

# Dragging The Pond



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# Dragging The Pond

What use is it  
this dragging of the pond  
that is your past

Up and down the shore  
further and further out  
you throw the grapple over  
drag it up again

perhaps a bent-wheeled bicycle  
perhaps an old boot  
only to throw it in again

And what if you did find her  
What if the grapple hooked her side  
that wonderful side, so sensitive  
as you dragged your fingertips  
over it, dredging up a shiver

What if you did find her  
and pulled her carcass into the boat  
What would you have  
but a poor rotting shadow  
of something that once was  
~~

# Scrolling The Net

Poets are a morose bunch  
wandering toward death  
often by way of pain

It comes of sitting alone  
waiting for inspiration

If they would only scroll the net  
or watch television  
or even gather in bunches  
and drink

None of this ultimate meaning stuff  
would occur to them

~~

# Dragging My Feet

Don't ask me to dance  
I spent my time  
in the Disco Bar  
Nylon shirt  
and platform shoes

Spent my time  
as a DJ too  
and now my playlist  
is called shuffle

So I will sit here  
enjoying my chair  
Consider it  
a well earned rest  
~~

# Dragging Our Ass

They say that girls  
want to marry their father  
and boys their mother

They say that boys  
turn out to be their fathers  
and girls their mother

I think it's simpler  
I think we're just lazy  
We go with what we know  
~~

# You and I in Paris

At odd times  
I think I would like a memory  
of you and I in Paris  
Walking by the river  
or coffee on the street  
or a too-small apartment  
with a too-small bed  
but a view of the tower

Then again  
we had a room  
with a chair in a nook  
where you would straddle me  
and look out the window  
at the brick tower  
above the power plant  
above the college on the hill

Across the road  
was our bar  
where we would talk for hours  
and in the morning we ate  
not in Paris, but in The Vienna  
~~

# In Uruguay

In Uruguay  
I wandered in the market  
admiring cowhide bags  
and cow-hoof mate cups

But here in Canada  
I have a lovely leather jacket  
that I never wear

Much too classy for me  
I'm more of a duck-cloth  
and canvas sort

~~

# Wisconsin

Happily  
I will never have to endure  
an interrogation by a journalist  
about this poem

"Is it really a Canadian poem  
or were you somewhere else  
Were you thinking of Wisconsin  
I have been told you were there  
once"

~~

# Pity the Rich

Pity the rich  
the jet-set crowd  
What can they do  
if they decide to be spontaneous  
They have to fly  
half way around the world  
to have coffee

While I, in my small world  
and my rituals  
my habits  
I have only to decide  
to go to the thrift shop  
to really shake up  
my morning

~~



# Reabsorb This

I don't know how  
these real poets  
rewrite, revisit or re-imagine  
their poems

To me, reading my old poem  
is like drinking my own piss

~~

# Outside the Thrift Store

The old, the lost  
and the pickers  
begin to line up  
outside the door

Surely today  
that fantasy find  
is waiting inside

If only it can be reached  
before these others  
get to it  
~~

# How Long Is It

Blood pressure high  
Sugar high  
God Damn It,  
why did I measure it

I need to stop this  
I need to remember a time  
in my 20s  
when I would live forever  
when I was fucking someone  
anyone

I'm on the pill she said  
Fuck me, she meant  
Fine, I said  
and followed her home  
That much booze  
and I still got it up

That's what I'm talking about  
not this pathetic measuring  
and wondering  
about this ache and that itch

Keep your eye on the act  
that might have created life  
~~

# Our Bussing Problem

And once more  
the province  
an area bigger  
than most European countries  
has been locked down  
to the level of Toronto

Explain that to me please  
Explain to me why...

Never mind  
If everywhere is locked down  
as tight as Toronto  
Then maybe Toronto  
will stay home  
~~

# Nothing but Volvos

You know when you buy a Volvo  
all you see are Volvos  
on the road

It's like that now for me  
Everywhere I look is death  
Everyone I know is dead  
All the great men are dead  
and I feel sick

I look for something to watch  
something to read  
something that isn't about death  
and hang on  
until it's time to go to bed  
where I will sleep the sleep  
of the dead

and perhaps wake tomorrow  
feeling alive

~~

# Why Am I So Ungrateful

A day ago  
there were gnats  
bouncing in the corner  
beside the door  
And today  
it was seasonably cold

Two years ago  
I had a couple of weeks  
and now, now I know  
that we are just larger gnats  
flying when we can  
hoping we don't get lost  
in a corner

~~

# You are the Line

I look down at my hand  
and in the crease of a finger  
is a thick white line  
A scar where a kite  
wanted to fly higher  
and I didn't ease the line  
enough

Try too hard  
to keep things close  
and you end up bleeding

Funny  
I don't look at that scar  
for years at a time

~~



# Hold On

The world gets a bit shaky  
once in a while  
and it's nice to have someone  
to hold on to  
until it settles down

~~

# Very Complicated Machines

Are we just  
very complicated machines  
It would be nice  
to think so  
No responsibility

Or a bit further back  
perhaps we are the playthings  
of the gods  
Again, no responsibility

As for me  
I will act as if I am free  
in a society  
And try to balance  
what my inner Robot  
God or Devil  
wants me to do  
With what is good  
for those around me

Even if I am not free  
I need to fight  
that which enslaves me  
I need to assume a responsibility  
Even if I am not, in fact  
responsible

~~

# Before Dinner

Before dinner  
drinking beer  
getting thinner  
feeling fear  
--which means  
absolutely nothing  
Al Purdy

There you have it  
an unknown poem  
(hand written dedication)  
by Al Purdy  
in the book  
"To Paris Never Again"  
I give it to you  
because Al can't  
(I feel we're on the first-name)  
~~

# Public Life in the Dorm

Not wanting to wake  
the room mates  
She bit into my shoulder  
when she came

It didn't matter  
It might have been  
her heels drumming  
on the floor

But we had a full audience  
and a lot of smirks  
when we left the bathroom

~~

# Leaving Town

Oh my  
It just flitted  
across my mind  
that the reason  
I've been in this town  
forty-five years  
is that I'm waiting  
for one of them to come back  
Oh no  
What if they all came back  
~~

# Leaving One Last Time

What if I took all the pain  
of leaving and being left  
by all those who are gone

What if I put it all together  
What fear could I have  
of leaving one last time

~~

# Whatever It Is

A strong sun  
a below freezing day  
The swamp  
re-freezing

Not water, not ice  
lines across the face  
of whatever it is

Somehow, as I walk  
with sore knees and stick  
I feel that I am looking  
at my life now

Not water, not ice  
Just whatever it is  
~~



# La Petite Mort

What fear have I  
of the eternal oblivion  
that follows my death

That I have experienced  
many times  
with many women  
and I know  
that however long  
people remember I am dead

to me  
it will be one brief, endless instant  
of ecstasy

And then a moment later  
Nothing  
~~

# Good Poetry There

These Canadian poets  
and their visits  
to Mexico and Central America  
are truly Canadian

The desire to visit a country  
where, if ever,  
than at certain times  
of the year,  
Ice cannot be found  
nor snow  
Is overwhelming

Think of such a place  
and wonder

I once, in mid summer  
slid down a mountain  
on my ass  
The snow packing tight  
up the back of my shirt  
~~

# Not For You

The first time  
I saw a Haida raven  
I was convinced I was looking  
at an art, ancient and sacred  
"This my grandfather taught me  
it is not for you"

