

Summer Skin



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Introduction

Oh how I miss the summer skin that I felt when I was a young man. That slightly sunburned, brown skin that held its own bit of the sun.

How I miss that kind back, I would run my hand over it and savour every soft ridge as I put lotion on to sooth the burn.

She would never give up the sun, and I never wanted to give her up, but seasons change, she changed, we changed and I lost her one fall, as summer ended and winter was coming

I lost her and I think I have been searching for that summer skin ever since.

Kim Taylor, January 2022



Summer Skin

She had summer skin
and I loved to look at it
She would sleep on top
of the covers
because of the summer heat
and I would find her
on hot afternoons
and watch that summer skin

~~

We Kids

We kids
running, skipping, jumping
along the breakwater

rock to rock
and at the end we dive
into the water to swim
out to the east pier
and we sunbathe

lying on the seagull shit
because we have to swim back
and it will wash off

~~

She Tells Me

The toilet is leaking
but it's not the toilet
it's me, I pissed on the floor
during the night

Once more I'm disgusting
once more the bathroom stinks
It isn't the sewer gas (broken pipe)
it isn't the shite (leaking seal)

~~

An Old Man's Ears

A Bach fugue plays
and I understand
Bring in a voice
and my deaf ears
make it surreal

To you a simple love song
to me it's Breton and Apollinaire
What my brain fills in
may not be what was intended
but what should have been

~~

Four Times

Four times I set out
to walk my property
and four times I ended
in a swamp
I am beginning to think
that I own a swamp

~~

Three Naps

Three naps today
and I feel dull as dishwater
Yesterday I fell asleep
with a mouthful of coffee
and almost drowned
Bit of excitement
Woke me up a bit

~~

On:I Feel Horrible. She Doesn't

By Richard Brautigan

I feel horrible. She doesn't
want me around the house, or in the car asking her to

love me and I wander around
lost, lost and alone and not at all happy in

the house like a sewing machine
does, wandering up and down stairs and one

that's just finished sewing
a green dress in a shade that looks stuck to

a turd to a garbage can lid.
and it makes me very unhappy

~~

My Children

My children are older
than I was during my wild years
During those years I remember
the adventures
the heartbreak
the waiting

Waiting for what?
Possibly for my children
who appeared after
my wild years
When I could appreciate them
~~

Before the Sun Comes Up

I drive slowly through the city
before the sun comes up
Most of these people
are heading for work
but I'm going home

I like red lights
they give me a chance to look
to see other people
it's sometimes hard to remember
that there are other people

I look in the cafe window
but see only piled up chairs
I look at the train as it passes
and see mostly empty chairs
Not many out on the cold winter streets

A few standing at the bus stops
looking cold, looking sleepy
and I'm sleepy as I turn the corner
and head down my street
toward her

I park the car
and enter the house quietly
I don't want to wake her
I get undressed quietly
and sneak into bed

She mumbles a bit
and says "oh" at my cold hand
my cold arm moves around her
but she moves against me
grabs my hand and warms it

I try to relax
try to get my knotted shoulders
to drop with each breath
but it doesn't work
until I hear that soft buzz

She has fallen back asleep
and as I hear that sound
My muscles soften
and as I fall asleep
I know where I want to be

I know I'll do this job
for as long as we need me to
for as long as I can come home
to her soft buzz
as she sleeps beside me
~~

Plaid Shirt

She wore a plaid shirt
and a pair of panties
around the place

It was nice
I wore a plaid shirt too
and my underwear

She called us
the lumberjack twins
and then she would laugh

She would flip my shirt
and so I had to hug her
Those were the rules
~~

One Who Notices

A Christmas decoration
lost or abandoned
placed too far from the tree
it hangs now, above my desk

Having found it
I must decide where it goes
or whether it stays there

It seems so unfair
that the one who notices
must be the one who decides
~~

Ice Maiden

She was an ice maiden
always too hot
her room was like ice
and when I lay beside her
her skin was like ice

She was passionate
there was no question about that
but she was just
a few degrees cooler
than the rest of us

~~

Serious Person

"You are not a serious person"
she said to me
and she was right
I wasn't working toward riches
or toward fame
I was doing what I wanted to do
year after year
and I was happy
Certainly not serious
never serious
~~

Howling Wind

As the snow would howl
around the walls
scratching at the logs
rattling the windows

I would build a fire
and pull the chair up close

She would come to me
with a blanket
and we would sleep in that chair
her tiny body on my lap

with the blanket pulled up high
and our feet mixed together
inside the arm

~~



How To Believe

I was brought up in churches
but it didn't seem to take
and then I got to school
and learned science

how to question
how to disprove
and how there was nothing proved
not ever

and fellas if you want your kids
to believe in god
keep them away from school
and especially keep them
away from science
that study of doubt and questions

If they must go to school
give them business or politics
where they have practice in believing
in one true thing

~~

Two Wine Glasses

We would buy cheap wine
all we could afford
and drink it out of mugs
at our kitchen table

We would buy chicken hearts
and pretend it was hamburger
and make dinners
of Chicken-heart Helper

We would beg money
from our parents
to buy textbooks
that we would swap around

and we would find jumble sales
to buy old coats
and elegant gloves
and once, two wine glasses

~~

Across the Lounge

I'm exhausted
I'm heading up to the room
said her husband

I'll be along soon
she said to him
as she reached for her book

And across the lounge
was a pretty, pretty boy
who looked her way

~~

The Sublet

A windowless
airless room
with a bed
that wasn't mine

I would wake
and not know the time
anything from morning
to 4am
from 4pm
to sunup

