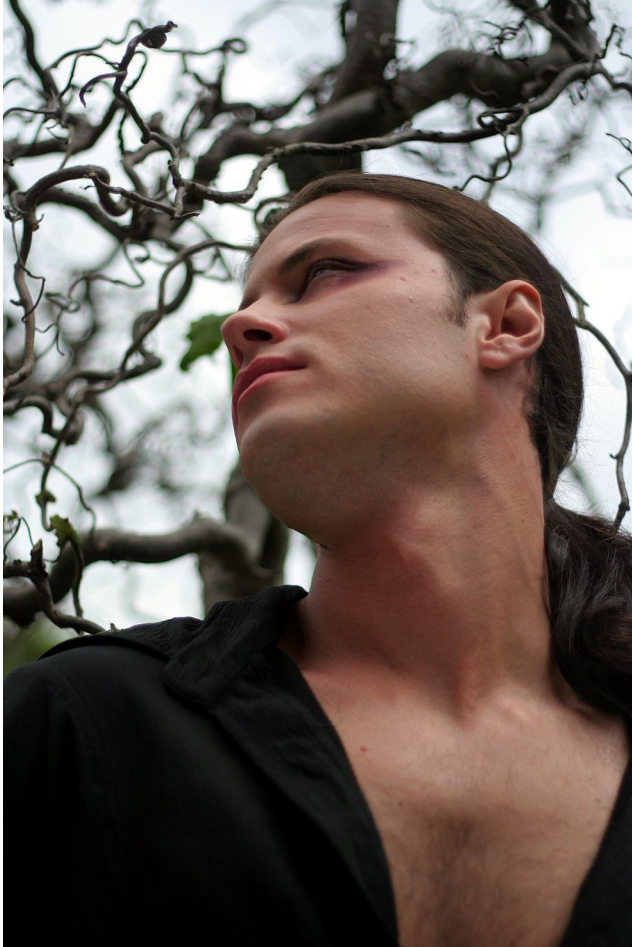


# Words Said Too Late



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# Introduction

It is December of 2021 and we are headed into yet another wave of the plague. This one is called Omicron and it seems to be more infectious, if less dangerous. Still, the lockdowns have arrived.

For two years or more I have been writing monthly poetry books and for two years or more I have been looking into my past. One of the things I have realized is that as a young man I could not say the words I should have said. I say them now, although they are words said too late.

To any who read this and need to hear it, say what is in your heart, say it now because forty years from now it will likely be too late.

Kim Taylor, December 2021



*Photographs taken in June 2006*

# Words Said Too Late

Thirty years married  
and he realized  
he hadn't told her he loved her  
for too many years

Somehow it was hard  
a habit lost  
the words came slowly  
but he forced them out

"What do you want" she said  
~~

# Lucky Man

I think perhaps  
I am the luckiest man  
on earth

I was blessed with more good women  
per year, in my 20s  
than anyone deserves

and then a few good women  
who, for the rest of my life  
stayed longer than they should have  
~~

# Our Car

It's a car with quirks  
We tend to drive them  
until they fall apart  
and along the way  
you get quirks  
Like the seatbelt  
that doesn't retract  
or the dome light  
that doesn't go off  
in the winter  
because the door switch  
doesn't work below -8

~~

# Three Little Words

Those three little words  
that young men find hard  
to say  
and young women  
want to hear

The three little words  
that can save a relationship  
if they are said  
and destroy it  
if they're not

To you young men  
I would advise you  
to say these words  
even if you don't mean them  
Even if it's not true

"It's my fault"

~~

# Breathless

Breathless

I mean

she takes my breath away

She walked past me

to sit at a table

by the window

Little crop top

tiny

thin as a whip

but shapely

(code for she's got boobs)

and she caused my breath

to catch

as I caught sight of her

I risk catching the plague

each time I come here

but who would not

with her in the place.

~~



# A Nod

A nod to the old guy  
with the grizzled gray beard  
as he walks out  
following the young girl  
he's been sitting with

Not father and daughter  
unless she's adopted  
but touches  
small comments  
with leaning in

She feels his coat  
warmed by the heater  
He adjusts her toque  
picking some fluff from it

Oh indeed, a nod to you  
my friend  
as one old gray grizzled beard  
to another  
Indeed a nod

~~

# It Is Enough

Do not tell me  
that I'm fighting the good fight  
or that I will kick cancer's ass

I do not fight myself  
and cancer is myself  
my own cells, growing

Rather look at my cancer  
and say Capitalism at work  
Modern economics at work  
the ideal of constant growth

But I do not see my cancer  
as an economic theory  
They are simply cells  
which grow unrestrained  
Cells which express their freedom  
to grow

But I do not think of my cancer  
as right wing thinkers  
expressing their freedom  
to destroy others mindlessly

I don't think about my cancer  
very much at all  
except as cancer  
which will eventually kill me  
and I am content with that

There is no war  
and I cannot beat this illness  
that is not an illness  
but simply my own cells  
not listening to the signals  
that say stop

Do not wish me a good fight  
Do not call me brave  
I simply listen to the doctors  
and the science that says  
for a time, we can stop this  
but eventually we will try  
other ways to slow it down

And I am content  
with the days and years  
they give me  
You do not have to remind me  
by asking how I am  
I am alive  
and one day  
I will be dead  
You will see how I am by looking

I am here  
and one day  
I will not be here  
It is enough  
I would prefer to be here  
and when I am not  
I will prefer nothing  
It is enough

~~

# The Great Love

In the Great War  
he lost a leg  
but found his love  
when his nurse arrived

In Paris, in the 20s  
Dada in Montmartre  
He was a waiter  
and she had been dumped  
by Man Ray

In the Second War  
He found her in Warsaw  
Hiding in a basement

In the great baby boom  
she married her high school beau  
and he started work at the car plant  
to buy her a house

In the Sixties  
she had no idea who he was  
but she was pregnant  
and loved the kid anyway

In the 80s  
He was Mr. Disco  
in his nylon shirt  
and she threw up  
on his platform shoes

In the new century  
she swiped right  
and found Mr. Right

In the '20s during the plague  
she found nobody  
he found nobody  
They were alone in their rooms  
and the population explosion  
began to slow down

~~

# The Story of My Back

I've always had trouble  
with the back  
Ever since a stupid trick  
in High School  
involving a stage, a table  
and a high jump pit.

She knew my back hurt  
and each time she came over  
she started with a massage

She would put me nearly to sleep  
and starting from there  
she would slowly wake me up  
with various tricks of hand  
and tongue

Eventually, it switched  
now fully awake  
and pain free  
she got me to do wonderful things  
to her  
until I needed another massage

~~





# Sugar in Her Mouth

-Eunice

Naked with sugar in her mouth  
she came to me without preamble

Straight from hello  
to furniture and books  
in my apartment  
She taught me how to laugh

She took my heart  
and my sweater as her own  
giving me what she could give me  
until she had to leave

Leaving me with a lifetime of fondness  
for the sugar in her mouth  
and the mischief in her eyes

~~

# My Fuzzy Slippers

My feet search  
for my fuzzy slippers  
slipped under the desk

Toes freezing to numbness  
Let it be the cold  
and not the diabetes

While I search unfeeling  
under my desk  
for my fuzzy slippers  
~~

# Like a Cut Flower

-Eunice

Like a cut flower  
You know will not last  
I enjoyed the hell out of her  
while I had her near

I did all I could  
to keep her fresh  
to keep her with me  
but eventually  
I lost her

I regret not a minute  
would not trade a day with her  
for any month with anyone else  
I enjoyed the hell out of her  
while she was near

Things that beautiful  
things that will not last  
must be treasured, pampered  
and you should enjoy the hell  
out of them

~~

# Lost Beauty

Double glazed  
E-factor filmed  
inert gas filled

How do we expect  
these modern windows in  
forced air heated houses  
to produce the ice-ferns  
that delighted me for hours  
in the farmhouse of my childhood

My hundred year old bedroom  
with its single glazed window  
its brick and plaster wall  
that wakes me if I touch it  
has never shown even a hint  
of the wonderful etchings  
of that farmhouse of my memory

~~

# The Infinite Sadness

The infinite sadness  
of a late night with a girl  
plenty of wine  
plenty of lazy talk  
and come the time  
to go to bed  
She says  
"the couch is there"  
~~

# Research Technician Blues

Back bent  
over a too-short hoe  
Feeling the sun on my neck  
t-shirt soaked through  
Row after row

There is no rush  
when you do a good job  
and each plant is important

Each row tagged  
to be bagged, ground  
and measured at the end  
of a long season of growth

~~



## 2U Northumberland

And there, across the road  
is the apartment I split  
with the guys  
and there, I look again  
at the dormer to my room  
way up top of the house

But today  
I had the sudden thought  
to name all the women  
who visited me there

Janice I was with  
when I moved in  
but she wouldn't live there

Darlene, who visited once  
Jodi, who may have slept in my bed  
but we didn't have sex



Were there others?  
I was drunk a lot  
and I'm ashamed to say  
I don't remember

I remember Lorna  
who moved in, sort of,  
setting up her bed  
in the freezing sunroom  
With Lorna, no more casuals  
visited that room

I had finally found the secret  
to being mostly faithful

Have someone at home  
waiting in your bed

~~

# A Dog in Guelph

This town has held me  
for a lot of years  
Like a dog  
I can sniff around  
to find all my old holes  
under bushes  
where I snoozed  
the hot afternoons away

And like an old dog  
I am comfortable in my ways  
comfortable in my place  
I know the neighbourhood  
and all the best places  
to scrounge a few scraps  
And all the places  
were I got a friendly pet  
~~

# The Albion Reborn

They are rebuilding the Albion  
Rebuilding my past  
The Ladies and Escorts  
will be a West Coast Bar  
and the Men's side  
will be an East Coast Bar

Upstairs (where I never went)  
will be a Prohibition Speakeasy

What is this nonsense  
What was wrong with the dive  
I grew up in  
The dive  
that looked like every other bar  
I visited in my drunken youth  
~~