This was different than the feeling  
of the Eskimo art I knew  
long before  
"This the missionary taught me  
I hope you like it"

Two generations later  
they seem to have merged  
Art from art schools  
~~

# Never Had to Try

Do I say  
that a woman never tried  
to get me drunk  
to take advantage

No  
much of what I drank  
was paid for

but what I do say  
with no hesitation  
was that a woman  
never had to try  
to get me drunk  
~~

# Green Thumb

Each time I use the stairs  
I turn the pots  
The red one with tomatoes  
and the green with basil  
I turn them so the stems  
stay mostly upright  
It doesn't even slow me down

How I wish  
I had turned our pot  
as I went by  
those many years ago  
Just a tiny bit of attention  
hardly any effort at all  
so that we could grow  
both in the same direction

~~

# I See Her There

I see her there  
at my desk  
writing one of my poems  
Head bent  
hair waving softly  
as her arm moves

But she can't be real  
This must be metaphor  
She isn't here any more  
and she hated my poems  
~~

# I Want To Be There

Think, search more deeply  
the bench around the maple  
was not always broken  
the supports were not always  
buried in the trunk

Think, yes there it is  
I was much younger  
and my grandfather was alive  
it was he who built it  
and he laughed there with us

Is it true  
Did he really sit with us  
do I really remember  
that bench when it was new  
I don't care, I don't want the truth  
I want to be there, laughing

~~

# They Meant Well

My mother told me  
that she was the x-ray tech  
when they set my broken wrist  
and she said the doctor  
had his knee on my chest  
as he pulled

I don't remember that  
because I was unconscious  
but I do remember a dentist  
who climbed up onto the chair  
and put his knee  
on my chest  
to pull a stubborn wisdom tooth

What is it with men  
with knees  
and with my chest  
At least they meant well

~~



# Can You Imagine

Can you imagine  
ever being young enough  
to be annoyed  
when awakened deep into the night  
by a hand  
or a mouth on your dick

Can you imagine  
ever being that sure  
that the hand  
or the mouth  
will be there next week  
or next year

~~

# No Sooner

No sooner does a young boy  
obtain two toy cars  
than he smashes them  
one into the other

Eventually that boy  
grows into manhood  
but some things persist  
Like smashing your will  
into that of the woman  
who lives with you

Unlike toy cars  
you can't control another's will  
you can't predict  
when it will come smashing at you  
It just seems inevitable  
until you get old enough and tired enough

~~

# Hobo

I listen as the train goes by  
Once I would have wished  
that I was aboard  
going somewhere, anywhere  
but where I was

Now I am content  
to let the passengers go on their way  
unconcerned with the small boy  
they just saw  
jumping up between the cars  
~~

# Not Real Work

Another cold day  
and I can't seem  
to kick myself hard enough  
to get some real work done

Surely I can sit here  
and write  
but that's not real work  
It won't get  
the bills paid

~~

# The Song of Flesh

"remembering the song of flesh  
to flesh and bone to bone"  
-Al Purdy

Bitterly do I remember that song  
the slap of flesh to flesh  
of a young woman  
covered in sweat  
as was I  
What matter we both work  
in the morning

And I remember the song  
of bone on bone  
as arms struck arms  
legs battered legs  
and fists drove into ribs  
In the love-play of boxing and karate

And I remember the song  
of a hand slapping a mat  
and bodies flying  
through the air  
Of landing, rolling and up again  
in a charge toward my sensei  
so I could be upside down  
once again  
Watching the mat  
fall down on me

And I remember hugs  
from friends and strangers  
as we gathered to play together  
All this denied to me now  
this love that exists only in memory

~~

# Stripes of Sunshine

I cannot describe  
There are no words  
for the delight I feel  
when I look up  
and see stripes of sunshine  
across the stair rail and shelves  
my son built  
~~

# Tell Me A Tale

The kid sits  
next to the old fisherman  
and asks for stories  
of being on the lake  
and pulling the nets

The old man looks back  
with tired eyes  
and says "it was a job"

The kid is shocked  
"just a job"? Sitting in front  
of his computer is just a job  
surely the old man  
is having him on

~~



## A Rich Poet?

Can you write a poem  
if you have never gone hungry  
never made do  
with furniture scrounged  
from bins behind Main Street  
Never worn a broom  
down to the bindings

Yes, I suppose so  
but how much easier  
to pay someone  
to do it for you  
or the much faster gratification  
of buying a book  
Perhaps even with explanations

~~

## Say It As If

Going through the archives of Poetry Magazine  
there are entire months  
where I don't understand a word  
I begin to suspect each issue  
has a guest editor

Who would have thought  
so much poetry  
could be so obtuse  
but I suppose if you have nothing to say  
you should say it as if

~~

# Stop Seven Times

I seem to recall  
that you can only fold  
a piece of paper  
seven times

I suppose we could use that  
and say that you can only fold  
my love in half  
seven times  
before I am too damaged  
to be folded again

But that would be  
a very awkward simile  
without even a smile  
(oh lord, pathetic  
stop writing)  
~~

# Sutemi

Have you heard this  
or read this?

You must throw  
your life away  
you must give up  
all hope  
of surviving

But you must not desire death  
When you understand  
you will understand  
~~

# Family Home

It was a farmhouse  
where my grandparents  
went to live  
with their parents

Old, drafty brick  
The walls would frost  
in winter  
and it would heat up  
in summer  
so that we kids  
would sleep outside  
on the porch roof  
under canvas

I knew every creak  
in the stairs  
and I hated the place  
So why, now  
do I feel like crying

When my grandmother died  
it was sold  
and knocked down  
and built over  
with indecent haste  
~~

# What Old Men Do

What else are old men to do  
but think of the past

All their life  
is behind them  
so it's not a surprise  
that they stand  
looking to the path  
down which they walked

~~

# Best Revenge

A lot of my enemies  
are dead  
Well, hardly enemies  
but those who tried  
to make my life difficult

However, some enemies remain  
and I'm not sure  
I can wait for them to die

I try, I really do  
not to accumulate more of them  
but they do seem to pop up  
in the strangest places

~~



# The True Splinter

Look, how did you expect  
me to turn out  
I was baptized  
into a church  
founded by a dead king  
who wanted a divorce  
so he could try again  
for a son

I went to many churches  
all of them the true splinter  
of the same church  
All of them, every one  
And every one recognized  
one by the other  
as being legitimate

All of them dying  
as the believers move  
to the splinters of the splinters  
of the splinters

~~

## With Apologies to Al Purdy

The god arrived and said  
"you must die  
or one who loves you"

My wife then, take her  
and the wife stepped forward

The god and the wife were gone  
and the god  
being a cruel god  
took also, all memory of the wife  
who loved the man

~~

# A New Jacket

Ten dollars at the thrift shop  
It is soft, very soft  
and light  
It feels like when Brenda  
would carefully put the sheets over me  
when I couldn't move without screaming  
She would go slowly and gently  
and for a few moments  
my life would be soft  
~~

# New Shoes

Second day, second attempt  
to write  
I read, but it's all the same  
I look at photographs  
but they are all the same  
I walk, take photographs  
and feel a little better  
I repair the window covers  
for the shop  
and feel a little better

But inspiration eludes  
leading to the feeling  
that I'm wasting my time  
Which leads to thoughts  
of new shoes  
Would it be worth it?