Each night
too, too often alone
was a crap-shoot
in an airless life
~~

Hotel Rooms

Too many years ago
I walked down dusty roads
and stepped off
into a ditch
to sleep under the stars
and a bag of down

My life is hotel rooms now
no more couches
given by strangers
to a dusty traveller
no more soap and towels
loaned with a razor
to clean off the road

~~

My Child

Waking to find my child
was not in his room
I searched the apartment
until she woke
and asked me why

When she heard
of the missing child
she looked at me softly
and said "come back to bed
we have no child"

~~

Lean Into You

I lean into you
like I had to lean
into the winter wind
as a child, walking on the beach

I lean into you
trying to penetrate
from the hair on your pussy
to the other side of your spine

Trying to reach
a place where the wind
is not so cold, to reach home
and the hope of a warm reception

~~



Dime Store Awning

We both washed up
under the dime store awning
this girl and I

She was pretty
she was in my class
and I was eight

What should I say
what should I do
at eight

We were there
until I was eighteen
and I was silent

~~

Birch Tree

So very like a birch tree
so pretty to look at
but when you put your hand
upon that bark to lean exhausted
for just a moment
you find the inside
has rotted away
and all that is left
is a cylinder of paper
that falls easily to the ground
along with you

~~

Springtime Lunchtime

Come the spring semester
I would take my lunchtime
sitting on the steps of Zavitz Hall
so I could watch the boys and girls
drift across the pavement
between the library
and the University Centre

Never looking my way
they would float or perhaps
trudge in their own worlds
Some looking forward
some down to their feet
and I would speculate on their lives
while eating my sandwich

~~



Seeking

She climbs the stone wall
and perches on top
the cold stone
bleeding the warmth from her hands

Hands that will hold no one that night
Hands that will remain cold
for hours after she has dropped
clumsily from that wall

She seeks to find some one
but has never said who
She has never found her, or him
in all the years I've watched

~~

She Told me a Story

She found me outside
on the step
my knees high
my elbows around
my head hung

She sat beside me
and said "I'm sorry"
and said "I am taking that story back"
and licked two fingers
then pressed them against my temple

Suddenly a burden was gone
a crime, an outrage, an injustice
something I didn't know
was gone and with it
the pain of a helpless rage

~~

It Leaks In

The wind would blow strong
and drive the rain sideways
until it found its way
up under an overlap in the roofing
and down the inside
to run in strange directions

To make the drywall seams
so perfect a year ago
show up like the work
of a poor man with little time
taping his own walls

~~

Mons Veneris

There is a mountain
that I have never moved past
there is no pass
Never climbed down from
there is no path
It is named for Venus
it is terrible in its beauty
especially when viewed
in the early morning light

~~

I Let Them Sleep

I had a big chest and broad shoulders
and on bus rides
I would often sit with the big wheels

The residence councillor
The admin lady
The teacher, even

And sometime during that ride
they would fall asleep on my shoulder
I learned to be quiet
not to squirm around

I learned to let the pain and stiffness ride
because these girls were usually in need
of some serious sleep
by the time the bus trip was on

So I let them sleep
and always when they woke
often after drooling on my shirt
they would grin a little sheepishly
and apologize

and I would always say, with my own grin
"You probably needed the sleep"

~~

My Kind of War

Canada and Denmark have a border dispute
it is over the line between Canada and Greenland
over Hans Island

For 30 years the whisky War has raged
First Canada plants the flag
and leaves a bottle of whisky
Then Denmark plants its flag
and leaves a bottle of schnapps

My kind of war

~~

Down To The Mine

You went down to the mine
to prove you could do it
and it was a collapse
or lungs rotted out of you

You went to the rigs
because you felt you should
and you lost your arm
or you fell and were drowned

You worked on the boats
because they told you no
and you got caught up in a net
or the boat sank in a storm

You went to the woods
worked like a woman
and died in a kickback
or were felled by a widowmaker

You fought like a demon
to go fight like a man
and you died on a dirt road
cut in half by a bomb

Oh my daughter
you, you were the future
you could have given birth
but you died like a boy

~~

Driving to the cabin with Pam

We drive past a farm
and you say "moo"

I am driving
and thinking you are working
I am confused

Did you speak another language
Did you ask me a question

I look at you
and you look at the cows
Oh, "moo"
~~

Viral Video

What are they thinking
this car ahead
they have covered their child's face
with peanut butter
and mom holds it out the window
while dad holds his cell phone

Surely the bear will lick the face
and it will be a wonderful memory
to be looked at in years to come
"oh so cute, look how he laughs"
But the memory,
captured on video

~~

Fire Ants

"Those are fire ants"
you tell me
you know what they are
and what they can do
but there is a stick
that you can use
to stir up the nest
"I wonder what will happen"
you say
but I don't hear
I am running
~~

A Tent

I had a tent thing going
the sheet bridging
the blankets and my pillow
The warmth of my breath
perfectly balanced
with the cold air
on the other side of the sheet

And you came to bed
and you adjusted the blankets
and you shifted your feet
and you tugged on the sheet
and my tent was gone
Sleep, so very close
must wait once more for balance

~~

Five Cents Per Question

Please think about what you say
please, before you bitch
make sure you are a dog
Before you say what's right
make sure you know what's right

All my life, somehow
I have kicked at props
to make thinking happen, I thought,
but never did anyone thank me
I should perhaps have charged

~~

Hello You

The screen saver on my computer
displays random photographs
from my collections
and sometimes I see you there

Oh love I see you
and I smile and if no one is here
I say "hello you"

~~



No Good

No good
It's just no good
you say
and I must agree
we never seem to work out
anyone reasonable can see that
all our friends tell us that

