

Squirrels with Knives



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They've got knives

Fat squirrels lined up
on the edge of the deck
like vultures on a fence
They've all got knives
and they are looking
at
the
door
~~

Slow Flood

The slow flood
of our basement
probably started today
as we pushed the snow
off the drive
and onto the lawns

~~

Christmas, Toward Midnight

It is wandering toward midnight
and yet, I am still awake

The presents have been opened
The small piles put into bags
and taken off to hidden troves
The house is quiet
and yet, I will not sleep

As if staying awake
is an act of protection
as if I am watching over
those I love
as they sleep

~~

Running Hot and Cold

It is a warm period
I throw my sweater
carefully
onto another chair

Knowing that soon
the hot flash will end
and I will be cold
again

~~

Pandemic Christmas

We did the family zoom thing
and laughed at the toddlers
Tried to catch up
drank too much coffee
And signed off
for the lunch
we might have had
Together
~~

What Do I Know

I know what I know
but what do I know
and what do I not

This is a good question
and as I sit and think
I believe I know very little
I can read, write
take photographs
grind wood
and a bit of budo

But for all that
I find many who know more
Perhaps that's it
I can see

~~

Fat Grey Squirrel

Fat grey squirrel
peeks from the shed
Doesn't fool me
I see footprints
in the snow
~~

The Main Stream

My son, my daughter
the times you feel outside
out of touch
with the mainstream
Rejoice
Consider that the mainstream
sweeps from beginning
to end of the river
Carrying all with it
unconsidered, powerless
Those you feel apart from
are without thought,
tranquilized
Because they know
They have been instructed
and there is no need
just move down that channel
down that main stream
and forget striking out
for the bank

Strike out, my babies
keep your head above the water
move to the bank
move to the streams
away from the Main
away from what "we know"
and see
See what others don't
what others can't
with their heads down
Swept along heedless
As if headless

Be the outsider
do not wish
to be blind
to follow the river
with your eyes shut
Only those few
who leave the mainstream
can see the river

~~

There Was Never Privacy

For 10,000 years
the grannies have watched
From over the fence
and around the hut
From down the street
and up the hill

Today
there are too many
and not enough grannies
today
the grannies don't know us
So we are watched
by a thousand cameras
~~

The Waiting

I look out the front door
but there are only bird tracks
No Amazon packages

~~

Fifteen Minutes

A few more years
that's all I have
to become famous
a superstar
to get my face
on the cover of a magazine
Just a few more years
for that accident
to happen

~~

Some Bread

Some bread
to feed the squirrels
I love to see their footprints
in the new snow
on the deck
I wonder where they think
the bread comes from
Do they know
we put it there
~~

Popular With The Kids

I gotta rhyme fool and cool
learn some signs
I dunno, like wiggle my fingers
or slap my own chest
~~

With It

How many cultural references
are going to be garbage
in twenty years
Howdy Doody do
who wore a coon skin hat
and had a tiger in his tank
~~

She Wanted What?

I wasn't very bright
as a youngster
I wonder how many cues
I missed
How much
I didn't get
~~

Winter Squirrels

Looking out the window
to watch the squirrels
eat the bread

Nobody there
The lazy little cobs
they're still asleep
~~

Richard Farina Wrote

Richard Farina wrote
"this one is for Mimi"
His wife asked him
"who is the next one for"

Two days
after the book was published
he was dead
I'm sure
there is a deep life lesson
somewhere in there
~~

Short Stories

Man, I hate short stories
even more
than I hate long poems

~~

This Book

This book
was owned by Tony Harris
it says so
inside the back cover
And it's on my shelf
because someone borrowed my book
and lost it
and gave me this one
which is not the book
he borrowed
and his name was not
Tony Harris

I have no idea
who Tony Harris is
or why he used
a tiny green-blue
blank customs slip
for a bookmark

~~

The Golden Age

Was there ever a time
when poets did not look back
to the golden age

Real poets that is
the ones who write
about the golden age

The past is where
the fields are golden
and the sheep are slow

So we wait a generation
and this will be
the golden age
Made misty by memory

The age when we were young
and the girls were pretty
and the boys were strong
and we could live forever

~~

Christmas is Over

The tree is coming down
and my little space heater
isn't being very heaty
and I don't have cookies
or a box of chocolates
to eat while I write

But I'm out of the way
being non-irritating
by being out of sight
I have a coffee
and a bit of quiet
~~

Mrs Moore's Fridge

The old lady is dead
Mrs Moore
who babysat us
and had a fridge
on her front porch
Back in the days
when you lost your house key
and didn't notice
for a month

She died when I was a kid
And years later
I asked my mother
if I remembered a fridge
on a front porch
Yes, that was Mrs Moore
next door
She used to babysit you
She died a long time ago
~~

Was Your Great Grandmother Nice?