~~

# Out Of Order

Yesterday I drank  
from my coffee mug  
before the first poem

Mistake

Lesson learned

~~

## Her Small Habits

I lived for those times  
when I would hug her  
and she would make  
those small comfort noises  
I never told her  
for fear she would stop

Never told her  
how I loved  
that she would hold  
one hand tucked under her chin  
as she leaned forward  
into my open arms

And oh, those days  
when she would grab  
a tiny handful of my shirt  
with that hand

~~

# Company

Pam is cross-legged  
on the floor  
in front of me  
as she works

She knows how much  
I hate these hospital days  
of testing to see  
how much closer I am  
to death

~~

# In Our Apartment

It was an old tub  
cast iron and claw-foot  
She would do strange things  
with those antique taps  
She would tell me  
but never let me see

When I was allowed  
into the sacred presence  
I saw a goddess  
Hair flowing and weaving  
around elfin face  
Huge eyes daring me

~~



# Greaser

Nose-picker shoes  
slicked hair  
and half my size  
he stood at the top  
of the cement stairs  
leading to our public school  
basement washroom  
and tiny gym  
And taunted me

At the top  
of the cement stairs  
Cement stairs

~~

# She was a looker

She was an old woman  
when I knew her  
"but she was a looker"  
I was told

Once, when she thought  
she was alone  
she opened a book  
where a rose was pressed  
and she bent to smell it

It was flat and faded  
and surely it smelled of book  
But she smiled  
~~

# Entropy

The second law of thermodynamics  
is, I have been told,  
the reason time  
only goes one way

Not, the universe tends toward  
or the universe loves  
disorder  
But that it's more likely  
that things fall apart  
than that they fall together

The energy it took  
to create me  
The energy it took  
to keep me  
Will one day fail  
and I will return  
to the various disorders  
from whence I came

But that highly unlikely event  
that allowed me to know this  
has been appreciated

~~

# What Happens

What happens once  
is eternal  
it has always happened  
There is no way to deny it  
The best you can do  
is ignore it

That you and I  
were once together  
means we are always together  
and I feel better  
for that  
~~

# Shadows

I sit and read  
but shadows flit  
across the room  
and compete for my attention

Perhaps there are birds  
watching me read

This morning I watched a fox  
trot across a parking lot  
~~

# Perfectly Still

I stood perfectly still  
and may even have  
held my breath  
as she walked toward me

Not wanting to scare her away  
I didn't look directly at her  
but watched from  
the corner of my eye

It worked  
she came to me  
and stood beside me  
"Hello daddy" she said

~~

# Networking

They say that  
when you sleep with someone  
you sleep with everyone  
they slept with

I like that  
all that love  
stretching on and on  
~~



# Fifty Years

I would like to think  
of myself at 75  
or even 80  
But in 50 years  
it won't matter  
if I make it past 65

I will only be a name  
and a pair of years  
in a genealogical chart  
someone I will never meet  
has made

~~

# Culture Wars

I want to visit  
the Mexico of Diego Rivera  
the Chile of Pablo Neruda

The exciting lively places  
that existed still  
Before the Empire of cash  
started declaring things  
like the war on drugs

Turning the worlds  
outside it's borders  
into market gardens

~~

# Here Is Spring

Here is spring  
brown buds becoming green leaves  
and I understand my mother  
when she said  
"chop me up  
and spread me on the garden"

Do not bury me  
full of chemicals and in  
a lead box  
Do not make me useless  
at the last

Let me become part  
of some future spring  
I'm sure there will be  
some nutrition in these old bones  
~~

# Don't Squash Me

I have an argument  
with a solitaire app  
on my phone  
I am convinced  
that the random deal  
is anything but  
A two of spades showing?  
The ace of spades will be buried

We are like that  
we notice bad things  
annoying things  
disliked things  
And we assume  
malign intent

The oldest religions  
were to appease the gods  
who, if they noticed us at all  
were likely to harm us

Here is food and drink  
please don't burn down my house  
These days, it is pleasant  
to blame an algorithm instead

~~

## Still Tough?

When we got a newspaper  
I would go naked  
into the snow  
to pick it up

Just to reassure myself  
that I could endure  
the snow on my feet  
To endure

The neighbours you ask?  
Just that kind of neighbourhood  
you know,  
low rent

We gave up the paper  
in one of many economizings  
and now I wear rubber sandals  
to and from the sauna  
in the backyard

~~

# Dyed Bones

I sit with a coffee  
waiting for this dye  
to coat my bones

Where it doesn't attach  
is where the cancer lives  
Or do I have it wrong  
perhaps it attaches  
to the cancer

So I wait for it  
not knowing whether  
to hope for attachment  
or none

Soon the machine  
will do its thing  
and next week  
I will learn things  
~~

# Waiting

Yet another week  
yet another weekend to come  
where nothing but waiting  
where I nap while waiting  
for others to wake  
or get ready  
or something, anything

I no longer have the energy  
to drive myself or others  
to some sort of activity

So I wait, and nap  
Hoping for someone else  
to say "let's go"

~~



# Favourite Game

Oh boy what fun  
the cat yells  
and I put him out

he yells  
and I let him in

Repeat until sleep  
~~

## This Week?

Endless years of  
week after week  
of plans postponed  
by "I'd rather not"

Yet without the try  
without the plan  
carefully made  
and agreed by all  
There is no chance  
of anything happening

So week after week  
for years

~~

# Teleportation

I always try  
to sleep on planes  
and trains  
and often in cars  
so that when I wake  
we are at the end

These days I often find  
that I nap at home  
just to get  
to the end of the day  
~~

# Baba Yaga

Baba Yaga sits in her hut  
with legs  
and waits with a meal  
for a man

She looks for the man  
who left  
and promised  
to come back

If you are not that man  
then don't go in for dinner  
Baba Yaga is hungry

~~

# Deaf

We don't want so much  
a human contact  
but a distraction  
from our own minds

We want the noise  
and clutter  
the jangle of so many voices  
we can't hear the one nearest

When we listen to them all  
we hear nobody  
and most of all  
we don't hear ourselves

~~

# Breakfast

It would be hard to describe  
how fond I am  
of the small thump  
that is you, putting the oatmeal  
down on my desk

How much I look forward  
to that small kindness  
each morning

~~

# Plans Changed

It often feels  
like I am waiting to die

Each day  
as I wait for someone  
to do something  
it reminds me of my death

Each plan that is changed  
leaving me to sit alone  
reminds me of my death

I hadn't realized  
how much winter  
had disguised these feelings  
But now that the sun shines  
it reminds me of my death

~~

# The Morning You Were Born

On the morning you were born  
the sun came in the window  
like a hammer

I could hardly understand  
the world was all hard edges

The light fractured  
on the way through a glass of water  
and the world was softer  
than marshmallows  
as the tears came

~~



# First Publication

The author expresses  
profound thanks  
to the editor, the publisher, the partner  
and Mom, always Mom

That first book  
seems like a triumph  
the culmination  
the reward  
of a lifetime's work

Poor sod  
There are so many more

~~

# A Loving Inscription

The infinite sadness  
of a loving inscription  
in a book of poetry  
found in a thrift store

~~

# Holding Hands

A man without children  
will often be uncomfortable  
even embarrassed  
when a woman takes his hand  
~~