But I am begging you
not for reason
but the opposite of reason
I am begging you to say to me
I'm sure that this time
it will be great
it will all work out
~~

Mother's Love

I am fairly certain
that my mother loved me
even when I farted

I am fairly certain
because she used to fart
and laugh about it

She would eat eggs
and then fart
and then comment about eggs
and farts

Me, I have stopped drinking beer
and the farts are not gone
but mostly gone
with just a few after meals

So I'm certain that my mother
would love me at least most of the time
and all I need worry about
is when I fart after meals

~~

For The Veterans

I live on a street
named after a battle
in the Crimea
on November of 1854
in a city named Inkerman

The strange thing is
that in the town where I was born
there was another street
named after this same battle
of all the odd things

~~

You Waved

You waved to me from across the mall
and I was happy again
I was thinking that you had forgiven me
for that terrible thing that I did
and after two months
you were ready to forgive me
and you were taking this chance
to wave to me
so that we could have a coffee
and laugh about how badly I behaved
but now you forgive me
and isn't it nice to see each other again

And as I raise my hand to wave back
the fellow behind me says "hey!"
and waves at you
and you grin happily
to see that he sees you
and that he has waved back to you
and now you are walking toward each other
and you will embrace

~~

Robert Markle

He was an artist and they banned him
and he taught at my university
and I posed for him
Well not for him but for his students
and he liked interesting poses
and he posed me with an old black woman
named Ellen
and he posed me with a young man
who was bigger than I
with more muscles
whose girlfriend I photographed
and he never had me ride
a bicycle around the studio like the skinny blond
but I would have
And while I was working for him
I went to Toronto for a burger
at Markleangelo's which was a burger place
~~

We Lived in a Place

We lived in a place
not over the local gambling den
We never had a run-in
with the local Pachinko boss
who chased us through the streets
with a WWII 8mm Nambu pistol
followed by his henchmen
with kitchen knives

We never had to run through
Chinese Restaurant kitchens
with huge woks of boiling water
that we dumped on the tile floor
so that it became super slippery
and all the bad guys fell down
while we made good our getaway

No, our place looked out over a drycleaners
and although I looked and I looked
I never saw a spy come in
duck a shirt or two
and disappear through the back door
into the secret headquarters

~~

Salaryman

So often I sat at my desk
like a Japanese salaryman
with life-long employment
and nothing to do

I am reminded of those days
when I sit at my computer
not writing anything
drifting through faceplant

The illusion of doing something
so different from the actual doing
it's in the number of hours
an hour takes to pass

~~

Reserves

We so often have reserves
we didn't know we had
I discovered this
in my last year of competition
on the cinder track
at our high school

Never before had I run
in anything but flats
but in the last few weeks
I put on a pair of spikes
and suddenly there appeared
a wicked final kick
All I needed was some traction

~~

Candle

You and I were a candle
You the wick
and I the tallow
You burned ever so bright
your essence rising, rising
high into the sky
and me, I remained
a shapeless lump
all that was left of us

~~

Eyes Closed

I close my eyes
to arrange a few lines
and suddenly my hand twitches
My eyes fly open
and there is nothing there
no lines
Asleep again

~~

Summertime

In a childhood that includes
so little money
that your time is not scheduled
into half hour time slots
for racing from baseball practice
to violin lesson

You may be lucky enough
to be out on a hot summer day
with nothing to do
except follow a dog
around the neighbourhood

to crawl under fences
and dig in kitchen gardens
to drink from the creek
and sleep the hottest part of the day
under a big green bush
with a hollow just wide enough
that you can curl up with the dog
~~

Gone is Gone

What is it about me
that no woman has ever left
and then come back to me

Was I so bad that gone was gone
Or was it simply
that there was another woman there already
~~

Your Eye

I took a photograph of your face
and decided I liked your eyes
so I zoomed in to your eye
but I went too far
and all I was looking at
was me, taking a picture
~~

A Good Night

The night that you and I
sat on the curb
and drank beer from a case
not caring if the cops picked us up
or if they took our beer

That night they left us alone
and we finished most of the case
waiting for some drunk
to run over our toes
It was a good night

~~

Progress

My mother said
she went from horse and buggy
to a man on the moon

I'm tempted to say
my kids will see
from a man on the moon to horse and buggy

But they weren't around
when there was a man on the moon
I was

And I remember the bread man
with his horse and wagon
delivering bread around the neighbourhood

So I am the same age as my mother
and there are still horse and buggies
on the back roads

Although we have switched from man on the moon
to millionaires in space
Money no longer spent, but earned by tourism

~~

Careful

When he was around
she had to be careful
what she listened to
and more careful
what she said

Lest he notice her
and speak directly to her
She could not deal with it

Too much attention
from him, too soon after
she thought they would be
together

~~

Flying Standby

He was waiting
to fly standby
when she saw him lean
against the airport wall

All long and lean and cool
with wolf-eyes, hungry

She cancelled her flight
just to go stand beside him
just to go where he was going

~~



For Him

When they were eight
she stepped in front of a bully
and punched him in the throat
because she had to protect her friend

When they were in high school
both from the wrong side of the tracks
they had each other
and the loser's table at lunch

They drifted apart
when they went to college
when they didn't see each other
at holidays

One day, a decade later
they met on a street
it doesn't matter which street
or which town

She moved him into her place
she found him a job
and he worked hard
and the years went by

Now he sits in his chair
hardly remembering her
hardly remembering his own name
and she steps in front of the world

~~

Turkey Point Park

We pitched our tents
and broke out the beer
and the Blue Jeans wine

We sat around the campfire
until two by two
couples drifted off
to tents, to pretend privacy