# Telephoto Magic

My 50mm vision  
looking up the underpass  
at a line of cars  
drifting down the road  
seems to have changed  
to about 80mm

~~

# Don't Bother Him

Who are these people  
I know I know them  
but my memory just doesn't work  
to tell me who they are  
and their names

Like a goldfish  
I can retain information like that  
for about three seconds  
and then it's gone  
I want to ask "How do I know you"

But if they are comfortable  
not saying hello  
I'm not going to complain  
I'm here alone with my tablet  
drinking my coffee, "don't bother him"  
~~

# My Father Has an Idea

Of all the stupid things to think up  
this one by my father  
was right up there

He was driving us home  
after a weekend visit  
and he got it into his head  
to make me puff on his cigarette

I have no idea why  
maybe he thought he would prevent  
me from smoking  
Hell if I was going to smoke  
I was old enough then  
to have started

I said no  
I said I had no intention of smoking  
but he insisted  
and eventually I puffed it  
spit the smoke out  
and spent the rest of the ride  
just wishing to get to a tap  
where I could wash the taste  
out of my mouth  
~~

# She Wasn't Hard to Read

She made kitten paws  
when she was excited  
and went up on her toes  
when she wanted attention

~~

# I Walk With a Stick

I walk with a stick  
a nice Ash cane  
with a Canarywood handle  
that is shaped into four  
very sharp corners

I rarely use the cane  
to help me walk  
instead it rides  
in my right hand  
ready for use

~~



# There is No South

There is no South  
in my country  
West, East and North  
no other direction

Not for many years  
and no future in sight  
There is no South  
in my directions

Not for my sanity  
It has wafted away  
and my country  
ends at the water

~~

# Her Broken Pencil

With her broken pencil  
she placed a line  
two lines  
through my signature

I had signed her petition  
and she meant to underline  
but succeeded in striking through  
with her broken pencil

Twice more I signed  
and twice more she stroked it out  
eventually she gave up  
and so did I

~~

# Cottage Grass

I am not going to the cottage  
on the weekend  
only to cut grass  
My stepfather said  
and I agreed

There is no grass  
but every 20 years or so  
we cut trees  
back from the drive  
and away from the cabin  
~~

# She Was So Thin

She was so thin  
that when the wind blew  
over her naked body  
as she stood on the balcony  
as oak in the sun

The wind made sounds  
like a flute  
as it passed over her  
~~

# The Saddest Song

I will never know how that feels  
she said  
as I cried, thinking of the births  
of my children

And I cried all the more  
because that was the saddest song  
I had ever heard  
and I wrote it  
~~

# A Wise Man

What is a wise man  
I do not know  
but I know he is not  
the man who tells a king  
that he is mistaken  
That is not a wise man

~~

# Two Squirrels

Two squirrels chase each other  
across the lawn and spiral  
up a tree

I watch with some concern  
should they not be preparing  
for a long cold winter

What is this frolicking  
what is this avoidance  
of what is to come

Then sadness as I realize  
I am Man, able to anticipate  
barely able to participate

~~

# The End of Darkness

It was a darker world then  
Streetlamps were short  
and not powerful  
and once away from the street  
in the middle of the park  
a dark summer night  
was truly dark

Only the glimmer of stars  
allowed us to run  
without hitting the trees

~~

# The Times I Died

When I was young  
I had nicotine poisoning  
cigarette butts  
in the remains of a coke  
and I died then

Later I was young  
and grabbing a tree  
I pierced my thumb  
A thorn contaminated  
gifted me blood poisoning  
and I died then

Later, when I was young  
I lay down in the street  
not wanting to live  
and I was run over  
and I died then



In High School  
a jock, good at it  
I set a table on a stage  
to flip onto a highjump pit  
and the table slipped  
and I broke my neck  
and I died

Later, in university  
I went to the west  
and carrying a woman  
across a harbour in Alaska  
I was swept out to sea  
by the ebbing tide  
and I died

Living for dozens more deaths  
I am still here  
to no surprise at all  
each heartbeat  
each pulse of blood in the brain  
is a narrow escape  
from yet another death  
~~

# Two Rich Men

Ah, you have billions  
good for you  
I too am a rich man  
I have more than I need  
I will leave something for my children

Are we not two of a kind  
peas in the pod  
I am a happy rich man  
Are you happy too?  
I have never heard, do you have children?  
~~

# I Never Understood

I never understood  
what she was saying  
I never knew  
if it was a foreign language  
or just an accent  
so thick I couldn't get through it

There are other languages  
ones not spoken  
but as clear as that spoken  
by your brother  
or your mother  
Not that you talk of things  
like that with your mother or brother

~~

# Fill Your Mouth

Fill your mouth with blueberries  
so that when you kiss me  
I can trace the various routes  
you take to my ecstasy

Let the world admire this birthmark  
this birth of pleasure  
as I walk by, and blueberry juice  
marks the places where you marked me

Let your teeth be blacked  
like a geisha in old Japan  
as you prepare your stain  
before you paint my future

Kiss me deeply  
so that we can share the traces  
of our lovemaking one on the other  
Let the world see us

~~

# As If She Talked In Her Sleep

It was as if she talked in her sleep  
while she washed the dishes  
her back turned to me  
She spoke as if she had forgotten  
I was sitting behind her

“I would so like to take this knife  
and cut the clothes from his body  
and then slice his skin into lines  
from shoulder to finger  
from hip to toe”

“I would so like to use this spoon  
to cup his balls  
and with my thumb  
press them down into the bowl  
until he screams”

“I would so like to take this fork  
and skewer him to the chair  
so that he cannot move  
and then looking at his eyes  
fuck him hard, let him know how I feel”  
~~



# Trees Have Been Friends

Trees have been good friends to me  
The giant maple of my grandfather's house  
with the broken down bench around it

The swamp willows of my grandmother's yard  
that won't die  
They are probably still there

The maple of my primary school  
with incredible roots  
roads and tunnels for tiny cars  
run by generations of childish hands

The new-born maple  
in my back yard  
that I cut once, but then let grow  
that throws shadow on our back deck

The corkscrew hazels, one in front, one behind  
that died at the same time  
and in the front  
the rootstock is growing well

The walnut on the fenceline  
In the fence  
that I let go one year  
and twenty years later is as tall  
as any tree in the neighbourhood

The tiny cedars from our land  
that somehow got planted  
in our front planter  
that now scratch the overhang  
of the second floor

More trees than I can remember  
offering themselves to be admired  
undemanding, seldom appreciated  
all good friends of mine

~~



# The Tobacco Pouch

Suddenly I wonder  
what ever happened  
to my grandfather's tobacco pouch  
the one he used  
to fill his pipe  
in that absent-minded competence  
that small boys think  
is a magical performance

~~

# Highway One

Driving East for endless hours  
through the night  
Hoping the gas would last  
until a station opened

We drifted across a continent  
when suddenly, not slowly  
Suddenly the sun was up

The sun was directly down the road  
and we drove straight into it  
Our very own Stonehenge  
telling us it was morning  
and we were drifting east  
across a continent

~~

# Fox Creek

In a bunkhouse full  
of young men  
There are few places  
where you can jerk off

About the best  
is the wash trailer  
where you can close the door  
on a stall

And when I did  
I thought of you

But I never told you  
about the stall in the wash trailer  
because you were not the sort  
to appreciate being thought of  
there

~~

# She Left Her Home

She left her home  
left her husband  
and went a thousand miles  
to an unknown land  
a place nobody would look

She wrote to me  
told me where she was  
gave me her phone number  
and said  
"If you should ever get the urge"  
~~

# Private Messages

I would lay my head  
on her stomach  
so soft, so smooth  
except when she flexed

I would listen to her stomach  
busy busy busy  
Gurgle gurgle  
her system talking to me  
~~

# Is This The Last Time

Yesterday Lauren decorated the tree  
and as she hung the ornaments  
I thought, is this the last time?

Silly old man  
Every Christmas tree for my whole life  
could have been the last

But I could not speak to her  
I went silent  
and I went silent later, as I tried to tell Brenda

The words were gone  
and only a massive sense of loss  
was left

I begin to understand my father  
who was mostly absent from my life  
who was retreated into himself

A soldier too young  
as all soldiers are too young  
their minds formed around horror

No wonder they are silent  
no wonder they are absent  
If I lose words over such a small thing

A small thing such as dying myself  
and the fear of not seeing much more  
how can I resent my father

Who learned such horror  
just as he became a man  
Silent, absent, how else to survive

I see that mental clenching of the teeth  
in my own small case  
to hold it together until it passes  
~~

# Stupid Cat

A child's cry  
and I am instantly awake  
Where is it?  
Who is it? My children  
are far beyond crying in the night

And again  
Not a cry  
but a meyouurl from our cat  
our stupid ancient cat  
Who sometimes sounds like a child  
~~



# The Decision

Here is a piece of rind  
from an old cheese  
Do I put it in the garbage can  
by my feet  
or out in the kitchen

Will it begin to stink  
before I empty the garbage  
from under my desk  
I think perhaps  
I will carry it to the kitchen  
~~

# The Multiple Universe

Because of quantum  
can I hope  
for a future world  
an other twist  
where you stayed with me  
and were happy  
with all the women after you  
so that you are all here  
with me now

Can I fear  
such a future world  
because of quantum

~~

# I Gave You a Cherry

I gave you a cherry  
so red and ripe  
plump and juicy

And you gave me a pickle  
all wrinkled  
and so sour it made me sore

Now I am very sad  
and I think my heart is broken  
although blood keeps circulating  
~~

# Leonard and Me

Cohen seemed  
such a perfect ladies man  
and he looked the part  
young and spry

But even Cohen got old  
and he was cheated  
and he had to keep singing  
old and grey  
~~

# Blind Photographer

Not that much older now  
just that much more blind then

Looking back at photographs  
I see a girl  
nice enough to see  
nice enough to photograph  
and I realize  
just how much I missed  
looking at the clothes, the expressions  
the accessories