# Paradise

A rainy day again  
(it's spring, what do you expect)  
in the Starbucks parking lot

Looking out, through water-streaked window  
over grass, sidewalk  
grass, road, grass, road  
grass, sidewalk and grass  
to the parking lot of Metro

A few trees and some bushes  
complete this suburban paradise

~~

# Scars

I have scars  
that no one ever sees

For instance  
on top of my shoulder  
is a big one  
a memory of a day at the beach  
without sunscreen

You'll never see it  
because it only shows up  
when I tan  
and these days, I never do

~~

## All Bundled Up

All bundled up  
against the rain  
against the virus  
she drifts across the windscreen  
Jumping and melting  
shattering into curls of running water  
like some green-robed ninja

~~

## Like This?

I read a lot of poetry now  
I used to hate the stuff  
but I read it now  
and sometimes  
if the poet is personal  
but not too personal  
I find a poem of my own

If the poet is symbolist  
or surrealist  
I might pick up the voice  
Even if the subject  
leaves me cold

~~

## **Bibs Small and Large**

It worries me a little  
that more and more  
of my food and drink  
ends up on my outside  
instead of inside

~~



# Perhaps Possible

That you can't fix the world  
is one of the cruellest lessons  
of youth  
made more painful  
by those who tried and failed  
Only to sneer delight  
at those who fail, after them

You cannot fix the world  
it is not broken  
it is those who live in it  
You cannot fix others  
You can only fix yourself  
so that others can see  
that it is  
perhaps  
possible  
~~

# Always a Photographer

Once, twice in time  
I have the desire to lie  
to write beautiful fiction  
to take you away  
from the pain of life

But I am shit at it  
Always have been  
I was never a painter  
Always a photographer

~~

# Fly Away

You are a bird  
you stupid Grackle  
why are you running around  
in front of me  
dragging my eye  
from the book in my hands

~~

## This Page Here

Ruth (from the dedication)  
must have been eating  
when she read this poem  
or perhaps

She was just in from the garden  
and missed her right thumb  
when she washed her hands

~~

# Adulting

When you finish your meal  
rinse and stack your dishes  
and bonus points  
for rinsing and stacking  
the others

When at a dinner party  
wash the dishes  
This is especially useful  
at family gatherings

You get brownie points  
and avoid  
the age-old arguments  
~~

# Rainy Day Nap

Is there anything  
more delicious  
than a nap  
on a rainy day

The drumming on the roof  
and the air  
cool with moisture  
on the skin of your back

~~

# The One Thing

The one thing  
that you must never ask  
of the world  
is why

Why, what is this for  
how can this be  
Who are you asking  
What would you do with an answer

That something exists  
is enough

~~

# Home Improvement

In our bedroom  
was a bare bulb  
The socket hanging  
from the wires

It stayed that way  
for many years  
for the conception  
of two children

Then one day  
a cheap paper shade  
suitable to a student room

That shade now lives  
in the cabin bathroom  
while in the bedroom  
a totally predictable  
ceiling fixture

~~



# Tomorrow

Get some exercise

I think

But what's the point

I think

Tomorrow I will know

~~

# Rumble and Clunk

The rumble and clunk  
of a second-hand elliptical  
above my head  
in my little writing nook  
finally breaks through  
my awareness

Time, perhaps  
to pick up and move  
And as I do  
Liam stops  
and hits the shower

~~

# The Edge

There is a moment  
in each day  
as the light switches  
from day to night

Where you are sure  
someone has spoken  
or you have seen someone  
from the corner of your eye

~~

# I Heard Voices

This morning I heard voices  
as if the radio was on  
in the next room  
Low

I couldn't make them out  
and so far  
nobody is telling me  
to knife anyone  
~~

# His Things

She scooped clothes  
from the floor  
in one motion  
as if bundling  
his whole life  
into her arms

"I always hated  
picking up his things"  
she thought

~~

# Did I Never Ask

It makes me sick at heart  
to think how little I know  
of my father  
of my mother too, come to that

Is it that I have forgotten  
like I've forgotten half my life  
or did I never ask

~~

## Most Likely

I push some spilled coffee  
around on the dirty console  
thinking of my father's death  
Thinking of my own

In a school yearbook somewhere  
I said I would drown

~~

# Yes I Cry a Bit

We can stay in balance  
or we can walk

The secret is not to stay  
balanced and motionless  
But to catch that balance

To stay there  
as long as possible  
and to try not to show  
that we are hurt  
ready to fall  
when facing an opponent

~~



# Never Let Them See You Bleed

I learned the lessons young  
Stand still, don't resist  
mouth shut, eyes dry  
and dead

Don't give anything away  
swallow your temper  
keep the anger pressed down  
and the sorrow

When wounded, step back  
when bleeding  
get under a bush  
and wait to heal

If you fail  
at any of these  
be ashamed  
and be warned  
You have shown where  
and how  
you can be hurt

~~

# Not Staying Long

I'm not staying long  
she said  
as she walked in the door  
I've got things to do  
and they don't involve you

Fine, I said  
as I undressed  
and got into the bed  
As long as you wish  
and then I'll say goodbye

What else can you want  
What else can you have  
She stayed for a while  
and then she left

~~

# Sweet Love

I try, I really try  
to write of sweet things  
of old loves  
remembered well  
but how can you remember  
even the sweet times  
without that dark spectre  
over your shoulder  
over hers

In an hour I will be in hospital  
and perhaps I will know  
a bit more than I do now  
how much longer  
I will write of sweet love  
and kind eyes  
watching softly concerned  
at 4am, a restless boy  
fighting his demons

~~

# Nothing to Nothing

Nothing to nothing  
is not a doubling  
my doctor said  
as she told me the scans  
turned up maybe  
one new spot on my spine

You feel OK?  
Yes, I feel fine  
Well nothing much has changed  
your numbers are good  
So we will keep an eye on you  
~~

## Next Gen

Where does the old man stop  
and you begin

Slowly, my children  
are doing what I once did  
and more beside

Not so much  
that I live through them,  
as they live past me

~~

# Not For You

These bits and scraps  
of thought and memory  
are not for you  
Not for anyone

They are simply a way  
to clean them out  
A box to fill  
so that with the lid closed  
the contents can be forgotten

~~

# Instant

Usually there is some time  
where we wait  
we probe carefully  
each other's skin

But you  
You walked right up to me  
and inside  
where you remain

~~

# The Origin of Religion

I look toward the trees  
where a hundred crows  
all talk to each other  
all at once

and I see a hawk  
being chased by two wrens  
and I think  
this must be a sign

There must be a message  
here  
~~



# Without You

I was lost without you  
sold at cost without you  
I live in the past without you  
a book that was lost without you  
The sun in the sky without you  
is hidden from sight without you  
The rivers are dry without you  
the oceans will die without you  
Nothing is light without you  
I've lost my sight without you

~~

# Prescient

As I back out of my spot  
I am checking the rear mirror  
and as my eyes flick  
to the side mirror  
I realize  
I am looking into the future  
~~

# Cities Create Farmers

To hear them tell it  
the farmers around here  
pulled a rib from their chest  
to break the frozen ground  
to grow the food  
to feed the cities

No government subsidy  
No tax breaks  
Just back breaks  
Just bare hands  
and that painfully got rib  
to feed the cities  
Who never pay enough  
~~

## Sekka no Uchi

Do you suppose  
the hammer tires  
of hitting the anvil  
or the anvil  
of being hit