Only she and I were left
we doused the fire
and went into the last tent

She said no thank you
So we lay side by side
listening to the grunts and moans
until sleep took us

In the morning the guys
winked at me
and I winked back
while the girls giggled

~~

Marriage

The years upon years
we spent angry
so that the kitchen dance
was a war

The chance to spend time together
was not a thing we wanted
What each of us needed
was for the other go away

And yet meals were managed
Lives were not ended
and we grew old
but we still haven't learned to dance

~~

Open Your Mouth

Open your mouth she said
and keep it open

She leaned close
and began to sing
listening to the echo
from my throat
playing with the echo
making it double
and triple

Drone she said
and I did my best
When she stopped
my throat hurt
my jaw ached

She grinned at me
and I smiled
~~

You Tell Me

You tell me I'm no good
at this shopping business
I never check dates
I never touch every apple
I just grab and throw
into the basket
as if I want to get out
as if I have things to do
~~

A Jack Strop

My mother was sent to the hardware store to buy an athletic supporter for her brother. I don't know why, but when she got there she asked for a Jack Strop. And where was the jock strap invented? About a block from one of my student houses, at the Guelph Athletic Hosiery factory.

Festival Weekend

The joys of festivals
getting shitfaced
and wandering wondering
if you brought a tent
and if so, where you put it

and where are your buddies
and did you come with buddies

What if you came with her
the one you've been after all year
what if she's in the tent
waiting for you

and you don't remember where it is
or if she's there and
What her name is anyway

~~

You Turn Around

Driving my buddy home
after too many
for his birthday
and he's puking cinnamon hearts
all down the side of his car
and he insists on directing

So you drive and drive
and eventually you check
on the directions
You say "where are we going"
and he says
"Down here where there are some
really great clouds"

~~

She Opened Hers

That terrible day
that horrible day
when she saw his world
through his eyes

I don't know if I can live
in that world she said
I warned you
it wasn't pretty he said

She closed her eyes
put her hand over his eyes
turned his head toward her
and kissed him hard

This is your world now
Open your eyes
what do you see
And she opened hers
~~

She Worked

She worked slowly
carefully
she aroused him
without waking him

Slowly, she rolled on top
and entered him
although some might say
he entered her

She kept still
only twitching enough
to keep him hard
as she bent forward
to breathe in
what he breathed out

And when his eyes
fluttered open
she started to ride
~~

Is That So

He was old, near death
and she walked to his bed
with a small child

He had no sex
for many years
and he remembered none

but she approached
with a babe in arms
and she perched
on his death bed
and she said
"This is your child"

He looked at her
he looked at the babe
and he smiled
and he nodded
His eyes closed
~~

Let Me Go

We will get the best doctors
we will find a cure
I promise we will

My love, my dearest love
you cannot cure what I have
I am old and you must let me go

My love, my dearest love
you have brought me back from death
once before, no, many times

Let me go
take back what you gave me
and let me go

~~

Stay, She Said

No, stay, she said
I want to wake
with you inside me

You are a sweet girl
I said
to think such a thing possible
but as you can see
big as it gets
it is small now
and already out

Tomorrow morning though
I promise
~~

Don't You Threaten Me

Don't you threaten me girl
I know the rhythms of your sleep
the twitches you make
and when

I know the shifts
and the softening of your muscles
as you slide into sleep
and I know the secret noises you make
the noises you don't ever hear

~~



The Grave

I clear the earth aside
to make a garden
and there, barely under the grass
is a small dog
wrapped in a raincoat

I pull it out of the ground
set it aside
and finish my digging
Then I gather it up
and bury it somewhere else
~~

Paris

Paris was never on the menu
at least Paris France
but Paris Ontario we did
the restaurant overlooking the river
the shops

You never wanted to go to France
I could barely get you to Montreal
but despite that, we've been some
and done some
More than I ever imagined at ten
~~

You Fill Me

As water takes the shape
of its vessel
You fill me up
each nook, each cranny
from the crooked toe
on my left foot
to the mole behind
my left ear
You are inside me
you own me
right to the skin
~~

Sharp-Inhaled

I drag the backs of my fingernails
ever so lightly
up your belly
in the hope
that I will be granted
the sound
of your sharp-inhaled breath
~~

Telltale Stains

It has been dry enough
to crack my lips
and I use your lip balm
to seal them

On my coffee mug
are colourless lipstick marks
that I scrub away
when I do the dishes

Nothing exciting
Nothing so dangerous
as scarlet marks
from a secret lover

~~

Old Sky Woman

The woman rests
on the back of a turtle
above an endless ocean

I would not ask she says
but there will soon be two
and we will need more room

I will try said Muskrat
and he swam down for a long time
when he returned he died

But he had a handful of mud
This Nanabush gave to Whiskyjack
and between them made the earth

Lowly Muskrat
Muskrat who we never thank
is sinking still, below the waves
~~

What He's Worth

One day his wife
came to visit the girl
who suffered, pined for love

Dear sweet girl
she said
why do you let him hurt you so

Oh I love him
she said
I cannot live without him

If you wish to die
I cannot stop you
but believe me, he's not worth it
~~

The Tape

Somewhere in my things
there may be a cassette tape
of stories my grandmother told
I asked her to
I bought her a recorder
and shortly before she died
she gave it back

I have never listened
perhaps one day
before I myself die
before there are no cassette players
I may find it
and if I do
I may listen
~~

Mnyaa

Mnyaa she said
as she drifted into my arms
a majestic freighter
moving sideways
into the dock

And I shudder
hoping she can't read minds
hoping she won't take it wrong
this comparison with a freighter
fat with grain from Saskatchewan

Mnyaa she said
as she drifted into my arms
like a leaf
drifting to the shore

Like a feather
drifting across the snow
and into the roots of an oak

Like the sand
drifting across the beach
and ending gently on a dune

Mnyaa I say
as I circle her waist
and gently cup her breast
as she lays her hand
over mine

~~

Why Is It

Why is it
that every time I see a photo
of Jane Birkin looking
at Serge Gainsbourg
It makes me feel good

I mean she's a knockout
and he's a not very good looking
old man, always smoking
And yet
There's just something there
~~

This One?