I missed a sexy beast

~~

# Tits on a Boy

I knew a boy once  
who said he wished he had tits  
so he could play with them  
any time he wanted

~~

# A Passionate Woman

You reach for the small knife  
that sits with the fruit  
on the hotel dresser  
and you lunge for me

I have no clue why  
you want to kill me  
but I duck  
and you rip into a pillow

Moving behind you  
I grab your wrist  
and squeeze the knife  
onto the bed

Then you fight  
as I drag you into the shower  
set it cold  
and throw you in once more  
~~

# You Were Away

The longing was there  
for you, when you were away  
Building with each day  
but when you were near  
a great fatigue  
a great life-tiredness grew  
and overpowered me  
until you went away again

~~

# I Take Long Naps

I take long naps  
just to eat up the hours  
I bump around the house  
aimless  
in the face of cleaning  
and dishes

~~

# Since You Left

Since you left  
I bought you two plants  
but it has been long enough  
that I have killed them

I tried very hard  
but they did not wait for you  
they could not stand the days  
I suspect it was the longing

I have thought of buying another plant  
but I will wait for you to come back  
and we can go together  
your hand in my hand

You can pick out the plant  
and I will pay for it

~~

# I'm So Old

I'm so old  
I know why they call a trailer  
a trailer

I have always loved trailers  
because it meant  
that between the double features  
I was watching  
I could watch two or three  
more movies

This was important for a kid  
with only enough money  
for a Saturday Matinee

~~



# In Port Burwell

In Port Burwell  
there is a submarine  
Port Burwell is on the Great Lake  
with the least amount of bottom  
Lake Erie is the "sort of great lake"

It's very shallow  
and in most places when the captain says  
"Dive Dive Dive"  
the boat will go down for a moment  
and then thump  
hit the sand on the bottom

But I suppose  
that will save the bother  
of saying "Up Periscope"

~~

# Identity Group

He was some sort of identity group  
with a mixed ancestry  
but all of them were in the identity group  
so he was in the identity group

My identity group  
is called "it's my fault"  
and I too have mixed ancestry  
but all of them are "it's my fault"

It's important to know who you are  
and where you came from  
so you know where you're going to go next  
And what you're going to say

~~

# Maya In The Tree

I know a girl  
who sleeps in a tree  
stretched on a branch  
just like a tiger  
which is quite strange  
because this girl  
who sleeps in a tree  
turns into a wolf  
when the moon is full  
and a wolf in a tree  
is something you don't often see

~~

# Shhhh

She says "shhhh"

She digs her elbow  
into that knot  
in my shoulder  
and when I yell  
she says "shhhh"

And then tenderized  
she uses her fingers  
on the same spot  
and I arch like a fish  
on the dock  
and she says "shhh"

~~

# Dwelf Hunter

-Pam

She had the hood up  
on her hoodie  
and she was putting on  
her red jacket  
and I thought "elf"  
and I thought "dwarf"  
and I thought of gaming  
and I thought of a bow  
and I said "you look like a dwelf hunter"  
and she looked puzzled  
as she often does

~~

# The Kubota

On the research farm  
we had cute little tractors  
a Kubota, four wheel drive  
diesel, and about the size  
of a lawn tractor

On the research farm  
we had cute little students  
and being students  
they made assumptions  
Lawn tractor, gasoline right?

And I drove by the barn  
and I saw the Kubota  
upside down  
the gasoline being drained  
from the tank

~~

# I Am Banned

I am banned  
from every gravel pit site  
owned by a certain company

I went with a model  
and we shot in a barn  
and at one point she posed  
in front of the wall

She wasn't about  
to do nudes with me  
but she took off her shirt  
so I could see her back

Through the shrunken boards  
in that barn wall  
were the boys in gravel trucks  
who got a nice view  
of her front

"I thought you were going  
to take pictures of the barn  
You are banned from all our sites  
from now on"

~~

# She Came To Me

She came to me  
in the deep woods  
in a shallow cave  
where I sheltered

She came to me  
as I made room  
Her face covered  
with signs, glyphs  
that I did not know

We sat side by side  
glad of the warmth  
and we watched the rain  
fall through the cedars  
and soak into the moss

Side by side and I shivered  
she took my arm  
and wrapped it around herself  
so she could get closer  
and my shivering stopped



Saying nothing, we watched the rain  
and she lay her head  
on my shoulder  
A small trickle, I thought it rain  
but it ran upward

Slowly, I saw the land  
I saw the forests of oak  
I saw the people free  
and I saw the people hunted  
and then free again

A war that made the rivers red  
made the bay red  
as the people were free again  
to take their land  
and I understood my place

It was a simple knowledge  
My place was in a cave  
sharing warmth  
with a woman with glyphs  
on her face

~~

# These Young Women

These young women  
these muses  
these lovers

They get older  
and more experienced  
(because they get older)  
and they eventually  
grow out of the muse  
and become the master

It's as natural as children  
becoming parents  
to parents become children

It is nice  
when there is a fond remembrance  
of the old man  
who was so impressive once  
~~

# Good Stories

A trained scientist  
I try to tell simple stories  
and then try to prove them wrong

But oh the stories  
created by men without science  
the amazing tales  
of snakes circling the world  
biting their own tails

Of world-carrying turtles  
flying through space  
Of jealous, petty gods  
who fight like the neighbours  
across the street

So many good stories  
that need no disproof  
they are sufficient without proof  
they are just so good

~~

# Garden Goddess

I heard the goddess  
in the garden  
banging around  
clanging tools together  
dropping pots  
and scattering the dirt  
all over the pathways

Not the most powerful  
of deities  
but she is my own  
and I go out into her garden  
to worship her  
once in a while  
when I'm not busy

~~

# The Kids in The Museum

Somewhere  
on a disk or perhaps a card  
somewhere  
are images of jellyfish  
taken in a museum somewhere

Blue lighted water  
with rising bubbles  
and jellyfish floating up and down

I spent quite a long time  
shooting what I might never see again  
while you and your brother  
impatient as always  
tapped your feet behind me

~~

# I Have A Pen

I have a pen  
that is extra thin  
so thin that it had to come  
directly from Japan

This pen is so thin  
that to write with it  
is painful, the sound  
reaching into the ear  
like the scritch of an earwig  
trying to reach an eardrum

I bought a whole pack  
and hid all but one  
so that I could draw tiny scenes  
and ink them with colour

And now, I have one  
the rest have been lost  
or perhaps still in their secret place  
~~

# A Curse

A curse upon these women  
who so tempt us  
away from God  
Who ensnare our desire  
and pull from us  
the most debased thoughts  
We must hide ourselves away  
lest God become angry  
and deny us heaven

So say the religious men  
and I say "go for it dude"  
because the less of you around  
the more women for me  
For I know the secret  
It is that God left a bit of paradise  
for us to discover  
And it is the women who keep it  
It is heaven right here, in them  
~~

# Each Time She Went Back

Each time she went back to him  
each time she tried to go back  
She ended up hurt  
It wasn't him that had to pick up the pieces  
I did that

He wasn't good for her  
I wasn't either, I kept putting her back  
so that she would seek him out again  
Perhaps I should have let her hit bottom  
like you do an addict

But you see, I was in love with her  
and I didn't like to see her hurt  
I would have spoken to him  
I would have punched him  
but she said no, leave him alone

So she loved him  
and I loved her  
and he, God knows who he loved  
certainly not either of us  
and that's how it went for years

~~



# Destiny vs Relax

I suppose I could write  
that destiny meant us to be together  
that long ages past  
our two souls longed  
to be together, and we waited

I suppose I could write that  
but honestly, too many of the women  
that I have met  
have felt like that to me  
Let's just enjoy the time we have  
until you get sick of my shit  
~~

# I Watch You Undress

I watch you undress  
in the light from the streetlamp  
coming through the blind  
and I wonder anew  
at the glory of you

Each curve of your body  
each line of hair  
over curve of shoulder  
and the long amazement  
of your legs

But no, a small niggle  
a nag at the back of my head  
I've seen this before  
Several times I have watched  
a woman undress  
in that light, each a wonder

I stamp down on that thought  
they are not here  
and you are  
and you are a goddess  
come to earth  
to punish me with your beauty  
~~

# The Window Seat

She would climb up into the window  
in that deep stone wall  
tuck up her feet  
and read her book

She had always wanted  
a window seat to read in  
and that was the best I could offer

I would gather up a blanket  
and tuck it around her  
Warmth against the cold stones  
and the wind that leaked  
through the old windowpanes

~~

# The New Place

Never have I moved  
into a new space  
without a companion to consult  
What comes to the new place  
What do we lose  
Colours? New Lamps?