Without the strike  
both hammer and anvil  
have no reason  
to exist  
Would never have existed  
~~

# Good Work

As I was waking  
my son was showing me  
around the writer's shed  
he had made  
in record time

An entrance with nook  
lots of light  
a wonderful lamp  
with burlap shade  
very retro

A bedroom  
and the sauna  
complete with toilet  
and sink  
(it was a dream)

The whole thing  
of cedar panel  
wired and magnetic  
safety lights  
"because it's code Dad"  
~~

# I Couldn't Look Away

Lying on my side  
as you came into the room  
I saw your feet first

Pale creatures gliding  
across the dark wood  
the cold wood

I couldn't look away

~~

## Is Your Love a Flower

Is your love a flower  
If you pluck a flower it dies  
say instead  
your love is lichen  
which is immortal  
which can grow on rock

~~

# My Scarred Heart

Every woman  
who has finished school  
who has finished with this town  
who has finished with me  
Has left with a piece of my heart  
I hope they kept it safe

In time, a heart regrows  
Lucky, because another woman  
always found her way  
to my door  
~~



# Fibrillation

Once, as I walked  
and felt my heart  
jump and pound in my chest  
I would have stopped  
finger to my throat  
concerned

But now I walk on  
thinking "it will sort itself"  
Now that I have bigger concerns  
than a jumpy heart  
~~

# Singalong

Israel plays his ukulele  
and sings Over The Rainbow  
and I try to sing along  
but Israel is gone  
And so is my voice  
~~

# Breaking Trail

The bush begins to green  
but for now  
I can still walk  
where I will not  
in a few weeks

Some sort of pressure  
to see places  
soon to be hidden  
leads me to the edge  
of the pond

Where the geese  
winners of the wars  
are nesting  
The goose eyeing me  
the gander with neck stretched  
thinking herself hidden

I stand quiet  
~~

# Each Time

Each time  
she would put the knife  
through my heart  
I would taste the steel  
on my tongue

More metallic than my blood  
Tinged with regret  
and hints of the perfume  
she would dab  
behind her right ear

~~

# No Need of a Timer

No need of a timer  
to remind me

I have a bladder  
that for decades  
has said  
"Time to go"

~~

*ZZZZZZZZZ*

## Yes, Like That

That wordless language  
that inarticulate precision  
the small grunts  
and moans  
that seem to mean nothing  
yet carry a world of understanding

~~

# We Swing Swords

All day we swing swords  
and discuss how to kill  
and at the end  
tired, footsore  
we face life once more  
outside the dojo

Face the lies, the greed  
the senseless desire  
for power, for lust

and perhaps, a little  
we regret the clean beauty  
of a sword moving at speed  
toward our head

~~

# A Poem of Death

I wish to write a poem of death  
but have no way to say  
that it is not about my own  
There is nothing for it  
but to write it

I have lost those I loved  
not many, but too many  
and it is my deepest hope  
that all those still living  
will be living still  
when I die

Damn, it has turned out  
to be about my death  
Can a poet not write  
without the words twisting  
and biting him on the hand

~~



# The Streets are wet

The streets are wet, cold  
the light a sodium mix  
of yellow and orange

My head is down  
but those lights reflect  
off of the water  
slick with oil

Pureness corrupted  
and the corruption makes the light  
swim and jump

My head is down  
and the rain runs under my collar  
and down my back

I put one foot  
before the other  
and think one thought  
to keep going

The thought of you  
warm in our bed  
~~

## What Is It

What is it  
to sit in a dark room  
slumped in a chair  
while she sleeps  
in the next room

What is it  
to sit in that chair  
and to feel her love  
slowly diminish  
and to know  
it's not her, it's you

What is it  
to sit helpless  
not knowing how to fix this  
to know she will leave  
if not this week  
than next

What is it  
to walk back to your bed  
and slip under the covers  
not waking her  
not touching her  
to lie sleepless beside her

What is it  
to wait for morning  
when she will ask  
what is wrong  
and know you will say "nothing"  
and know that was the wrong answer

~~

# I Love You Dearly

I love you dearly  
she said  
But are an unholy  
pain in the ass  
you will never be serious  
you will never amount to anything  
you are as stable as water  
from a drainpipe  
and just about as faithful  
She was right, of course  
~~

# Not Impressed

Write me a sonnet  
she said  
I didn't know  
what that was  
and I misheard  
anyway

I wrote her a limerick  
and she was not impressed

~~

## When We Could Travel

When we could travel  
I had little desire  
Now that we cannot go  
and all we have  
is a walk around the block  
I see more strangers  
than ever I met  
in a foreign land

~~

# Peace and Quiet

I don't want  
to make a living  
writing

I don't want  
to recite (re-cite)  
to strangers  
in a coffee house

I don't want  
to be a bit more lyrical  
or a bit more obscure

I could go on  
with all the things  
I don't want

But it adds up  
to a bit of peace  
and quiet each day

~~

# I Made a Wish

As a child  
I made a wish  
upon the first star  
and the shooting stars  
and birthday candles  
and dandelion blooms

All of the wishes  
must have been for others  
because I'm damned  
if I can remember  
any of them  
coming true

~~



# The Best Paper

The paper  
in the poetry books  
is so beautiful  
Not like this recycled  
bleached flimsy  
I want to take the books  
and vacuum the words  
leaving blank pages  
filled, potentially  
with the best words  
that can be placed  
only on the best paper

As I think of that  
I notice the vacuum  
has a loose filter  
I must fix it  
or the words  
like the dust  
will escape  
to fall back  
on the beautiful paper

~~

# I Learned

How can you not have learned  
after the third or fourth time  
I was once asked

But I did learn  
I learned the special wonders  
of each woman  
their delights and their hates  
I learned each time  
that I could love them

There was nothing of failure  
that the relationships ended  
all things end  
but my love went on  
and perhaps one or two of them  
kept loving me

I learned all right  
from each and every one  
but do not say  
that I should have learned  
from failure  
There was no failure  
Only a time together  
that came to an end

~~

# I Was Fourteen

I was fourteen  
and alone  
on the beach  
when I came across  
the footprints

A sign  
that I wasn't the only person  
in this damned town  
in winter

Footprints that  
I told myself  
were small  
and as I followed them  
I filled in the details

Black hair  
brown eyes  
curved breasts  
curved hips  
curved lips  
smiling at me

It was a lovely thought  
and then the footsteps  
moved off the beach  
onto the sidewalk  
and I could follow them  
no further

But that grey damp day  
was a bit warmer  
for the company

~~

# The Last Time

I know for a fact  
that she went wading with him  
the last time they were together  
they rolled up their pants  
and puddled in the lake

They must have gone deeper  
to get away from the others  
on the beach  
as he told her he must go  
They were far enough out  
that she could cry  
making his shirt wet

It was years  
before she told me the story  
it was after I picked up those pants  
and said  
"These smell of the lake"

And she asked me  
to wash them for her

~~

# Dissolving Into You

I walked upon the fen  
and looked down  
into the pitcher plants  
to see the insects  
half dissolved  
or wriggling weakly

In those red depths  
I saw myself  
having slid down the sides  
deeper and deeper  
unable to climb out  
and I thought  
"This is you and I"

~~

# Signs

"Oh", she said  
as I stroked her belly  
down from the hips  
to that mound  
that I loved so well  
"Your hands are cold"