All cats look for the door into summer
to them, we are gods

My cat will ask to go out
and when I open the door, will back up
then as I close the door
he will ask to go out again

Surely, between the closing and the opening
I will have made it warm again

~~

Chores

Soon I will get the coffee ready
Brenda will be coming home
and want to sit and drink it

I do my best to have it ready
but too much work
and too few technicians
make her work day a crap shoot

Still I will try
and I will have supper ready
so that there is a chance
for food before our class

And tomorrow morning
I will lie in bed
telling stories in my head
while Brenda makes breakfast

~~



Emergency Horn

Inside my father's lighthouse
was a box with a lever
that was the emergency foghorn

The light and the horn electrified
there might be a night
when, powerless, ships might be lost

I would move the lever a bit
and hear the start of a note
but no more, inside that cement pyramid
one would go deaf

I sometimes thought
of the stormy night
when I might need to sit outside
ducked down behind the wall

Waves crashing over and around
counting elephants, or thousands
and when the time came
pumping that handle hard

For how long
All night, into the next day?
to protect the boats that might wander
too near, or need to approach

For how long
would I need to bounce that note
off the side of the lighthouse
hoping it would be heard

For how long
until someone noticed
and came to ask the problem
Why is there no light?

And I would say, "fix the power
for God's sake, find the break
before some freighter
finds the pier"

~~

A Sunday Town

I walked once
through a Sunday town
trying to buy paper
trying to buy a pen

I had something to say
I had something to say to you
but I walked for hours
through a Sunday town
and each store window
with the promise of paper
and a pen
was next to a locked door
with a sign that said closed

Eventually I sat on the curb
and with my finger
I wrote in the dust of the road
my message to you
~~

Without Because

I forgot one day
the word because
and for that I lived
in a world without cause

The things that happened
simply occurred
perhaps next to each other
but they were all complete

Nothing had to wait
for anything else
Without because
there was no time at all

~~

The Law of Legs

The law of legs
upon legs
under legs
between legs
has always been mysterious
to me

Mostly I just leave my legs
where they are
under, over, between
and let her decide
where she wants them
~~

True Believers

It was nailed first
to the church door
and then spray painted
on the bricks behind the stores

Having rarely gone
to either place
I had no idea
perhaps I might have gone

Gone to some new place
taking you with me
but I didn't know
and they came for you

~~

Dry

It had been dry for weeks
I watched the gravel path
for no reason than to have
somewhere to rest my eyes

I saw the very first drop
fat, pregnant, full of promise
strike the path
exploding in a tiny cloud of dust

I watched the dust settle slowly
but then another drop
and another
and the dust swirled up

But all in vain
as the rain came down
and I watched the dust
knocked out of the air

~~

Dust

Old, full of dust
the wing back chair
was parent-donated to some student
either present or past
who lived in that house

Of the five or sometimes six of us
who lived there
None had missed at least one night
in that chair
books on the lap

blanket carefully laid over
by a drunken house mate
home from the pub
Moving on tip-toe feet
past that chair, to a warm bed
~~

Water

Lying in the bottom of a rowboat
arms around her
feeling the sun on our bodies
the breeze drying the sweat
sweeping the mosquitoes away

A motorboat moves by
down the river to the lake
and soon afterward
a hundred small wake-waves
rock us gently to sleep
~~

Dave

A child soldier
in the Biafran war
he carried an AK-47
Gentlest of Aikido partners
he said little of those times
and we asked little

~~

I'll Ask

In the Clifton Hotel
the wives would call
"Is my husband there?"
and the bartender would say
always
"Just a minute, I'll ask him"

~~

Roll in the Hay

Oh how romantic they say
to make love on the hay
in the loft of the barn

Having spent days
covered in sweat, dust and hay
having had the choice
of torn up arms, or overheating

I can say with certainty
that hay is not a thing
to expose anyone's backside to

If you must make love in a loft
Take a blanket, and disturb not
the dust

~~



Beach Fire

Of the three hours we spent
sitting around a driftwood fire
at least half that time
was spent seeking the other side

The side away from the smoke
They say a beach fire is romantic
but it's hard to swoon
while one is choking

Oh god, the wind has shifted again
and so must we

~~

Korean

For most of the year
the geography teacher
called me "Taylor"
On the first day
he sent around a sheet
"write your name, last name first"
and so I did

Eventually someone asked
why he called me Taylor
and he said "sorry Kim"
and I shrugged, I never cared
what people called me,
certainly never cared
about being called "Taylor"

Still I have to wonder
if he thought I was Korean

~~

Kyoto Bus

May, in Kyoto and tourists
the town was full of tourists
the bus was full of tourists
and the local old ladies

We were several huge foreigners
and we stood wedged in the aisle
of the antique Kyoto bus
hip to hip, shoulder to shoulder

Barely enough room to stand
you didn't dare lift your heel
or some foot would be under it
so you could not lower it again