Never has a place  
been entirely mine  
always I have deferred to her  
and never has a new place  
felt like anything but home  
~~

# The Turkey Shoot

A turkey shoot  
in the village near our home  
in the countryside

Our stepfather  
who hunted each fall  
came home to tell us  
about our mother  
how she was an amazing shot  
how she was better  
than he would have believed

And our mother simply said  
“My father taught me to shoot”

~~

# A Book in the Back Pocket

Each month  
I spend an hour or more  
in the hospital  
Between blood drawn  
and calcium shot given  
I read the news on my phone  
or read a book

This I have done  
my whole life  
Always there was a book  
in my back pocket  
and never, my whole life  
have I been impatient

~~

# I've Lost the Fiction

I pick up and put down a book  
Late Nights on Air as it happens  
but I've lost the knack  
of reading fiction I think

Somehow the characters  
are real and I don't like  
the bad things that happen to them  
so I put it down

But then I think I should finish it  
and I pick it up again  
reminding myself  
these guys aren't real

~~

# She Had an Itchy Foot

She had an itchy foot  
a wandering urge  
and I loved her for it  
even though I knew  
that it would take her away  
from me some day

I couldn't tame her  
hell it never crossed my mind  
I just loved her  
when she was with me  
and loved her  
when she moved on

~~



# I Liked the Mornings

I liked the mornings best  
The negotiations had happened  
the night before

and in that early morning light  
a simple "Yes?" was usually enough  
to roll into her

The trick, was to make sure  
the night before  
she didn't regret being in the bed  
~~

# In Early Winter

In early winter  
there is about an hour  
between sunrise  
and cloud-over  
where the sun shines  
straight down Gordon Street  
and lights up the church

It used to shine  
straight into my room  
on Northumberland Street  
through the dormer  
and onto the walls  
creating a golden glow  
on the girl in my bed

~~

# The Pamurai Returns

Ah, my pill box  
is on the last day  
that means Tuesday  
and that means the Pamurai  
switches from her parents place  
to mine  
In preparation for a week of classes

She will walk in just after the start  
of the Chile class  
and I will probably say  
Oh, oh, just a moment, grab a stick  
even before she puts down her bags

~~

# Renaissance Hair

I love this city  
A young blond girl  
in Balzac's coffee shop

Wavy renaissance hair  
with her coffee  
and a library book

A great start to her day  
before she walks toward  
her high school

~~

# Not a Thought in my Head

Not a thought in my head  
as I sit drinking my coffee  
and staring out at the traffic

Watching the lights change  
Watching the drivers panic  
because the turning lane is blocked

watching the rail company trucks  
driving along the tracks  
over the Gordon Street underpass

and not having anything at all  
to do with any of it  
Life is good

~~

# In the Wrong Place

She is in the wrong place  
she used to go to another shop  
that I used to visit each morning  
But that shop isn't open to sitting  
so we ended up here

and that ends two weeks  
of wondering how I know her

In another coffee shop  
one of my models walked in  
and said hello  
I spoke with her  
in that embarrassed way  
you speak with someone  
who looks vaguely familiar

I didn't recognize her  
with her clothes on  
~~

# She Defended Me

-Lorna

The only woman who ever did  
she defended me like a mother  
Tiger-like, she would rip into anyone  
she thought was hurting me

She took on bosses  
friends, enemies  
just about anyone who  
had an unkind word for me

And never did she turn that ferocity  
on me, even when I deserved it  
Never, even when I drove her away  
did she speak to me in anger

~~

# So Very Easy

So very easy it is  
to stay indoors  
rather than walk to get coffee  
we have coffee here  
and it is warm  
and outside it is not  
and the snow is choppy  
on the sidewalks  
and we have snacks  
and I can work here  
and I can resist the snacks  
and I am not losing the weight  
I wanted to lose

~~



# To My Master

Shall I write a poem of praise  
to my master  
the one who taught me the craft  
of putting words upon paper  
in pleasing patterns  
in surprising meanings

I would do so in a heartbeat  
if I had such a master  
(he would tell me not to use cliché)  
But that age is gone  
I could go to a university  
and take courses  
and perhaps have a supervisor  
for a post-grad degree in literature

Such ugly words, so much less  
than Master and Apprentice  
and the education so much wider  
than instruction in poetry  
So much wider, so to take longer  
and thus provide income for many  
rather than a single teacher

No, I have no degree in literature  
and I have no master  
other than a constant flow of writing  
for my whole life  
and out of all this practice  
perhaps some day  
a poem

~~

# I Turn a Corner

Driving Brenda to work  
I turn a corner and sigh  
such a feeling of content  
such a joy of un-reason

What is it with corners  
that I become the universe  
as I turn  
Perhaps something of balance  
some inner ear trick

It matters not a bit  
for whatever the reason  
I sometimes know that content  
That here I am in the world  
for another day  
The Universe and I  
~~

# What Is A Lot

Did I sleep with a lot of women  
I don't know, what is a lot  
Over what period of time

Give me a number  
I will still hesitate

Enough to lose count  
but I lose count up to ten  
Is it a good thing

Does offhanded fucking count  
a one night stand  
where I don't remember her name  
the next morning  
Is that a good thing

Is sleeping with 100 woman once each  
better or worse  
than sleeping with one, 100 times

Is that 100 to one  
Which is the good thing

Sex was nice, I enjoyed it  
but now that I cannot  
rise to the occasion  
I don't miss it

I find more satisfaction  
in being kind  
than in counting coup

And there are more potential partners

So much a good thing

~~

# Heirloom

I make a hollyhock girl  
with her matching dress  
and swirling hair  
and give it to my daughter  
who receives it carefully

Wide-eyed she looks at me  
and I tell her  
it is from my grandmother  
to her

~~

# We Need The Winter

We need the winter  
although I hate it mightily

we need it  
so that come spring  
when the air moves above zero  
when the buds begin to swell

we appreciate it

~~

# Skinny Dipping

To come across a girl  
naked in the creek  
Just emerging  
hands in her hair  
and singing

To stand dumbfounded  
unable to turn away  
unable to look away  
and see her see you  
and smile

~~

# You Wash Your Hair

You wash your hair  
shave your legs  
and assemble yourself  
in anticipation of him

Later you wash your hair  
shave your legs  
trying to get him off of you  
trying to wash him away  
~~



# Any House

Any house this old  
has the ghosts of those who died  
floating through the rooms  
Age makes this so

These new houses  
bought for new wives  
who will stay, alone  
waiting for a husband  
working somewhere far away  
to pay for this new house

They wait without company  
No ghosts to feel close to  
only twisting studs  
that crack the drywall

~~

# You Know

You know  
that is the least sexy thing  
you have ever done to me

And I laughed  
and laughed  
~~

# The Snow Pops

The snow pops under our feet  
as we go out for noontime things  
and we buy Ninja Bowls for lunch

I get a seaweed salad  
and it pops in my mouth  
~~

# How Many Things

How many things have I done  
because I didn't think I could do them  
and how many have I dropped  
never to do them again  
once I got a bit skilled at them

This has been going on  
since high school I think  
since I worked hard  
at any sport I didn't make the team  
and once I did, I lost interest

Well this week I am stuck  
my brain has frozen  
because I have noticed  
that I have an interest in writing  
a novel  
And yet I think I should

No ideas, I hate writing dialog  
no life experiences  
My life was uneventful  
and fiction isn't for me  
At least the level of fiction  
that I would need  
to make my life interesting

Yet the nagging urge is there  
My idle time is spent wondering  
why I don't have any ideas  
for a novel

This morning it is clear  
I would have to write a book  
that I have read  
Not something I should do  
And over 60 years  
I've read a lot of books

~~

# Mna na na na

I would come home late  
and leave again early

I tried not to wake her  
but as I came to bed  
she would lift the covers  
and welcome me  
into the warmth

When I left in the morning  
she would make sleepy sounds  
objecting to my absence  
Mna na na na  
and would squeeze me a bit  
before letting her hand  
slide off my back and arm

I rarely saw her awake  
but I would remember  
those sleepy moves  
all day long  
As I looked forward  
to our few hours together

~~

# A Lifetime of Abuse

A lifetime of abuse  
is catching up to me  
Just like the doctors said

Dozens of sprained ankles  
from basketball  
have left me with a foot  
that often yells at me

Dozens of years of sword  
have left me  
with wrists that often ache  
and if I don't pay attention  
scream at me

A single bad tackle  
in grade 9 football  
has left me with a knee  
that survived, sort of  
until recently  
then spoke up again

Don't talk to me  
about my shoulders  
they talk to me enough  
for all of us

And a neck  
that started to hunch  
then broke  
is well on the way  
to having the last word  
~~

# I Have Hated Christmas

I have hated Christmas  
for most of my life  
but lately, with some money  
I have found delight  
in buying presents

Of course, of course  
I want to buy things  
that folks like  
and what do I hear

"Oh I don't need anything"  
"You don't have to buy me stuff"  
"It's fine, I can't think of anything"  
Only my daughter  
bless her heart  
"Anything at all from this store"

It's enough to make me hate  
this season once again

~~



# The Half Tooth

I never found  
the half-tooth that flew  
out of my mouth  
as I hit the sidewalk  
with my face

It was gone  
I hope into the gravel  
beside the curb  
I hope it didn't go  
the other way  
down my throat

It was a mess  
my face  
And my father took me  
to a dentist  
who said it hadn't hit the nerve  
and put a temporary cap on  
so I wouldn't bite through  
my tongue

~~

# The Other Half

Off the high diving board  
screaming like an idiot  
I hit the water  
and the water hit my jaw  
slamming my mouth shut

And I lost the other half-tooth  
so that for the next ten  
or fifteen years  
I looked like a vampire  
whenever my temporary caps  
fell out

Eventually a lovely girl  
got me into the dental school  
and the students put the crowns on  
so that I am the handsome fellow  
you see before you now

~~

# After She Left

A week after she left  
I found two shirts in the laundry  
I washed them carefully  
dried and folded them  
and put them away in the closet  
Just in case she came back  
for them

~~

# Her Eyebrows

She had surprised eyebrows  
Something about the way  
they arched  
or the way  
she plucked them  
but whenever she looked at me  
I checked my beard  
for food hanging there

~~

# No Money For Food

Gone with a roommate  
to the meat science wing  
to the abattoir

I hoped to still my hunger  
having no money for food  
A poor student

I watched the cow led  
up the ramp  
and hit hard in the forehead

Watched as this now-carcass  
was hooked by the back leg  
and hoisted

The throat slit  
the blood drained  
and more knives came out

Skinned, halved, head separated  
and hung on a hook  
to be checked by the vet

As the meat was cut  
as the cow became cutlets  
I wandered to that head

Skinless, eyes unseeing  
tongue hanging out, cheek twitching  
All I could think of was a hamburger  
~~

# Sent For Microbes

Sent for microbes  
from a fistulated cow  
for the anaerobic micro lab  
I was assisting

I wandered to the barn  
and found the cow  
punched the rubber stopper in  
and reached for the stomach

When I came back  
my plastic beaker full  
and passed it to my boss  
He looked me up and down

And with a wicked grin  
on his face  
asked  
"Did it cough?"  
~~

# Stop When It's Done

I grew up trained  
in the Kerouacian school  
You start writing  
and you stop when it's done