Are you going to live forever my child?

If so, behave yourself

look to your reputation

But, brief mortal

if you are going to die

then live

Hitch across the country

get drunk in small town bars

and fight out back

because the locals

think you were flirting

with one of theirs

Work to eat

and give that money away

to someone who needs it more

than you do

Go to school
and stay there
for as long as you can
convince me to support you
It will be longer than you think

Get your heart broken
A lot
Tell your stories
they will keep you warm,
better than a good reputation
and money in the bank
~~

She Could Cut Me

She could cut me down
with a word
but she usually didn't bother
She'd wait
until I wasn't looking
and throw me on my ass
~~

Ready

It snowed today
and I shovelled the drive
just in case
you dropped in

I made sure
your space was clear
and there was no ice
on the walk

~~

Nudes

My camera is ten years gone
but my eyes
still hold the longing
to watch light
cascade over flesh

~~

3 Crore on Frontline

The memes I don't expect to understand
but the news
"3 crore on frontline to get free vaccine"
I fear that my mind is going,
if not already gone

This is not the first time
But I remain hopeful that
it's a cultural thing
and I'm simply old
rather than old and senile
~~

They Revealed It

I blame the Catholic Church
they dropped the latin mass
I don't care if they had nobody
who was interested in the church
and latin
It was a mistake

When the common folk
lost the mystery
but gained the words
they could not help
but to interpret those words
~~

Old Deaf Kitty

Old deaf kitty
comes meowing
around the corner
Yes, there is someone
here

Want to go out
Yes, go keep the squirrels
off the deck
lazy fat things
getting all up on your deck
~~

This Mirror

Here is a mirror
it has returned you
to yourself
I pick it up
and gaze deep
hoping
that it will return you
to me

~~

Pizza and Pop

Pizza and pop
in a school lunchroom
plastic chairs
linoleum squares
Another seminar
but where?

~~

It's Too Cold

It's too cold
for the little fat furries
and the apple cores
and the bread crusts
are piling up
on the deck

Stay bundled
in your nests
you grey squirrels
and you solitary reds
get that nose
tucked into that tail
The food will be here
when it warms up

~~

Tear Me Up

Around her
I always felt
like a big sheet
of wet paper

And she had such
Big
Boots
~~

Strip Me Down

Strip down to the moan
she said
because we've only got
a few minutes

~~

Hello?

Once more I reach for you
I call
expecting you to answer
You must be upstairs
or maybe outside

But thoughts of the door
remind me
that you are not here

~~

In Bed

Lying on my back
looking at the cracks
in the ceiling
I can see them all
at once

There is nothing
to block my view
No lemon hair
No gentle eyes
or seeking lips
~~

Old Hickory

Hoist onto my shoulders
your thighs around my ears
I walk you to the door
where you grasp the sill
and for the first time
you notice the knife I keep there

When I felt the blade
against my eyebrow
I wondered
if you were thinking
of taking my ear
or cutting your thigh

~~

So Much

So much
I want to avoid this
but rising from the swamp
like last year's dead moose
comes the hole
in my life
that was left
when I said goodbye
~~

From Here to Was

Returning to you
I saw
that I had been away
for too long
I had moved from here
to was

You smiled and hugged me
like you would hug a friend
and I saw
that we would drift
apart
~~

So It Goes

So it goes
I thought
and we move on
And I did
move on
and now, a lifetime on
I find
that I have carried you
with me

~~

Oh, Hello

When you're gone
I nap more often
it moves the hands
on the clock
and sometimes
lovely, lovely times
you wake me up
~~

Liam And The Big Truck

When you were little
my little boy
you would run to the window
to watch the garbage truck

Now that you're older
you don't bother
thinking instead
"Now I've got to go get the bins"

~~

Thoughts that Follow

Thoughts that follow:

I'm a little hungry

I can make lunch early

Oh, no I have to wait

She doesn't like to eat early

I can make lunch early

~~

Port Stanley

How can it be
that I can't lie on the hot sand
and stare up at the sky
so impossibly, deeply blue
Sweat on my back
gathering grains
my legs, my arms
hot grains of sand
that I will stomp away
brush away
as I walk home

It is yesterday
and I'm sixteen
all stumble
all bumble
and yet
You are beside me
and it is hours from supper
and, even through the sand
I can feel you breathe
~~

Tillsonburg

You scared the hell out of me
You asked me to the movies
said you would pay

It seemed like you liked me
but how could that be
Not me, you were looking
at someone else
You must have been

It was impossible
Nobody could like me
want me
I said no thank you

~~

Guelph

Picture a bed
and a half dressed girl
lying with her face to the wall
and a boy, dressed
sitting on the edge
He's thinking about his life
and what it all means
Sad isn't it?