I removed them  
to rub them together  
and she said  
"I didn't say I minded"

Of all the sighs  
and moans  
she made  
The paint under her nails  
where she scratched the wall  
The way she threw her head back  
her eyes rolled up

I think my favourite sign  
was when her toes  
those perfect little toes  
would curl downward  
toward her heel  
while her legs  
rose high into the air  
~~

## Two Poems

In June of 1960  
two poems  
one by Lorca  
and one by Neruda

Of all the things  
I could have read  
at this precise moment  
That was just perfect

If you think  
that after reading those  
I will be writing my own  
You have more faith  
in my ego  
than I do  
in my talent  
~~



# Let Her Sleep

I speak  
and she does not answer  
Not unusual  
but as I walk by  
I notice she sleeps  
in her chair

Let her sleep  
She works hard  
and hurts because of it  
She is kind to me  
and I am not always kind  
Today I made some noise  
as my back was stabbed  
with an ice pick

So let her sleep  
let her miss my temper  
my sweeping of dirty dishes  
from the counter  
into the sink  
as I look for a place  
to chop, while hoping  
that whoever stabbed Trotsky  
and me  
has escaped back to Russia  
~~

# How Many More Nights

The moon climbs slowly  
diagonally across the window  
as I lie sleepless beside her

How many more nights  
will I be here, will she be here

I turn away from the moon  
and watch the moonlight  
slide across her hair  
and caress her back

I trace with fingertips  
the moonlight  
from her hair  
across her back  
and down to her hip

She stirs  
makes a grumpy noise  
It is I who lie wakeful  
she is determined  
to sleep  
~~

# That's Nice

Look here  
I said to my daughter  
I had my school track shirt  
silk-screened  
on the very first Earth Day

She said "that's nice"  
while giving me that look  
that daughters give to their fathers  
The one that says  
"All you're telling me  
is that you're old"

~~

## Those Last Few Minutes

Those last few minutes  
lying in bed  
waiting for the brain  
to sort that dream  
into place

Otherwise half the day  
is spent with the feeling  
of leaving something  
half done

~~

# Every Time

Every time  
she cheated on me  
it was a surprise

But every time  
I cheated on her  
she knew

After all  
I am a man  
~~

# It's Cold Again

It's cold again  
being spring  
it might snow today

Yet the girls  
are in tight sweaters  
and tighter jeans

You have to love Canada

~~

# Ninja

Black sweats  
black coat  
with hood  
and a black mask

She looks like a ninja  
taking her little dog  
for a walk

~~

# Just My Type

Just my type  
absolutely not a pretty face  
and no girly clothes

Clunky boots  
but no goth/hipster/grunge  
Glasses worn  
as if she doesn't care  
that she needs glasses

no delicate features she  
but strong  
Same with her walk  
as she crosses the street  
hands jammed into jacket pockets

Something on her mind  
~~



## Dead Leaf

A dead leaf  
substitutes for a small animal  
a mouse, or a chipmunk  
as it runs down the road

fleeing the wind  
fleeing the cars  
I wince as it is run over  
~~

# Horrid Cakes

We have tea  
and horrid cakes  
with too little sugar  
at the living museum

as if tasting  
what the officers ate  
would tell us  
about the mud  
the filth and lice  
and the brutal  
man-destroying life  
of the soldier  
in the colonies

~~

# A Ball Game

A ball game in Detroit  
and then for a beer  
but half way in  
we realized our pale faces  
were the only white boys  
in the place

We looked  
They looked  
"wrong place"  
ran across everyone's brain  
followed by  
"oh, Canadians"  
as we walked to the bar  
~~

# You Would Think

You would think  
that the author  
of a surreal poem  
an obscure poem  
would know the meaning  
and perhaps they do

But I have read  
some of my own  
and I have no more clue  
what I meant  
than you would  
if you were to read  
them

~~

# Writing In My Car

I think I like writing  
in my car  
better than here  
a softer seat  
and my head is higher

When my head  
drags my poor abused neck  
downward  
it doesn't take long  
before my back  
begins to complain

~~

# I Suspect My Mother

I suspect my mother  
of being a bit  
of a bad-ass  
I know I'm not supposed to  
but there are so many  
clues

I suspect my father  
of being a bit  
of a victim  
I know I'm not supposed to  
but I am older now  
than he ever was  
and I see life more clearly  
now  
~~

# I Smile

As you strike me  
I remain silent  
not defending myself  
for I know  
that makes it worse

But inside my head  
my scream, my shout  
my kiai  
Drowns your voice  
drowns the sound  
of your strikes  
Drowns you

With each strike  
you get that much closer  
to death

And deep inside  
behind dead eyes  
where you will never see  
I smile

~~

# What's In My Bag

Show us  
what's in your bag  
oh famous photographer

For by the magic sympathetic  
we will become as good  
as you  
at what you do  
~~



# The Dog-eared Textbook

And so we come  
to the dog-eared textbook  
with marginalia

I look forward  
to my education  
tomorrow  
~~

# Do Nothing

Do nothing  
or, if you must  
Do the minimum  
This is the modern way  
and why not?  
To save time and effort  
must be a worthy goal

Do nothing  
when faced with a hard choice  
Do the minimum  
when faced with a repair  
Tomorrow will take care  
of itself  
Someone else will do it  
if it bothers them enough

~~

# I Take What I Can Get

Having risen early  
and gone for a walk  
while the early morning sun  
is shining

I feel a certain smugness  
as I drive home  
(drive home from a walk)  
in the grey overcast day  
where the snow  
is beginning to fall

~~

## In My Head I'm There

Not likely  
to get to my cedar bush  
and cabin  
any time soon

I found a small stand  
of cedar on my walk  
and pissed happily  
imagining myself  
somewhere else

~~

## Like Scars

Looking at the first dog-ear  
in this anthology  
of Canadian poets  
I decide to leave it

After all  
they are like my scars  
Part of the book now  
~~

# Death of Coffee

I will take  
the death of my coffee  
as a sign  
to stop reading

But truth be known  
I just can't get  
my heart into it  
Perhaps later  
likely tomorrow

~~

## Other Forms of Rot

As a young man  
I never bought  
expensive watches  
The stems would go green  
and break off  
after a year or two

It felt as if  
there was some corruption  
in me  
It still feels that way  
considering some of the things  
I did to some who loved me

Thinking back  
I glance down  
at my legs  
Half expecting to see  
moss, bracket fungus  
and other forms of rot

~~

# Improvement

Where once  
it would take weeks  
months  
for me to forget  
some slight  
real or imagined

It now takes me  
only days  
to forget, forgive  
or otherwise free myself  
from the depression  
my anger brings

~~



# Jackknife

When I was a child  
I would sometimes be given  
a jackknife, as you give  
to a small boy relative  
so he learns about cutting himself

All of those knives  
were taken by my grandmother  
"because you carved up the furniture"  
Do I have to defend myself  
even now?  
I did not

But the knives were gone  
Many years later  
As my grandmother's house  
was being emptied  
to be sold  
I opened the forbidden drawer  
with my folding knives

And became quite sad  
at the trauma, the hate  
over such poor little things  
I let them fall  
into the garbage  
I let them go  
~~

## Watch Out

A goose  
after such a racket  
with other geese  
in a swamp  
just out of sight

Erupts  
flying over my head  
and crashes through  
branches, dead and alive  
wings missing trunks  
but little else