It doesn't matter  
if Jack actually wrote like that  
it's what I do  
lacking any actual education

So plotting  
that cute software I once had  
that expanded and expanded  
and you just filled in the blanks  
is a bit beyond me  
when it comes to some things

Cobbler, stick to your last  
as they say  
~~

# At the Least Twitch

It does something to your mind  
when a beautiful woman  
snaps into your arms  
at the least twitch  
of your hands

As if she is primed  
waiting  
ready  
and when you say go  
she jumps

It does something  
to your mind  
and the world seems lighter  
and you seem lighter  
and you hold on  
for everything you're worth

~~



# No Romance

I walk home  
to the hiss of car wheels  
in the slush

No romance here  
no misty shores  
no foghorn longing  
for a lost freighter

Just car after car  
as I slop through  
my own slush  
on the sidewalks

~~

# Waves

The waves drift into the shore  
rolling up the sand endlessly  
as if to shift the land itself  
back, back, give us room

~~

# When I Met You

A Yellowjacket on a child's wrist  
the child, frantic, wanting to scream  
wanting to fling his wrist around  
but understanding  
that he will be stung  
and he will hurt

~~

# Drum Beat

Your look  
releases in me  
what, surprising, reveals  
A finger's tap  
on a taught drum

~~

# She Looked Nice

She had that solemn dignity  
of all virgins  
Holder of the gifts of the universe  
Holder of the delights of heaven  
Bearer of the infinite  
In other words  
she looked nice

~~

# Into Sleep

I slide from reading to sleep  
and only notice  
when I'm on the other side  
coming to the surface  
where I somehow notice  
through bent back  
or creased ass  
that I'm still in my chair

~~

# Respect the Gods

When walking outside  
I tend to throw coins  
into water

And if I'm drinking  
I tend to save a little  
and throw it on the lawn

If I'm eating  
A small portion is set aside

These are for the gods  
Small gifts to make happy  
any powers that can make me unhappy  
One should always respect power

~~

# Puppet

A puppet  
on strings held by someone  
or rather some group  
called perhaps society

A hollow man  
nothing inside, no substance  
just an outer form  
pretending to existence

These are the feelings  
of the early 20s  
that time of moving away  
from parents

That time of moving into the arms  
of society at large  
If you can't get through that  
Gods may start to speak to you

And that gun collection in your closet  
becomes attached to the hand  
of that puppet  
and it becomes easy

~~

# Our Apartment

The water didn't work and  
there were cockroaches  
you could hear them  
in the dark  
and you could watch them  
scatter as the lights came on

The stove stopped working  
The fridge smelled funny  
but not as funny  
as the bathroom carpet  
full of piss from the last tenant

It was cold in winter  
and hot in summer  
and I would not have missed  
living there with you  
for a great big wallet

~~

# The Fling Before The Thing

In the movie of my life  
I suspect I was the handsome poolboy  
and the women I knew  
were the spoiled daughters and wives  
of the rich people  
who hired me to clean up

Being in University  
I rarely met women of my class  
They weren't there  
they weren't willing to starve  
in order to get that education  
and so I met my betters

A lovely fling  
the fling before the thing  
(I love that phrase)  
and I was content  
with my dark latin ways  
and sometimes, my hopes  
~~

# I Am The Closer

I grab the container of nuts  
and just about spill it  
all over the kitchen floor  
I should know better

I am the closer  
the un-opener of drawers  
the swinger-shut of cupboard doors  
the shutter-off of taps

I am the mysterious force  
that completes the movement  
as others poke at what they open  
and expect it to become closed  
As it does, like magic

~~



# In My Journal

-Penny

I searched my memory  
and as I did  
My heart opened  
and you tumbled out

So long a prisoner  
so long confined  
in a false memory of pain  
and anger

You tumbled out  
as a friend  
as a lover  
and our parting days  
were not so much loss  
as I thought  
but the nod we made  
to the complications of life

as we walked away  
both looking back  
both with a look that said  
"What can you do"

~~

# Pam Buys a Book

It has been many long years  
since I have wandered  
in a bookshop  
with a pretty young thing

She was looking  
but I was simply along  
for the company

~~

# She Had Bruises

She had bruises on her arms again  
and I looked at her  
while she looked back

This shouldn't happen I said

It's not your concern she replied  
Not your worry at all

Maybe you should leave I said

I'm not going to leave  
I love her

At least tell me  
you give as good as you get

~~



# I Know

It was as if the laces  
of her running shoes  
ran all the way back  
to his pocket

He simply had to twitch  
his fingers  
and she was going to him

I tried to tell her  
he wasn't good for her  
he wasn't the one for her  
but she laughed at me  
and said "I know"

~~

# Leaving Tokyo

The best Ramen I ever had  
was at a little hole in the wall  
at the bus station  
as we were heading for the airport  
Leaving Tokyo, leaving Japan

We had ten minutes  
and I had the sesame special  
and I gulped it too fast  
but it was the best Ramen  
that I have ever had

~~

# The Tears of Old Men

Her gran told her  
that the best skin lotion  
was the tears of old men

Since that day  
she had the finest skin  
in the village

~~

# Sunday Morning Sleep-in vs Sunday Morning Zoom Class

-Pam

I hear weights clash and clatter  
and washing machines churn  
from up the stairs

I am to wake the Pamurai in half an hour  
with some breakfast  
so we can do our class

I think perhaps  
she will be awake  
when I tap on her door

~~

# Something Will Happen

I am marking time again  
it's so easy  
No inspiration, wait for it  
Maybe next week  
Maybe if I go to the cafe  
and sit in a corner  
something will hit me

Nothing ever hits me  
inspiration never works  
and so I mark time  
waiting for death or inspiration

I suspect it has something to do  
with how I do my martial arts

Not a thought in my head  
I move toward my partner  
and know that something  
will happen

No inspiration needed  
only that first step forward  
~~



# Keep Moving

Driving through the country night  
aimless

Paved roads give way to gravel  
and gravel to sand  
as we end up in a farm lane

The car lights show tobacco  
or corn  
something green and tall  
in neat rows

Before we get too far  
we stop and turn around  
and somehow wind our way  
back to the main roads

Not that it matters  
the goal is to drive  
to keep moving through the night  
Never away or toward  
just talk

~~

# An Arm

An arm  
She has come down to an arm  
either hers  
thrown across my chest  
her head on my shoulder

Or mine  
circling her waist  
as she is snugged into the curve  
of my chest

As sleep approaches  
the body disappears  
and it comes down to the arm

the fingers moving once in a while  
to ensure flesh  
remains present

I am still here  
she is still here  
and sleep can arrive

~~

# The Belgian Hall

Coming out of the Belgian Hall  
full of beer  
into a moonlit night  
and departings for home  
I watch a helpful friend  
reach through the driver's window  
to put a car in drive

Part way home  
riding in a friend's car  
I see that other car  
in the ditch  
we don't bother to slow down  
Drunks in the ditch  
are just too common  
to bother

~~

# You Smell Like Morning

I come up behind you  
and wrap you in my arms  
I watch in the mirror  
as I spread my fingers

Are my hands that big  
Are you that small  
I know your body is warm  
and you smell like morning

~~

# A Blue Capri

-Penny

Why did I not cross the road  
I stood, waiting as gap after gap  
whizzed by

I knew not why I waited  
until finally  
a blue Capri drifted past  
and in it, a girl

I understood then  
once, I would have been beside her  
in that lovely, lively car  
but no more

Still  
She was worth waiting for  
just to catch a glimpse  
~~

# I Had Missed It

She was dressing  
Brushing her hair  
in front of the mirror  
I embraced her  
and admired her slim body  
my hands moving over her

Something made me raise my eyes  
and I looked into hers  
hard, flashing  
I had missed it  
and I slowly released her  
Went quietly as I could  
from her room

~~

# A Place to Stay

She returned  
after many months  
needing a place to stay  
I fed her, gave her a beer  
and put her on the couch

Some time in the night  
I heard her get up  
head to the bathroom  
and then pad back  
on bare feet  
to stand beside my bed

Wordless, I moved over  
and lifted the covers  
She moved like liquid  
like she always moved  
into my bed  
and sighed  
~~

# What I Needed, Always

According to the envelope  
my mother sent me a letter  
on the tenth of January 1979  
I was living at 2 Upper Northumberland

She wrote it on paper and envelope  
that said "Season's Greetings"  
and the letter? A poem  
written in her incredible penmanship

"For You" by Carl Sandburg  
and signed simply  
Love you -- mom  
In lower letters, mom  
~~



# Old Letters

About once a week  
I read an old letter  
They frightened me but  
they are such gentle things

A small pile  
mostly from 1975 to 1980  
When I stopped writing I suspect  
When I started living  
with one girl  
and all other people fell away  
as my world came down  
to two

~~

# Half In, Half Out

She sits at a table  
hands around a cup  
as if trying to capture  
the warmth

He stands at the door  
which is open  
He is half in, half out  
and as you look you understand  
he is half in, half out

He looks at her  
she does not look at him  
she looks down  
at her hands around the cup

They might have been this way  
for years  
Today may have been the first time  
but this is how it will always be  
she by the table  
he half through the door

His hand is half raised  
half reaching toward her  
She doesn't look  
she sees her hands around the cup  
And this is how it will be

~~

# Might Have Been

I have left  
and been left by  
many women  
and not once  
not ever  
did I feel anything  
but regret that it ended

When we were together  
there was anger  
and bitterness  
and screaming  
Of course there was

But when it was over  
all the anger faded  
as if it never was  
to be replaced by regret  
for what might have been  
~~

# Days Like This

Days like this  
I might accept  
clear blue sky  
golden sun  
and just above freezing

Yes I could accept this  
I seem to remember  
days like this  
while I was in school  
usually just after  
I'd met a new girl  
~~

# Is That Her?

Driving down the Gordon Street hill  
looking at the students walking up  
I realize I am searching for someone  
I'm not sure who  
but I examine each face