~~

Waiting To Begin

When are you coming home
Because my life
is on hold
My heart
has stopped
and things that fall
just hang in the air
like a bad movie trope
So baby I hope
that you're coming home soon
So I can breathe again

~~

Inventory

Two years of cancer
waiting for the clever little cells
to get around
the expensive pills that I swallow
every evening
two hours after supper

Two years without fear
"It simply is"
But this plague
that could kill me
in a week
And those who don't care

Today, again
I was too frightened
to go into the grocery store
So I came home instead
Another week of coffee
two days of decaf
I'm OK until then
~~

Huggy Old Man

I seem to be
a huggy kind of guy
I wasn't much for touching
as a boy
And crappy at kissing
as a teen
But as an old man
I'm a whiz
at the hug
(just not too long, OK)
~~

Youngest Inaugural Poet

All in the news
is a sweet young
national poet
Perfect
Hopeful
Thoughtful
A poet of change

Good
I am too old for such things
but someone must

I have tried, worked
in my small way
to change the world
to change the lives
around me
But now I leave that
to others

Content that my life
wasn't important
Content to be a poet
of squirrels on the back deck
and sunshine glimpses
and tales of misspent youth

Go
Be the poet laureate
of your own life
I'm retired

~~

Photographer Sometimes

Ten years
of developing film
and prints
and I'd had it
I put my camera away

Twenty years later
the digital colours had me
the saturation
the sharpness

But slowly
I looked for ways
to destroy
what was never meant to be

The sharpness went first
Where was the grain?
And now the colours

The world I see
is not vivid
Not sharp
It never was

Another ten years
and I put the cameras
Away

~~

Clever Fellows

The Japanese
have figured out
how to make the scent
of a cat's head

Clever fellows

~~

The Middle Class

I see that it is impossible now
to live like the Simpsons
(that's a cartoon family,
single income)

Fuck me, when was it ever?
I was born in the fifties
Time of single incomes
Sure
Maybe for the union guys
in the car plant
But not for us

Not for me and my family
Two of us, and our three degrees
and the Union
managed a house
and two kids
barely

It's a choice, you know
and somewhere
around Reagan and Thatcher
you, yes you Joe Voter
bought into Trickle-Down
Give rich people
more money
and they will give it
to you.

You bought that
instead of a house
Now you own that
Good thing
you don't have to pay
those union dues,
that extra pack of smokes
is nice

And that pension?
Nope, you have bills now
Fuck the future
~~

Never Drank It

When my grandmother
gave me a bottle of liqueur
from a trip she took
I said I would drink it
at my wedding

I knotted it into a macramé
which also held a plant
and hung in my college apartment

Later
it was thrown onto the basement floor
and soaked in floods
for several years.
The booze leaked or evaporated
and the jute stank

But it's OK
I never got married

~~

Reading Poetry

You don't read poetry
to learn how to live
you read it
to learn how another
struggles to live
~~

Beatnik

Beatnik
Beat Nik
Sput Nik
Pic Nik

Jack says no
Says you listen
to his own confusion
There is no lesson
Except Luc Bresson
Mul Ti Pass

Snap your fingers
the moment lingers
~~

Zen

You think it's confusion
it's all illusion
it's all collusion
with the great delusion

~~

Out The Back Door

I look out the back door
to check on the world
No squirrels on the deck
but my little grey cat
is checking too
We both look
We both look at each other
He looks at me
I look at him
Then I wiggle my fingers
and he meows
But, smart kitty
that he is
he doesn't move
until the door opens
In he comes
flipping his tail at me
You're welcome I say
to his upturned nose
~~

McLaughlin

Tucked away
in the University library
not hidden
not forbidden
just not visited
Four floors up
and at the back
were a few books on
Tantric Sex

How perfect was that?
A girl I knew
was into the East
and what a perfect
ummm opportunity
to combine two
ummm interests
But it never worked out
Before we were enlightened
we always ended up
having non-Tantric Sex

~~

Bill Burroughs

Did Bill Burroughs
make a living
charging \$5
to take his picture
and \$10 to stand
beside him
like a third world urchin?