"watch out" I say aloud  
thinking "you clumsy stupid animal"  
~~

# Mother

The first and last thing  
in your life  
is the word "mother"

The first is a woman  
who cries as she says  
"I am your mother"

And the last  
is when, with your last breath  
you answer  
"Mother"

~~

# I Had Forgotten

I had forgotten  
that you can preserve a leaf  
by placing wax paper on it  
then a towel  
and ironing the lot  
so the leaf is coated with wax  
Our very own mummification rituals  
Our very own attempts to defeat death  
~~

# It Is A Photograph

Here is a photograph  
it is of a child  
a child lying on a beach  
the child does not move

It is a photograph

It is a photograph

tell yourself

It is a photograph

~~

# Never a Soldier

I was never a soldier  
in a foreign land

I never lived there  
long enough to take a wife

We did not live poor  
outside of town  
hated by my people  
and hers  
but happy with each other

She did not wait for me  
as I went off to war  
and came back again

Each time giving me  
something new  
a shirt she had sewn  
a hat she had bought  
or slippers  
to wear by the fire

~~

# Borderlands

There are edges  
in all lives  
borderlands  
where the edge of home  
touches the lands  
of the foreign

For most, those edges  
are their front door  
or perhaps that place  
where their sidewalk  
meets the town sidewalk

~~

# The Strand Theatre

I wish I could go  
to the Strand Theatre  
on a summer Saturday afternoon  
to see a movie

The big sign  
sticking out over the sidewalk  
The main feature  
and the second show

Through the glass doors  
and into the lobby  
where a small snack-bar  
dispensed Macintosh's toffee  
that you could share  
if you broke it fast enough

and into the theatre  
Two aisles and an actual stage  
with a big screen



and for those who knew  
doors at the back  
to get to the alleyway  
after the show was over

Gone now  
it must be close to fifty years  
but I still visit  
once in a while  
for a twenty-five cent  
double feature  
Saturday Matinee  
~~

## Soon Too Late

A thought drifts  
across my mind  
I would like a coffee  
but I glance at the clock  
and decide it is too late  
decide I should go to bed  
soon  
~~

# What Is This Ash

What is this ash  
in the can  
on this shelf here?

It is your grandmother  
and someday  
we will have to do something  
about her

Perhaps cast her upon the lake  
that she loved so much  
did you know she swept the fleet  
one year in her sailboat  
Got to tie a broom to her mast

Did you know she ran rum  
across the lake  
in the fishing tugs  
At least I think she did  
from the stories she told

And she knit me a sweater  
almost every year  
and made me a quilt

This was her pepper grinder  
which she asked me to fill  
every time I visited  
because I was so good at it

She was married and divorced  
and worked for the town  
Before that she developed film  
in the drugstore  
She trained in the militia  
and taught me to shoot

Or maybe on the garden  
she loved to garden  
and my father built her a greenhouse  
out of bits and scraps

She hammered bent nails straight  
and once smuggled a cactus  
back from Israel  
in her hollow bra

She taught me how to slip plants  
and asked me to carve her a dibbler  
Oh it was ugly  
but she told me it was the best  
and each time I visited  
she was using it.

I wrote a letter to the University  
to save an old greenhouse  
and told them she loved it so much  
she never stole bits  
off the plants

I don't know  
when we'll take that old can  
and sprinkle it somewhere  
as long as it sits here  
in the basement

well, you know  
~~

# Missed Timing

If there was one thing  
I could point to  
that caused the arguments  
and the stress  
in my relationships  
It would be  
the mis-timing  
of that rising heat  
That desire for sex  
~~

# As Perfect As It Gets

As perfect as it gets  
sitting in the car  
in the Starbucks lot  
Warm enough  
but not, as the song says  
Too Damned Hot  
followed by Love For Sale

And in my book  
I come to the first poem  
not just dog-eared  
but check marked  
by passages of miscarriage  
Him drinking  
and un-tender sex

~~

# Bright Spring Jackets

Bright spring jackets  
on a young couple  
set off by light blue  
surgical masks  
as they walk with their coffee  
past my car

I see them living together  
and the extra stress  
of feeling trapped together  
by the pandemic  
added to the usual

I wish them well  
or if that is not enough  
I wish them a selective memory  
of walking, in bright spring jackets  
toward a hopeful future

~~



# Parents Are

Mothers are for encouragement  
where you deserve none  
and fathers are for assuming  
you can do the job

Figure it out, they say  
if I had time to teach you  
I'd have time  
to do it myself

And when you finish  
your father might nod  
while your mother will say  
how beautiful

~~

# Dredge It Up

Never wake a sleeping baby  
and let sleeping dogs lie  
We all know these things  
and we know the truth of them

Yet we feel the need  
to pick at scabs  
to dredge from the fetid mud  
at the bottom of the swamp  
that memory

We snap, we wail  
we recoil from the stink  
of that rotted thing

All the while being told  
it's good for us  
~~

# Angry Sons

Was ever a son not angry  
It is a myth  
a lie  
that says sons grow up  
for twenty years  
and step into a career  
of wife and kids  
New car each two years  
and a friendly dog

A lie  
Sons stay at home  
and chafe to be gone  
they resent taking on  
the jobs their father did  
where they once longed  
to help

This anger too  
is a father's gift  
or rather the slow ability  
to hold that anger

Before being led from home  
by a young woman  
to eventually  
finally  
start a life  
of his own

~~

# I'm Trying to Say

When you come into the room  
it is as if  
there is less air

Not in the scientific sense  
that, indeed there is less air  
to the exact volume  
of your body

No, I am trying to say  
that when you enter the room  
I find it difficult to breathe  
as if my lungs are inefficient

Oh hell  
you take my breath away

~~

# There's Always an Excuse

There's always an excuse  
for what you do  
He did it  
She didn't  
Life is hard

But no matter  
how good the excuse  
it was you who did it  
~~

# Pressure to Perform

Some old man told me  
or perhaps I decided  
That I needed to satisfy  
any woman I was with  
And so, when I was with  
any woman  
I was frightened  
that I would not be good enough  
that I would not find  
those secret places  
that would make her sing  
make her moan

Often I would fail  
as many of those women  
who might read this  
could tell  
And to them I say  
Sorry, Sorry  
I was young  
I needed practice  
I think I got better  
~~

# In Guelph

How did I get here  
to this land-surrounded town  
with its two rivers  
No match for a lake  
that you cannot see cross

How did I end  
thrown up on the land  
so far from the empty horizon  
Eyes stopped short  
no matter the direction  
~~



# Long Car Rides

When I was small  
the long car rides  
from Tillsonburg  
to Port Stanley  
were a dark, quiet time  
to speak with my mother

A time when there were no distractions  
just the trees and towns blurring past  
in a hypnotic invitation to share my thoughts

~~

# Must Be A Textbook

Who scribbles  
on the front of a book?