Expecting I guess, a ghost  
to smile back at me as I wave  
~~

# Sit Perfectly Still

Who was it?  
Who  
You? Yes it could be you

I suddenly remembered  
a night with someone  
and she told me  
"Sit perfectly still  
I'm going to make you cum  
Don't move your hips"

Damned if she didn't  
but who?  
There are only a few  
who would have taken charge  
that firmly  
~~

# Her Fingers

Watching her fingers on the keyboard  
I was once more amazed at the sounds  
she brought out of her piano

Not having a lick of music in me  
Not being able to do much more  
than drop a needle  
I sat and watched those fingers  
for many hours just to be near her

More than once she finished and  
looked up to see me crying  
She always smiled a little  
and kissed my cheek

~~

# How Much

Today at the thrift store  
I bought five novels  
two poetry books  
and several back issues  
of Queens Quarterly

I feel a need to remind myself  
that I don't read as much  
as I used to, which was constantly  
and that I am, for some reason  
thinking of writing even more books

So a small reminder to myself  
I am not going to live to 95  
or 85, by a long shot of luck  
maybe 75  
How much can you get done  
in ten years, my boy, how much  
~~

# Where She Sat

That was where she sat  
wedged in to the corner  
and I sat next to her

That was her beer  
Adele would bring it to her  
and a Bass for me  
even before we finished sitting down

And that was her favourite band  
playing on the radio

Her favourite meal  
and her favourite snack  
are still on the menu

And here I sit, for one more evening  
watching the door

~~



# The Most Hated Poem I Ever Wrote

This will be  
the most hated poem I ever wrote  
All my life  
I have loved women  
I have lived with women  
and I have suffered  
It's the hormones you see

All my life  
I have lived with PMS  
and all the other effects  
of that monthly cycle  
Some women have denied it  
Some believed me  
when I said they changed  
But every single one  
would, when the time came  
Bite my head off

I know this, because I have lived it  
and I have my own cycle  
which always linked with theirs  
because I responded to their moods  
Of course I did, I loved them  
and so when they went off balance  
I went off balance

For too many of these loves  
they had pain along with the moods  
Heavy bleeding and endometriosis  
and I thank science for the pill  
Lately I have begun thinking of it  
as "the meds"

When she would go off her meds  
I would run and hide  
I would bite my tongue  
but too often, she would hunt me down  
and bite my head off  
Now I am old  
Now I am in need  
of a quiet life

And yet, sometimes I look at a woman  
and think "why do you say that?"  
"Why would you want to start a fight?"  
I know enough, it has taken me years  
but I know enough not to say  
"Are you on your period?"  
Not if I want to keep my head

I still run and hide  
find a quiet place  
Out of the way, and I sit quietly  
trying not to look over my shoulder  
I wait for it to pass

~~

# The Gap

I have been to Brazil  
and seen the Favelas  
That separation  
of rich and poor

I look out the window  
and see a long line of cars  
each with a single driver  
drifting through the lights

And I see a fellow  
pushing a shopping cart  
piled high with clothing  
with sleeping bags

He turns his head  
and watches the line of cars  
afraid to drift too far  
onto the street

Well he should be afraid  
Not many of those drivers  
even see him  
shuffling along with his cart

~~

# I Need to Exercise

I need to exercise  
I need to stretch  
My back hurts  
my joints hurt  
and I know the cure

but I need something  
Emotional balance  
I need a quiet space  
to get bored  
to get moving  
this old body

Just start, you say  
and you are right  
Just start  
I know this  
And yet

I just don't care  
it's all so pointless  
I have no reason  
to start  
I need a new habit  
I need a new excuse  
I need to get off my ass

~~

# God Tries to Help

There was so much grief  
that the god of that place  
blew down onto the boy  
and he was alive once more

But wind is fickle  
and the god's breath went wide

There were sticks  
that budded and leaved  
There were rocks  
that became ocean sediment again  
or sand, if you will

The dead grass of winter  
came to life once more  
only to die under the winter snow

and those who were crowded around  
mourning the boy  
They were alive, but in that instant  
they died

~~

# Furey and Laure

An angel and a woman  
wait on the other channel  
as I take the chance  
to read a month's poetry

There is coffee involved  
and a soft chair  
Here we are  
at the good part

~~

# My Apartment

Two Upper Northumberland  
was a lovely apartment  
Full of noise  
and romance  
one big ending  
one main beginning

But Suffolk Street  
Of all my places in Guelph  
I think that one suits me best  
They had to choke me out  
by cutting off the water

There I had three women  
I called wives  
and a few more  
I called friends  
and some other friends  
who lived with me  
who are lost to me now

But when I think  
of “my apartment”  
that is the place I think of  
Walls, floors, ceilings  
and water sprinkler pipes  
all done by me  
I had a sort of ownership  
~~



# There Was a Way of Sitting

There was a way of sitting on the couch  
in the late 1970s  
There had to be bell bottomed jeans  
and a loose top

Bare feet were necessary and drawn up  
onto the cushions  
Arms wrapped around knees, but not too tight  
showing some boob

~~

# High School Bus

That damned school bus  
leaked in fifty places  
We would speed down dirt roads  
trying to outrun the dust  
but it came up from the floor  
to choke us all

And then there was the valley  
the run straight down  
a hard left  
and up the other side

Careful had no place  
or we'd be walking to school  
the bus forever stalled  
at the bottom

No it was accelerate down  
hard left  
and hope the wheels don't break free  
on the way up

When I could avoid it  
I did not ride that bus  
~~

# How Long is Always

She says she can't remember  
a time when she wasn't here  
with me

She was always here  
as I was  
and we were together always  
because of that

I can remember when she arrived  
I asked her to live with me  
and she said yes  
and we moved her things  
into my place  
That was three years ago  
I'm sure I remember that

~~

# Ponytail Bouncing

To watch a young girl  
cross the street  
in front of the college  
Long loose limbed stride  
calves pushing  
ponytail bouncing  
Such a welcome sight

~~

# Survivors

Exams are nearly over  
the kids are slowly disappearing

I remember as a student  
the search through the halls  
or in the bars  
for those who will remain  
as long as possible  
before they have to go home

Like survivors of a shipwreck  
we would huddle together  
for warmth

~~

# To The Author

I have not put the bookmark  
back in your book  
I'm sorry about that  
but I don't have a lot of time for books  
and yours didn't capture my interest  
in the first thirty pages or so

But you will go on the shelf  
and maybe someone will take it  
and read it  
Every book has at least one person  
who is interested  
If only you

~~

# The Crazy Kid

The crazy kid  
who searches the beach every day  
for treasure  
He is there from last to first snow  
with his rake  
and his metal detector  
pulling up beer caps and change

It's a lake, we tell him  
No pirates, no treasure  
Just tourists and they only bury  
each other  
But every day  
he is on the beach at first light  
and stays until he's chased away

~~

# That Old Mutt

That old mutt  
hung around the town  
from house to shop to beach  
Mooching for food  
and rolling on his back  
as if anyone would rub  
that burr covered belly

~~

# She Drifted Past

She drifted past the coffee shop  
and I hadn't seen her in years  
She once lay outside the University pool  
sunning her boobs  
and I once found a porno on line  
with her as the star

She's probably my age  
Looks a bit younger  
but now she's limping  
We were never friends  
but I'd see her around town  
Another drifter washed up in Guelph

~~

# There Were Squirrels

There were squirrels  
we could hear them in the attic  
above our dining room, our kitchen  
and so we pushed the hatch open  
and realized that attic  
ran the full length of the building

There were dozens of apartments  
open, waiting for us  
to drop down from the ceiling  
and rob to our hearts content

We lowered the hatch  
back into place  
and forgot the attic was there  
It was a student joint  
There was nothing to steal

~~



# Ice 9

Vonnegut told me about ice 9  
and I thought it a lark  
But now I know there are nineteen forms  
of ice  
and now I worry that someone  
will throw one of them  
into the damned ocean

~~

# Break Me

"Break me" she said  
as she fell back onto the bed  
But of course, he did not  
still, she made quite a racket  
as they tried to break the bed

~~

# A Bed In The Cabin

I know a fellow  
who actually did break his bed  
It would move about eight inches  
as the headboard slammed into the wall

I know this is true  
because many years later  
after he had gone  
I fixed that bed

~~

# In A Bedroom

It was the bedroom again, that drab, brown bedroom with the sad little bed and the walls coated with pieces of snot. Fifty years now he had been trapped in that room, ten as a child and then the dream. He wasn't sure he would ever get out of that room

One day after the next, well, possible every other day he would be back there. And each time he was, he woke with a terrible taste in the back of his throat. Metallic. Blood, it was blood he tasted, as if the dust and dryness had ripped holes in his throat.

Came the day she asked him to come to her bed. Came the night he realized she too was trapped in a room. Pink, frilly, fluffy. Too bright, too stuffed with stuffed toys, and she suffocated each night. He didn't understand, there was so much more there in her room, but he stayed with her. And she stayed with him.

Some months later, they started to enter the rooms together. He loved her soft bed and the lights like stars above. She praised his spartan room, a place where she could hold her arms out at her side and turn in a circle without knocking things over. Without being shouted at for being clumsy.

Came the night they found the third room. Large bed, large room, light, airy, clean, colourful. They tried to remain asleep, but waking cannot be prevented, and as they opened their eyes they realized that perfect room was the room they had made.