Seriously
is there a celebrity alive
who didn't find Bill
and say "big fan, can I?"
~~

Still Angry

Damnit, why are you hiding?
I had my morning nap
and I'm sure I dreamed of you
but I can't remember
you must have hidden

You're still angry aren't you?
It's been thirty years
and you're still angry.

~~

His Manhood

"He pulled me
onto his manhood"

His manhood?
Is that what you think,
that a prick is a man?
All that's important
is the cock between his legs?
His meat and two veg?

Honestly, grow up a bit
and stop with the Victorian cuteness
His prick is not his manhood
any more than your cunt
is your womanhood.

Your womanhood is also your tits
and his manhood is also his tongue
And you've both got an ass
Get it right.

~~

Ninja Squirrels

The squirrels have come and gone
taking the stale bagels
while I sat, head down
writing

I feel that ought to make me sad
but really
they're only squirrels
how much did I miss?

~~

That's You

The footsteps
in fresh snow
leading to the shovel

The packed snow
that later turns
to small patches of ice
left to jolt your shoulder
as you clear
a new fall

That's you
~~

Preparations

Fix the coffee
turn on the lights
and the music
Fix the heater
Pour the coffee
put on a sweater
Find glasses and pen

All this
before even thinking
of the first few words
~~

What's Wrong Now

Scratching my head
I feel a tickle
further down
as if a hair
is being moved
But I'm bald
Oh dear
What's going wrong now
~~

Direction is Never Destiny

Three steps forward
two steps back
We all know this
We all know
things will improve
We have faith
that it will get better

But why two steps
why not six steps back
for three forward

Some facing the other way
will say three steps back
and six steps forward

Direction is never destiny
Pick one
and walk
~~

Didn't Happen

You would think
with all their pushiness
their feed-me looks
that squirrels would be shameless

But that fat black squirrel
just fell
out of a snow covered bush
hit the ground
looked around
just like a cat
and walked off
pretending it didn't happen
~~

Restful Woman

She was never more
than 30 seconds
from coming
So restful
~~

Shorelines

The shorelines are all the same
The water
the rocks
or the sand
If you long for difference
say one's water is sweet
and one salty

But surely
this is the same
as the girl in your arms
Her lips are sweet
Her lips are salty

I have stood on the rocks
in the Southern Pacific
the Northern Atlantic
and on the Great Lakes
The girl is the same
sometimes sweet
sometimes salty

~~

Magical Thinking

A clear sky
no bird in sight
but a feather drifts
rocking down the air
as I watch

Yes I checked
no birds
yet a feather

Surely, I told myself
it was dislodged
from a tree
by the wind
No omen this
no glimpse
into magical realm

And I walked on
diminished
~~

Cost

Six poems for a coffee
is that too high a price?

~~

I Look Up

And the sun
how did I miss it
I must sit
for a while longer
and enjoy it
I write this
in exchange
for five minutes

~~

Tubby Black Squirrel

Tubby black squirrel
waddles away from the deck
"You ate it all yesterday" I yell
He flicks his tail
and rolls under a bush
~~

The Idea of Bread

There's something about
making a coffee
while she is out
getting fresh bread
for breakfast

The white warmth
of a croissant
making my insides warm
as I look out the window
onto fresh snow

~~

My Old Man Was Not There

My old man
did not make an appearance
But I spent the weekend
in Port Stanley
On Friday
I traded his car
a blue Pontiac Parisienne
with the 327 engine
off lonely in the corner
under the hood
for some white car

I must have been
up to no good
for a couple of days
that I don't remember
Therefore, drinking
But on Sunday
I was parked close
to the old man's place

I talked with two old guys
(the two who convinced me
to swap cars)
and said "I'm 65
and my old man
is going to give me shit"

I drove off to return the white thing
but the new road, the subdivision
and the new construction
on the old man's place
confused me
I was there already

Funny though
his house was on a clay hill
No room for roads or houses
~~

White Roses

I sent white roses
from Alberta
and when I got to Alaska
and phoned you
\$7 a minute on the payphone
in the bar
You said we should re-evaluate
our relationship

I sat down at the bar
and the rest
as they say
is fuzzy

~~

Lost My Religion

Give us back
the age of the Patriarchs
who spoke to God
who would kill their sons
to prove their obedience
Give us that firm hand
and a future after death
with virgins

And take away our need
to think our way
through this godless age
No more
of this existential angst

Daddy oh Daddy
why did you leave us
alone and bereft
of your firm hand
and that love
I'm sure
must have
been
~~

Listening

I hunch over my notebook
listening to Classic Prog
on CBC Listen

My neck getting stiff
my back getting sore
I grit my teeth
and vow, just one more
~~