Dog-ears  
check marks  
and at one poem  
(of course Peggy Atwood)  
asterisks, lines  
and words  
more words  
beside the words  
~~

# Please Have Mercy

Please have mercy  
it is just creeping toward spring  
just becoming jackets  
as I wait for Fed Ex  
to try again  
to deliver the pills  
that keep me alive

I do not need  
to read a poem  
about the seasons  
I do not need reminding  
that winter is coming

~~

# Messages

As you move toward the airport  
the phone messages move  
between us:

Coming in to the building  
Getting on the plane now  
Turning off the phone  
Arrived safely

and then silence  
as you move through foreign climes  
and I resist, often  
asking if you are fine  
if you still remember me

I resist  
not wanting to distract you  
not wanting to seem needy  
~~

# That's Good Land

That's good land  
that is  
why would he go  
and sell it to the developers  
so they can cover it with houses

For money you fool  
how much do you figure  
that old man made  
each year

No, that land was his fortune  
his savings  
his retirement plan  
~~

# She Would Open Her Hand

She would open her hand  
and a bee would land  
She would whisper  
and the bee would sleep

When we walked together  
sometimes dogs would bark  
but she would look  
they would lower their heads  
and lie down quiet

I don't know what it was  
I wish I did  
But she could never  
make me still  
How I wished she could  
~~

# Last Bicycle Ride

There must have been  
a last bicycle ride  
But, not expecting it  
I don't remember

Now as spring thunder roars  
I think of you  
my second-hand steed  
Perhaps, if I grow to trust  
my balance again  
~~

# Conductivity Blues

As I tap again and again  
on the glass of my phone  
trying to take a picture  
I vow, yet again  
to trim my nails

Yet, stubborn thing  
if I were trying not  
to touch-screen anything  
I would go from nothing  
through search-engine  
to cat-video  
in a flash

~~



# Cold Spring Rain

Liam has been caught  
at the end of his walk  
in a sudden deluge  
of cold spring rain

"Maybe go early  
to the sauna  
to warm up" I say

But what I really want to do  
is fold my little boy  
into my arms  
to warm him

My little boy  
who has become a young man  
who often now hugs  
his frightened father

~~

# Foot In The Door

Another month  
is trying to close the door  
while winter  
with its frozen boot  
does its best

Brigit pushes  
the boot melts

~~

## 200 Poems

200 poems  
from PK Page  
to look forward to

I may have to slow down  
as my pile becomes halved  
and we remain in lock-down  
the thrift shops closed

A good place to slow down  
~~

# Face Like an Old Boot

He was an ugly man  
ugly as a fire plug  
we used to say  
Face like a pug

No Hapsburg lip  
or Windsor ears  
just a mutt  
Short of a pedigree

But to see his face  
when his wife appeared  
No movie magic  
could have done better  
The beast becoming Beauty

~~

# So Many Poems About Sex

So many poems about sex  
There are more important things  
justice, equality, reconciliation  
Where are those in your work

I do apologize  
before your quite reasonable qualms  
but I am a scientist  
a biologist  
and all my training  
all my understanding  
tells me that for importance  
it's all about sex

~~

# Ripples

The last time I saw her  
she lay back in a canoe  
and trailed her willowy fingers  
in the starlit water

The ripples spreading back  
tiny waves moving toward and away  
from me  
I reached out to touch one

~~

# Accommodation

When first she moved in  
the vine and the tree  
Hardly a space between  
but, after a year  
a comfortable accommodation  
~~

# I'm A Gemini

The lonely, the abandoned  
the bullied, the powerless  
always have a companion  
an invisible friend  
as a child  
some spiritual being  
a guiding animal  
or an angel  
as an adult

Someone on their side  
someone magic (uncritical)  
to grant wishes  
Clap your hands  
and wish real hard

~~



## Lovely Paper II

These poems I read  
are on such lovely paper  
and they are all the better  
for it

My poor creations  
are left ephemeral  
electrons in the net

Not real at all  
virtual, digital  
The difference between  
vinyl and mp3, surely

~~

# A Grain Of Sand

Spend your time  
while you can child  
with your nose pressed  
to the sand

see how each grain  
is different  
each a chip from another rock  
crushed and ground  
by glaciers  
polished by water  
thousands of years old

Look while you can child  
in a few, so very few years  
the sand will only be a blur

~~

# Streaming

Where once  
I would take disk from cover  
and know who was playing  
their lovely music

Now I pick up my phone  
with every third tune  
"I know that, who is it?"

~~

# Trust The Image

Why is it  
that the image of a bird  
wings plucked  
but for some pin feathers  
should remind me  
of a Vancouver bar  
with jodo judges  
and  
Hah! Hoppy beer  
~~

# I Can Taste You Still

I bring my fingers  
to my mouth  
and sometimes I swear  
I can taste you there

Surely not after these years  
but there it is  
that peculiar taste of salt  
and blood

You are gone these many years  
and many years before that  
you were gone from me  
But it seems the body remembers

~~

# NeoProphets

When you hear the voice  
of he who speaks for god  
ask quickly after the health  
of that god who has a cold  
and so must speak through a man

When you see the works  
of those who do the works of god  
look closely to the money  
where is it now  
that it is in their safe hands

The good men I have known  
who wear the robes  
of church and temple and coyote  
Have been as deaf as I  
to the words of their gods

They ask no fee of coins  
for their service  
but instead the good works  
of those for whom  
they have done good works

~~

# Famous Sensei

I see them in their numbers  
the leaders  
the teachers  
the fighters  
I see their photographs  
and their acolytes singing  
their endless praises

Yet the best men  
I have ever met  
never sought recognition  
let alone fame  
never asked for praise  
they only chatted  
and practised  
and sometimes taught

Their followers were few  
but faithful  
You will perhaps not know them  
for they have learned  
and do not seek  
what so many others seek  
they do not ask for their 15  
~~

# How To Build a Fire

You do know  
don't you  
that two logs  
far apart  
will never create a fire

You have to roll them together  
touching is best  
and they will ignite  
they will combust  
they will throw off the heat

So how about it  
there is the bed  
shall we see what happens  
if we try to start a fire  
Even if we don't manage a fire  
we'll be warmer  
~~



## A Strand of Hair

She brushed her long hair  
of the lustre that, if I may  
made me lust for her  
and from her comb  
she pulled a single strand  
and said to me  
Give me your hands  
Over my wrists  
she draped that hair

~~

## Walking With Mom

Red snow suit and all  
Oops down she goes  
but Mom is there  
to help her up  
a brief hug of the knees  
and off we go again

~~

# Box, Assorted

The auctioneer is bored  
another box, assorted  
The bric a brac of a life

House, contents and machinery

This would be contents  
of some random drawer  
The accumulated junk  
poured into a cardboard box

Is there a treasure  
a collectible toy  
a forgotten gold coin

Who will give me five dollars  
how about four  
~~

# When I Almost Died

The wooded hill  
behind my father's house  
and as I reached out  
for a handy tree  
I drove a thorn  
deep into the palm  
of my right hand

Two or three times  
I almost died  
and this was one

Blood poisoning you could see  
as it moved up my arm  
Good thing you brought him in  
said the doctor

~~

## When I Made a Cane

Behind my father's house  
I tied a branch  
into a knot  
thinking that when I was older  
and I needed it  
I would make it into a cane  
Years later I looked  
but could not find the tree  
~~

## When I Was a Shamen

I have never cut  
a desert cactus  
to squeeze out the water  
But I have plucked  
touch-me-not  
to smear on poison ivy

~~

# Primary Colours

There are three primary colours  
of which all the others are made  
That is what I have been told

But this bug, here  
with a metallic sheen  
down his back  
Here is a colour  
I have never seen  
it almost  
no, it does  
it changes as I watch

How did this clever insect  
know the proportions  
to create its magnificent decoration

~~

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