~~

# Too Sensitive

"You're too sensitive"  
she told him

Yes, flense the skin  
from the muscle  
and take handfuls of salt  
to throw

Then say "too sensitive"  
~~

# The Jumble

The housekeepers weren't sure  
when it started  
The girls in the double  
shoved their beds together  
and would separate them  
in the morning  
but then they just left them

They pushed the mattresses close  
and slept sideways, arm in arm  
Then the beds were shoved  
up against the wall  
and another mattress appeared  
and another, all on the floor

We didn't believe them  
so we went down early  
one Saturday morning  
and tapped lightly on the door  
One of the girls let us in  
and put her finger to her lips

She opened the door to the double  
and we saw the rest of the suite  
tumbled and jumbled  
arms here and there  
some pajamas, some naked  
and all sweet as kittens

The girl who let us in grinned  
and joined the pile  
while we left quietly  
shutting the front door with a click  
and a promise to the housekeepers  
that we would never mention  
what we'd seen

~~



# Some Memories

Some memories  
are worth keeping  
Like the memory of wild hair  
rising from my shoulder  
to the side of my face

Her arm stretched  
across my naked stomach  
and her leg draped  
over mine

As if she were holding me there  
as if she were claiming me

~~



# How Many Men

How many men  
have slept between these sheets  
She wondered to herself  
as she slipped into bed  
alone this time

She lay with her head thrown back  
her arms up, hands behind her neck  
and tried to count them  
And failed

She rolled to her side  
swept the other pillow up  
into her arms  
throwing her leg over it  
and dropped into innocence

~~

# Just A Moment

"I've been waiting" she said  
as I entered the bedroom  
fresh from the shower

She was naked  
I saw as she lifted the sheet  
And she was eager

"I was only a moment" I said  
"I've been waiting"  
"I only just met you" I tried

She smiled and I said no more  
As I swung my legs  
into her bed I heard "so have I"  
~~

# When I Heard The Siren

When I heard the siren  
I was with her  
I was holding her  
my nose pressed to her hair  
which smelled of perfume

What does that mean  
she said  
that siren, should we run

I reached for her breast  
and said "we cannot run  
the bombs are coming  
and we cannot run far enough"  
She nodded, she rolled on top  
~~

# The Obits

Once I looked in the alumni magazine  
to the obituaries toward the back  
But upon finding old friends  
an old love  
I learned to stop reading  
a few pages before  
For fear I would catch a glimpse  
of another name I loved

~~

# Tap Tap Tap

Tap tap tap  
She would sit on the couch  
and tap one side  
of the bongos I had picked up somewhere

Tap tap tap  
And I had learned to leave her to it  
she would tap for a long time  
sometimes hours

Tap tap tap  
I knew where she was  
I knew what was happening  
and she had to live through it again

Tap tap tap  
I would sit close  
not touching, never touching her  
but close

Tap tap tap  
I had to be there when she stopped  
because she would reach for me  
and cry herself to sleep

~~

# No Reason

As I walked to you  
I dropped my stories  
like used tissues  
along the side of the road

Not many, but enough  
that you will never have my story  
I don't want you to have my story  
You don't want my story

Have the good parts  
the parts that make you smile  
and when the mood hits me  
Tell me I have no reason

Because I want no reason  
to complain  
I want no reason  
to be hit by the mood  
~~

# She Grinned At Me

I would get quiet, refuse to speak  
and I would go blind  
not see her  
when I was so angry it scared me

She crept toward me  
my head straight forward  
she on the couch beside  
and she slowly, gently  
laid her ear against mine

"What the hell" I said  
and she grinned at me  
"I'm trying to hear the ocean"

"You think my head is hollow!"  
And she grinned at me

~~

# He Learned

His father hated his mother  
and so he learned  
that all women are worthy  
of contempt

How did this happen?  
Me, I suspect it goes back  
through a thousand generations  
to a boy and a girl

Into the bush they went  
and the boy knew nothing  
and as he tried  
the girl laughed

~~



# The Day I Grew Up

I wonder if that day  
was the day I began  
to grow up

My father had taken me  
down to the beach  
so I could swim

As we got there he said  
"you go on  
I'll watch you from here"

He did not come into the water  
just in case I should stumble  
and drown

"You go on and swim  
I'll wait for you here"  
And so I went boldly into the water  
~~

## He Was So Sour

He was so sour  
I watched mosquitoes  
spit his blood into the bushes  
~~

## She Was An Apple

She was not made  
for this world  
She was like a peeled apple  
exposure to the light  
and the air  
turned her pure white being  
into a sickly brown  
Which soon rotted  
~~

# A Canadian

Pierre Burton told us  
a Canadian is someone  
who knows how to make love  
in a canoe

And so we tried  
hunkered down  
ribs sticking into ribs  
and so we ended laughing in the water

A Canadian is someone  
who knows how to make love  
in the water  
while hanging onto an overturned canoe

~~

# At The Beach

We waded out past the kids  
past our own kids  
splashing in the shallows

Past the other adults  
who were shorter  
And to one side  
of the others

There in the not-privacy  
of a public beach  
we had our quick dangerous fuck  
and giggled like teenagers  
all the way back to shore

~~

# Three Billion Birds

Three billion birds  
lost since 1970  
in North America

Three point six billion humans  
in 1970  
Eight billion now

We are cowbirds, cuckoos  
on this planet  
brood parasites in the nest  
~~

# Linda Ormand

She was never really there  
in the coffee shop  
at the University  
never really in Guelph at all

The place was too big for her  
too many people  
[it was barely a city but a town  
would have been too much]

I saw her in Prince Rupert  
stayed a while on her barge  
in the harbour

And a few letters  
over the years  
heading further and further  
into the North

~~

# The Monster

The poor moth was huge  
and should have stayed outside  
but it got in  
and the screams of the girls  
were worth hearing  
as we gently captured the thing  
and sent it carefully back outside

~~

# Covid Returns

After a brief respite  
a few visits to a coffee shop  
where I could see others

I am back home again  
I have all I need  
and people

and I suppose I am careful  
preserving my wounded hide  
for a little bit longer  
perhaps long enough  
to get outside once more

It has become a contest  
~~



# So Long Ago

So long ago  
she was new  
he was new  
and she confused rage  
with love

So long ago  
that she has never forgot  
And when her mother says  
he's not good for you  
She says "I know" and smiles  
~~

# Thrift Shop Finds

The Japanese Garden  
in the arboretum at the University  
is dedicated to a fellow  
and I looked at the plaque  
Looked at the garden  
And said out loud  
"I've got your books"

~~

# A Good Hate Fuck

She goaded him without pause  
sometimes for days  
and finally he would snap  
grab her by the arms  
throw her onto the bed  
and fuck her hard

Later, as she lay back  
looking at the cracks  
in the ceiling  
she would say, in a dreamy voice  
There's nothing like a good hate fuck  
and he, beside her, would nod

~~



# My Grandmother's Dressing

My Grandmother's salad  
had a home made dressing  
Dissolve a lot of sugar  
in vinegar

I could never understand  
why something that sweet  
and something that sour  
was not simply nothing when mixed

~~

# How To Be A Poet

Take any poet, anywhere  
and any poem  
Read it to her  
and as you look up  
say languidly "we are like that"

~~

# The Eye

I who cannot drink  
you, who know this  
You sometimes let me sip  
from your drink

Let me remember my youth  
those drunken nights  
where I would talk someone  
into my bed

And as I hand your drink back  
you give me "the eye"  
Like we've had the conversation  
and yes, you will go home with me

~~

# Oh Thank You So Much

My boy is trying to put on some bulk  
I said  
as we looked at the giant container  
of protein powder

Don't worry  
she said  
His metabolism will change  
Just like yours  
As she looked at my belly  
~~

# Five Years

Five years they say  
on the all-knowing internet  
five years  
if the hormone therapy works  
And you can expect broken bones

Why do I look?  
I don't want to know those things  
Three years already  
so I could expect two more?  
What am I to do with that?

~~

# Making Bread

Like those interweaving paddles  
in a bakery, to make the dough  
I try to mix it up with you  
but the paddles (you and me)  
seem to be designed  
to miss each other

~~



# An Endless Search

An endless search  
for my residence room  
(57 south for some reason)  
that continued all night

Another stupid dream  
of no significance  
Well, I'm searching for something  
Shock upon shock

You were with me  
helping me to find a room  
in what looked suspiciously like  
a locker storage place

Students as warehoused merchandise  
What an original observation  
what a discovery  
Shock upon shock

And in the rows of lockers  
refugees and immigrants  
had shops to sell food  
to the students

May as well make some cash  
from those captive audiences  
the residence being a world  
unto itself

~~

# Canadian Literature

I am reading Canadian Literature  
Here is the bush  
Here is the heroine  
Here is the trauma  
and in the end  
they all wander away sadly

I am starting to understand  
why I stopped reading novels  
and switched to Science Fiction  
where bad things happen  
to bad people somewhere else  
in the Universe

And the hero goes home  
with the purple-eyed alien girl  
~~

# These Poems I Read

These poems I read today  
seem far too clever for me

They tickle the brain  
with hints of meaning  
If I just read them more slowly  
think a bit longer  
maybe I can figure them out

And the emotion I get  
or am supposed to get  
from poetry  
seems mostly confusion

~~

# Nut Brown Girl

-Eunice

I think they called her  
a nut brown girl  
or some such terrible

I had a nut brown girl once  
or at least she was nut brown  
at the end of summer

She worked in the fields  
she worshipped the sun  
and come September

~~

# Did She Aim

Did she aim that thing  
at me  
or was she really that careless  
of how she sat  
Up there on the desk  
crosslegged, shorts  
and pantyless she taught

The instructors CPR course it was  
and as I sat taking notes  
I looked straight up her leg  
to that flower between her legs  
when I raised my head  
and hoped that was all  
that raised

~~

# Finding Her at Dawn

In the earliest hints of dawn  
I would wake  
and finding her beside me  
I would stroke those sleepy thighs  
just to see if there was a reaction  
Finding none  
I would drift back to sleep  
until the sun made eyelids transparent  
~~

# Effortless Legs

She floated over the parking lot, those long legs swinging effortlessly, that long straight hair swinging from side to side. Her books over her shoulder and a look of sleepy determination to carry her to an early morning class.

I couldn't take my eyes off her, to my 25 years she looked like Venus, she looked like Aphrodite, she looked like the rest of my life. Of course I followed her, to hell with my own class. Like there was a string from her backpack to my heart, I was dragged along.

How much can a boy take? I wanted to catch up and stop her, I wanted to tell her that in forty years we would be waiting for our kids to come visit. I wanted to tell her that we would travel the world and oysters would appear, wherever we went. I wanted to say hello.