Days of Blood

On the days of blood
She would try to think
before she spoke
Not really believing me
about the change
that chased the moon
But out of love for me
she made an effort
not to rip my throat out
~~

To Work

A white-sun morning
clouds on the horizon
and a clear-cold sky
as I drove Brenda to work

On the way back
the sun burst free
painting the old town
and the lone jogger
moving up the hill
a rosy-orange

~~

Squirrels, Not Birds

Was it our turn
I don't know
about such things
but yesterday
after months of silence
our place erupted
with bird calls

And today, nothing
Sorry, we have fat squirrels
not lovely birds

~~

Belief

Look at it
two eyes
nose
mouth
four limbs
a spine

What delusion
what fantasy
could make you claim
that you are separate
apart from a frog
a dog

Only man
whose brain
has the ability to ignore
his eyes
Could invent nonsense
and claim it true
"Because I believe it"
~~

There Havet

There havet oberu les-
ot herwi secha os-
Man theme asure
maker ofrul es-
cre atoro fcate gorie s-
subm itsfr omfea r-
Butr ulesc hange
soher eism ine-
al lword saref ive-
Li mbsan dhead
wordb ingt orso-
n eatne ssand mores o
~~

Close the Curtains

If you open the curtains
and let the light in
the sun will reveal
streaks on the glass
and the dust
drifting through the air
The table
which once pride-gleamed
is revealed
as the scratch-and-dent thing it is

Best close the curtains
and go back to sleep
Dream of that shining city
(citadel, fortress)
on the hill
Remember, remember the spires
with pennants flying
and never look down
to where the blood
has worn away
the mud upon which
it was built

~~

Acolyte

I sat for hours
on her floor
resting my head
on the edge
of her bed
I listened to her talk
and nodded
in the right places
But not once
did she invite me up
and into that bed

~~

Lessons of Budo

I sit
chin on hand
eyes closed and burning
trying to rearrange
my thoughts
so I can teach
how to kill imaginary people
with a Japanese sword

There is no part
of my mind
that stumbles over that
I long ago understood
that in order to live
I must accept that I am dead
and in order to die
I must have been alive
~~

Sensei

I know what I want to teach
but once again
I will ask what I need to teach
This is the dance
I have danced
for forty years.
The only question
is where, in the dance,
we step in

~~

Lost Cause

It was a lost cause
and I knew it from the start
but there she was
on the mini-putt course
and there was I
on my bicycle
heading to the beach

I stopped, got off the road
and unslung my camera
She was right there
all I had to do was speak out
or raise the camera to my eye
But I knew it was a lost cause
I just knew it

~~

A Nice Balcony

She lived in the fourth building from the left
three rows in
count down 15 floors
and look to the far left
then count in two apartments.
It was nice, with a balcony
that looked over another balcony
under a balcony
beside two balconies.

She liked to lean on the railing
and chat to me
as I sat inside
with a beer
waiting for bed-time.

~~

Jackson Pollock Was Not a Russian Spy

A cultural war
that has gone on
since the second world war
Jackson Pollock, a Russian spy
putting plans for secret military bases
in his paintings

But the war
has been going on
since Ogg and Ook
that stone spear point
could be better
but
"we've always done it that way
you communist"

Those who believe in progress
are absolutely deluded
each change is to be resisted

If it was good enough for Grandpa
it's good enough for us
Progress is the enemy
of the tribe

It is a false god
You don't believe in progress
you fight to keep what you have
and more fiercely
for more of it

~~

Touque

Winter
and at the intersection
is a girl
or I assume

long blond hair
under a touque
Big winter coat
and boots

A lot left
to the imagination
~~

How It's Done Now

Of course
on a day when my back spasms
seem to be settling down
I will get out of the car
and knock the Mag Light
from the door
where it will hit the ground
and roll under Pam's car

Carefully, slowly
the old-man-crouch
lowering a knee
then the other
to the ice
and that tentative bend
to put a hand on the ground

Now the twist
to look underneath
and the even more risky
reach for the flash

An even more tentative
rise, rather not like
a porpoise breaching
and a slow walk to the house

~~

A Simple Equation

I sit with my coffee
reading, writing
and I feel my lower back
against my chair

I feel it spasm
in slow motion
More and more tight

Each sip of coffee
or sniff of freeze-running nose
hurts just a bit more

I should not complain
I will not
While my old grey cat
lies whimpering, leaking shit

Both of us will recover
or we will die
Life is a simple equation
~~

Just John

Catching movement on the deck
I think "squirrels"
but no
it's my neighbour
putting garbage
into our bin

No fat furballs
eating an apple core
Just John
puttering around again
~~

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