Another stop of the bus
the feeling of a sharp elbow on the hip
a slight jog of our own elbows
and another old lady was out the door
~~

A Nap

I need to nap he said
and she looked at him
with her sad green eyes

Would you like to join me

Yes she answered instantly
Yes I would
and with that she led the way
to his unmade bed

She threw the covers aside
and waited for him to lie down
then she lay down beside him
and hoped he would, he did

He draped his arm across her back
and tucked his head into her neck
and she was truly happy
to feel his warmth

~~

Think About It

When I think about you
you should be thinking about me
I know that's not what happens
but I wish that it would

If you are thinking about me
I do my best
to think about you
because that's the way it should be

If we don't think about each other
how can we be in the same house
how can we occupy the same space
as two people who think about each other

~~

Zombie

I lived once
with a real live zombie
if you can imagine such a thing
No free will
does only what told to do

It wasn't very much fun
having a room mate
who only does what you do
and never comes up with something
to do on a Saturday evening
~~

Hide a Light Under

I once tried to hide a light
under a bushel basket
and it didn't work
I mean it did
but it didn't hide the light

You see a bushel basket is woven
from slices of thin wood
and it has metal handles sticking up
that make it so that when upside down
the sides only touch the ground once

The woven wood has holes
and the light spills out unbidden
and so unhidden
and the light slips out at the bottom
which was formerly the top

~~

What is Your Name

It is an amusing fact
that novelists agonize
over the names of their characters
and yet in real life
names are pretty much random
I mean they never ever match
to the character of the named

Now Dudley Do Right
was a good guy
and Snidely Whiplash
was the bad guy
but seriously,
didn't you figure the hero
was Horse
I mean, Nell did

~~

From Less To More

Perhaps it is in the direction
that luxury lies
Having spent several days
sleeping in ditches
by the side of the road
a night in a backwoods motel
is the height of luxury
and if the shower works?
Oh heaven indeed

~~

Thank You

I think perhaps
that she took me to her bed
as an act of kindness
or perhaps of charity

However it went
it was something I needed
and I hope that in the morning
I thanked her for it

~~

The Blue Capri

I stood many hours
outside the house where she lived
but having no idea
which room was hers
I did nothing but stand

When I tried the door of her car
A wonderful blue Capri
it was open
and so I slept in her back seat
for another hour
before the long ride home
~~

Can You Tell

Once or twice as I wrote
I paid attention
and my handwriting agreed
with my mood

Too much these days
I type directly to my destination
and the words never reflect
what I feel

If I am angry, and pound the keys
the letters are calm
If I am sad, and barely touch the keys
the letters are calm

Can you tell that today
I am bitterly disappointed
that you cannot read this
and tell that I am sad

~~

Our Children

I sometimes wonder
what our children looked like
Did they have your eyes?
I surely hope so
and your nose?

Were they happy kids
with just enough mischief
to put our fists onto our hips
as we tried not to laugh

Did we stay together for the kids
or did we find a way
to make it work apart

Or best of all dreams
Did we stay together
because we wanted to

~~

In 1962

In 1962 on top of the fridge
was a radio always tuned to CBC
I barely remember what else
was up there
but then again, I was short

I know the yardstick
was hung on a nail
behind that fridge
Oh yes I remember
where the yardstick was

Beside the fridge
was a single-side toaster
and if you were good
you could open the side
and the bread would flip itself

I listened to Max Ferguson
and western swing and country
for some reason the only music
I can remember
as I ate at the kitchen table

I watched Gramma
dry and put away the cutlery
into that big walnut cupboard
the one in my cottage bedroom
She would squeeze each piece
through the tea towel into the drawer

~~

Early Morning Rifle Shots

Each frozen morning
ten below or more
I step out on the deck
and like a rifle shot
like a hickory rod brought down
onto a maple floor
the crack rings around the yard
and bounces off the garage
~~

Please Be Happy

Hopping from leg to leg
pulling faces
telling jokes
I would get her to smile
but the smile would fade
she would drop her eyes
and a melancholy would take her
again
~~

Worse When I Re-watch

So very hard
to convince myself
that the world will not end
that I will not end
if I watch a movie

That the work I have assigned
does not need to be finished today
the doctor told me I will have time
and if not, someone else will finish
~~

South Ontario Winter

Ah this South Ontario winter
Get out there quick
get out there while the snow falls
and shovel

Wait a day
and come the thaw
the snow melts a bit
then freezes again

It's not the shovel you will need
but the axe
What piles you have made
you will look at until spring
~~

He Tried

The body in the ravine
and I the neighbour
on his other side
called to identify the body

It is he, certainly he
the man who tried so hard
to provide for his family
the man who lost his job

The man who cut his grass
although there was no food
on his table
so the neighbours would not know

Yes, it is he, certainly he
the man who thought he had insurance
but the payments were missed
and now his family has moved away

And now I tell the story
to the new neighbours
who shake their heads
and say Poor Man

~~

Old Crow

Old crow hunches
pulls in his black cape
and turns his back to the wind

Too many years
upon this earth
He is cold, even in summer

Yet he endures
he shrugs his shoulders
to shift the cape higher

His head hangs down
too much effort to lift it
and little strength left

He waits for his death
or a kind word
or perhaps for spring

Old crow simply waits
for what is to come
What is to come

~~



Door to Door

My old cat and I
get confused sometimes
we wander the house
often together
and want the winter
to be spring

We move from door to door
window to window
but all around us
is the snow
the grey, suffering snow
~~

A Little More Use

Just a little more use
I have the papers
to donate my body
to the University
and for perhaps two years
after I die
I will still be of some use
~~

A Child's Choice

It was a choice
one of our first
and one of the only
Is it double bubble
or mojo?

