not yet
not while I can say
I just have nothing to do
nothing to get me out

There once were things
things I had to do
but they have slipped
like sand through my fingers

Perhaps tomorrow
there will be things to do
Perhaps tomorrow
I will be too busy for a friend

~~

Anne in 1968

She sat hunched
in a fur coat
that was her Grandmother's
Bare feet
she hunched forward
on the steps
and hid her hands

Later that year
she stopped singing
and went off in a caravan
Her long hair to her shoulders
her pretty face
she took away from me
in that caravan
And I heard no songs again

~~

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180mag (Photo magazine monthly) - 2005-2014

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