For a penny there were two mojo
but for that penny a gum
and a Bazooka Joe comic

Certainly it wasn't life or death
but for a five year old
these were serious questions
Mojo or Double Bubble

~~

Joni and Mean Old Carey

Tell me true
If you could
would you head up into the hills
above the Mermaid cafe
and live in a cave
beside Joni and Carey

Would you spend the summer
drinking wine in the sun
If you had it over again
would you go

~~



Small Town Smart Kids

It was public school
and shortly after the IQ tests
the principal started a club
for certain invited kids

I was one of them
one of the lower half
of the class
but I was invited
and we had one meeting

On the next, the principal wasn't there
so we looked through the library books
and found one with naked women
We were hooting and pointing when he came in
and there was never another meeting

~~

The Mail

I took my heart from my chest
put it into an envelope
and mailed it to you

A week
two weeks I waited
for your heart to come in exchange

Three weeks
and it never came
was it lost in the post

Not having another heart
to mail to you
I never asked
~~

A Not Funny Story

I have a funny story
about my grandmother
but it doesn't work any more

She dialed a wrong number
and the lady on the other end
said "you have the wrong number"
and my grandmother said
"then why did you answer?"

You see, it doesn't work
any more
~~

The Pier

I walk on the pier at Steveston
and I walk at home
all piers, everywhere
are the same pier

The pier in Valparaiso
is the pier in Port Dover
and I walked on it
while in Halifax

~~

The Prepper

He likes to be prepared
and so, whenever there is an earthquake
or perhaps a tsunami
he lies down in a metal coffin
that locks from the inside
and he waits it out

He always takes a sandwich
In case he gets buried
The metal detectors will find him
and if they don't
He's all set anyway
He doesn't want to be a bother

~~

Under Rocks

I have no idea where we were
some sort of park
some sort of family outing
but I spent the entire time
paddling up and down
a shallow creek
with snorkel and mask
saying hello to every creature
under every rock

Shall I make some comment
about dwellers under rocks
who care more for themselves
than their supposed loved ones?

I will not
from what I saw, the dwellers under rocks
in that long ago stream
just wanted to get on with their lives

They had not the least intent
to harm others
except perhaps those they ate
But then again
there was no malice, only food
~~

Old Vibrations

How many words
in how many classes
over forty years
have I sent out into the air
To be gathered up
in how many student's ears

Surely those vibrations still exist
surely long after I am gone
someone will hear those words
and say "I think I understand"

But perhaps not
the rooms where I spoke
are long turned to offices
where the din of printers
and the drone of typing fingers
would surely drown the old words
that might still be echoing there.

~~

Rich Man

Apparently this house I live in
is worth a million

This house my mother begged me
knock into the basement
and start over

This house we bought
with a single bedroom
so we were no more tempted
toward room mates

This house that was instantly too small
when our children were born
and so we replaced the roof
with a second floor

and now this house
which has grown new
while I grew old
is worth a million

I'll never see it
I intend to die in this poor house
with its sagging floors
and badly hung doors

Its rubble foundation
that was good enough
when I was young

~~

Advice

Sharpen the knife
slide the edge along the steel
and then slice a tomato
laid on your wrist

This is the sort of thing
she asked of me

Grind the chainsaw blade
wield the round file well
and then cut the log
laid across your lap

~~

Pleasures

A single piece
of dark chocolate
broken into small bits
thumb sore with the effort
and each bit sucked
to extract the maximum taste
from waxy chocolate

Poor diabetic man
such meagre pleasures
and after it is gone
what is left
but a sore thumb

~~



God Lights

Look there, my grandmother said
there, near the sunset
see the light? An angel ascends

I looked hard
for as long as I could see
in a moving car

I looked, squinted, looked again
but not once did I ever see
a dead body floating upward

~~

Tease

She looks directly at me
her eyes locked on mine
as she slowly crosses her legs
exposing nothing, thank you,
and slowly, tip by tip
she loosens her glove
and after I count (how can I not)
to five

she slowly slides the first one off

~~

Laundry Hamper

It is perhaps a rite of passage
for a young man
to discover his girlfriend's panties
on the floor

In his dreams
he perhaps thought
of scarlet, with black lace
barely a breath of material

The rite of passage?
they are white
with suspicious dark stains
in the crotch

And his response
to this test of manhood?
He must not drop them again, on the floor
but instead gently into the laundry hamper

~~

Pity

Black, so very black
were those nipples
on dark chocolate boobs
and they were irresistible

I had no business asking
but I did
"they are so lovely
do you mind if I touch one"

Taking pity on an old man
she nodded
~~

The Rescue

She dreams, and as she does
I reach into her dream
with my right hand
my left keeping a firm grip
on her shoulder

I reach in, careful
of what might grab my arm
and yank me through

What am I looking for
what am I reaching for
I don't remember
but it felt important
that I reach for it

~~

Canadian Burqa

Canadian burqa
waiting by the crosswalk
Mask and scarf over hat
Not struggling for air
Not struggling for freedom

But those eyes
the single most sexy thing
on a woman
and there they are
for everyone to see

~~

Broad Shoulders

I want to tell you
that she came on little cat feet
to steal my heart
when I wasn't looking

But really
she came like a barbarian horde
battered through the gates
and carried me off on her horse

~~



A Man Doesn't

She got to yell, to scream
she got to cry, to wail
she got to tell everyone
tell her side of a story
with only one side

A man doesn't yell
doesn't cry
and doesn't tell his side
of the story
At least, that's how I was raised
~~

The Most

It's her eyes, yes her eyes
that I love the most
No, wait, her mouth
that wonderful smile I love
No, wait, it's her hands
those gentle hands on my cheek
certainly that's what I love most

Wait, it's the way she walks
No, the way she speaks
the way her hair smells
the way she butters her toast
the way she snuggles up close
the way she loves me too
Yes that's what I love the most

~~

At The Edge

I move carefully to the edge
the ground tends to give way
and once there, I look over
the cliffs, high enough
end in tattered rubble
and foaming waves

I step back exactly one pace
and lift my eyes
look at the horizon
and see nothing but water

~~

The Pond

In the spring
you can tread water
in the warm pond

One day
you feel the weeds
tickle your feet

Summer is half over
pull your knees up
and pretend it's not
~~

I Lied

I lied when I was sixteen
and ever since then
I have wanted to admit
my mistake

But I never got the chance
I never got to tell her
that I had lied

She died and I have this lie
in my heart
This lie that will not go away
until I have joined her

~~

What's It To You

What's it to you
what I feel about her
You may be her friend
but I am her lover

Can you not see
that curiosity to you
is life and death to me

This TV fantasy
that makes you feel entitled
to know my inner life, the
intimate thoughts of a stranger
is not something
I feel the need to indulge

What it is to you
is nothing
and I have no interest
nothing
~~

Christ Anglican

That black and white church
where they splashed water
on my forehead
That black and white steeple
that I saw each weekend
Where I sang in the choir
because she sang there
That square, squat church
where, some years later
I watched my godfather's ashes
lowered into a small hole
where I threw in a pebble
They blessed the nets
each spring
as I watched once
And I must have sat
in the pews again
but I don't remember

~~

Winter

When the heat
finally came on
I would listen to the pipes
knock and knock again
as the hot water
fought the dead air
And then, half a day later
I would open the valve
and the air would whistle
as it bled from the radiator
Winter had started

~~

She's Here

Can I use your toothbrush
she said from the bathroom
and after a brief fist-pump
I said, cool as a catfish
"of course, my dear, of course"

~~

A Camera

In this camera I own
every image is perfect
the focus is infinite
an inch to a mile
The exposure is perfect
No unlighted shadows
No highlights lost
It is all just so perfect
and yet, I can see nothing
I don't know what to look at
This camera, it seems
is you
~~



Summer Cabin

She spent the summer
in a cabin in the woods
Made love to a bear
Went crazy with blackflies
Took potshots at the canoes
Hunted the marsh
with a ten foot punt gun
Just pull the trigger
and gather them up
before they sink
She hung them from the trees
and forgot to take them down
Which explains the bear

~~

That Man

I would like to apologize
for that man who hurt you so
That man you compare me to
when you don't like me

I believe he is sorry he hurt you
I believe he has suffered without you
I believe he has had enough
I believe I am not him

~~

Garden Cane

I grabbed a cane
as you did
so that we could swipe at things
as we walked along
and as we swiped at things
my cane broke
it was a weak spot
and there was a worm inside
a white one
and where I had gripped the cane
I now gripped a white worm
which dripped goo
all over my palm

~~

Pretty Pretty

Sixty five years of women
who define themselves as beautiful
and they are beautiful
in a self-referential sort of way
gaunt cheeks for cheekbones
collagen injected lips
making fish faces
fat siphoned from stomachs
and injected into the ass
Nails buffed and polished
by Vietnamese women
trying to feed their families
Fake nails glued on
so that work is impossible
Fattened and thinned
extended and trimmed
and each one looks
like a cheap magazine
at the grocery store checkout

~~

Fourteen Times

I'm on a suicide watch list
she said with considerable pride
I have tried to kill myself
fourteen times
in the last year

You see, my life is unbearable
My mother doesn't understand me
and my boyfriend is a jerk

I smiled and nodded
not trusting myself to speak
I put a sad look in my eyes
and made plans to escape
as quickly as possible

~~

Winter Work

Three hours in the bush
chainsaw hot
but my hands were not
After the logs were thrown down
near the wood pile
I stumbled into the cabin
and thinking to be a scamp
I put my hands up her shirt

Rewarded with a shriek
I took them out
but she caught them
stuffed them back under that shirt
and held them there, hard pressed
into what felt like white-hot skin
It felt so good it hurt
I may have cried

~~

Need Rehydrating

I look in the mirror
and see that I have more wrinkles
They cannot be from age
they must be from the weight I have lost
Yes, certainly that is it

~~

Just Dry Skin

There is a subtle loss of feeling
in my fingertips
something that makes me look
over and over
to see if there is a cut
or a piece of tape there

~~

Illusionist

She never said
she was a magician
or an illusionist
She always denied
she had any power at all

But she made me believe
that I would live forever
that I was loved
that it would be all right
She made me believe
~~

Through The Night

We drove through the night
she and I
to get home again
From one coast
almost to the other
to get home again

One of us would drive
and one would sleep
trusting the other
to take care
sometimes a hand
on the leg, something to say
I am here

We drove through the velvet black
on roads that shone with moonlight
to get home again
to make it on time
for her wedding
~~

Unhappy

Knowing nobody but me
she wanted someone else
someone who didn't want her
but I didn't know it then

Go, I said, if you need him
go to him, come back to me
and she went
and she came back unhappy

~~

Lonliness

Is loneliness a longing
for what we have lost

I have lost so very much
and so many
and yes, I feel a longing
for my twenties
Those years so very much lost

But lonely, not really
not often at all

What I have lost, I accept
Those I have gained, I welcome
and the years, the long years
that have fled
have each left something behind

Something I would not have had
something the opposite of lonely
~~



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