I wanted so much that my chest hurt with the longing for her, this girl that I had never seen, this visitor from the Paradise Gardens, this... She had slipped into the physics building and as I wrenched open the door she had turned a corner, one of six.

~~

# Out of Time

You're out of tune she said  
You can't quite get the beat  
but you're a pretty boy  
and so I will go tone deaf  
for a while and you can sing  
as loud as you want  
while I enjoy that face  
those arms, those legs  
for a while

~~



# The Red Curtain

So very many years  
it has been  
since I have felt  
(as my mother described it)  
that red curtain descend  
So many years  
since I have dented a car hood  
or broken a dash  
or punched through a headboard

Forewarned is forearmed  
in all those moments of blind rage  
there was something  
some small part of me  
or perhaps of my mother  
who warned me with her story  
some small part  
that redirected the rage  
that made sure I hurt myself  
and not the one I loved  
And I thank her for that warning

~~

# Years Later

Years later  
I returned to that field  
where we first made love  
To that depression  
full of moss  
out of the wind  
and as I approached  
I saw it was full of thorn  
~~

# Broken Wings

Your birds with broken wings  
my mother called them  
A long string of girls she met  
all of them with problems  
that they shared with my mother

I don't try to find broken wings  
I told my mother  
but I didn't tell her  
that the girls she met were ordinary  
that we were all fucked up then

It was just that they talked to me  
And whose fault was that Mom  
Who taught me how to open them up  
and get them to talk  
about their problems

~~

# I Regret

Do I regret anything?  
Oh my love  
I regret every moment  
I was angry with you  
every moment I didn't speak  
every instant not holding you

This I regret  
stupid man  
to think I had enough time  
to play at "who's right"

I regret not saying "you're right  
and I would like to embrace you  
to prove that you are right"  
This I regret  
for I will never get those moments back  
~~

# The Saddest Week

The saddest week of my life  
was when she moved out  
I didn't want her to go  
but she was going

For a week she packed her books  
into boxes  
and her clothing into bags  
I helped carry her furniture  
down those stairs

The stairs I was so happy  
to help carry things up  
She was not happy  
because I was not  
But I could see she was excited  
a new phase in her life  
one she wanted so very much

It was hard for me  
to watch her books come off the shelves  
and her knick-knacks get wrapped  
in newspaper and tucked away  
She was especially careful  
with the things I had bought for her

Came the day  
when I carried her last box  
out to her car  
and she said "I may be back"  
and I said "you'll always have a home"  
but they were lies  
We didn't know that at the time

I stood on the street  
and waved until she turned a corner  
and stood for a long time  
thinking perhaps she will turn again  
and come back  
and ask me to carry those boxes  
back up our stairs  
into our apartment  
~~

# The Land of Should Be

I lived once in the land of should be  
and I was miserably unhappy  
which is like being horribly horrified  
Forever was I outraged at injustice

But one day, I found a doorway  
and it led to the land of actually is  
To live there you must look around  
and understand where you are

Not so shocked at being smacked  
with newspaper to nose  
You can still work for justice and happiness  
but you have to work at it yourself

~~

# Not the Tail

In the days before drones  
I thought, cleverly, to use a kite  
and a camera with time-release shots

A windy day  
the camera tied to the tail  
and off we went

The kite spun the camera  
into the hard-packed sand  
Hmm, try it again  
and again the same result

At the end I had a camera  
that was cracked across one side  
and so I taped it off  
and took square shots ever after

Tie it to the string  
~~



# She Was Sorry

I'm sorry teacher, she said  
I was walking on the street  
and he grabbed me

I spun him around  
slammed him into a wall  
and pulled back my fist

But I couldn't hit him  
You see, he was crying  
~~

# I Was Warm

Walking to work  
from her bed  
The memory of her arms  
I was warm all the way

~~

# 18 percent grey

The grey December sky  
behind the basilica towers  
Flat and 18 percent  
It might be a backdrop  
in a photo studio

I thought of her eyes  
and decided no  
Her eyes were never so flat  
if ever so grey

~~

# I'm Fine

How are you  
she would say  
How do you feel today  
and the answer always "fine"

So very many years  
a lifetime  
before I could say  
"I am struggling"

~~

# Tell Her

Would it have killed me  
to tell her I loved her  
to tell her I needed her  
I wanted her always

But no  
Barely a man  
Mostly a boy  
I had to keep it to myself

It drove her crazy  
she tried so many times  
and I sat silent  
And I lost her

~~

# Breathing In and Out

Facing each other  
heads on the same pillow  
I breathe in  
what you breathe out  
and you breathe in  
what I breathe out

If breath is life  
We happily mingle  
I breathing you  
you breathing me  
A confusion of being  
~~

# How Much Time

How much time  
how much time  
how much fucking time  
do I have left to me

Is it enough to become a novelist  
is it enough to outlive this plague  
and travel again to other places  
is it enough to say goodbye

If I say goodbye now  
it seems silly to say hello  
in a month's time  
Not that I care about silly

So say goodbye  
and hello and goodbye again  
and when I can hug you again  
keep it with you, just in case

~~

# The Truth Leaks In

I begin to write a story  
something fictional  
based on characters from my life

As I write  
I can't seem to escape the truth  
The story is my story

I don't know what to do with that  
I thought I was done with that

I was looking forward to a story  
with an unknown end  
~~

# Bedsweatting

I rise three, four times a night  
to go pee  
and each time I return to bed  
I look at the pattern of sweat  
on the sheet

We've got one of those covers  
that you use for small children  
when they are wetting the bed  
and it works just as well  
for an old bedsweatting dad

~~



# Damnit

Damnit  
aren't you supposed to have  
a lifetime of memories  
to keep you company  
when you are old

I could use those memories  
in this plague-time  
in this locked-away house  
to keep me company

But I don't have many  
just flashes and pieces  
Three good women  
Two amazing children  
and all I have is flashes

This living in the present  
is all well and good  
but my advice to you  
is to make good notes  
so what is past is present

~~



# I Cough, No Stroke

Naughty damned heart  
there is the flipping in my chest  
like a dead fish in the boat  
who doesn't know he's dead yet

I check my pulse  
yes, fibrillation again  
damned naughty heart  
and I cough

Check it again, the pulse  
and there it is  
that lovely sinus rhythm  
No stroke today

~~

# Brautigan Waiting Room

The ululation of a hospital phone  
Shouts across the waiting room  
Like a thousand tribesmen  
Waving spears  
And charging toward your death

# I Tried Her Safety Razor

-Pam

I tried her safety razor  
and commented  
"reminds me of my old man"

Yesterday she gave me my own  
and I took out a blade  
the kind I haven't seen since work  
when I used them to halve  
Triticale embryos so I could draw them

I put it in the razor  
and she gave me my first shave  
with the past

Quite aside from the feeling  
of a woman shaving you  
it was a pretty close thing

Maybe I'll set up the cutthroat razor  
and then we'll see  
if she really forgives me  
for that time in class when I hit her

~~

# A Piece of Blue Topline

As a teen  
I needed a belt  
and walked onto the dock  
looked down  
and found a lovely piece  
of topline, a deep blue

I used that rope  
to tie my pants  
for decades, all through high school  
and University and years of work

Eventually, the rope got too short  
and I set it down somewhere  
Now I could use it again  
but I don't know where it is

Keep track of your stuff  
my mother would say  
just before she told me  
where it was

~~

# Relics

There they are on the shelf  
relics of the woman  
who came before me

I won't make him throw them out  
because I know he loved her  
and if he loved her  
he can love me

Should I ask for her number  
or leave it a surprise  
these things that he does  
the things I will find

And when he calls me by her name  
I will simply answer "yes"  
because I know her relics  
are in his heart as well as on the shelf

He's a big man  
and there's enough to share  
These relics of who came before  
are nothing for me to fear

~~

# Boots for Presents

Used to hate this season  
as the family  
struggled further toward debt  
which meant something  
in those days  
Struggled to give presents  
to kids who went hungry

Old running shoes  
and ripped jackets  
until Christmas morning

But now I can give  
to kids who get soakers  
by choice  
and are old enough  
to say thanks

~~



# Big Man

There's pleasure  
in a solid chair  
for my ass  
and a wall  
to lean against

To enjoy the full effect  
of gravity  
without worry  
the chair will collapse  
the table fold  
or the wall tip over

Shocking to realize  
the tension that comes  
with trying not to break  
the world

~~

# It Takes a Village to get my Morning Coffee

Walking into the usual haunt  
to a "happy holidays" and  
"you have the dark roast right?"  
Nice to be home

There's no such thing  
as a city  
Only a bunch  
of villages  
pushed together

Or even scattered  
around and between  
other villages

~~

# All My Life

All my life  
I thought I could hear electricity  
flowing through appliances  
All my life  
I thought everyone could hear  
that high pitched whine

All my life  
I went to sleep with the radio on  
and almost every woman I slept with  
asked me how I could sleep  
with the noise  
I sometimes said it was romantic

Turns out that whine  
that jet engine in my ears  
is tinnitus

Turns out not everyone hears it  
and those who do later in life  
are driven to distraction

They can't turn it off  
and they never learned  
how to mask it with real noise  
How to go to sleep  
with the radio on

Me, I learned how to be bored  
with that constant whine  
so those women in my bed  
would stay in my bed  
and go to sleep  
in their silence

~~

# She Is Very Dry

She is very dry  
I told my doctor  
and he said that  
spit was a good lubricant

Being still a boy  
I figured the only way  
to get spit on a dick  
was for her to suck it  
and so that's the way it was

Stupid boy you say  
but porn came in magazines  
and they were expensive  
It never occurred to me  
that I could spit into my hand

I wonder if we'd have stayed together  
for longer than we did  
if we'd enjoyed the sex more  
~~

# In Florida

In Florida the family prowled  
amongst the alligators  
and wondered at their strength  
The kids even sat on the back  
of one of the poor little beggers

But the big ones  
the ones that would jump ten feet  
into the air for a chicken  
The big ones  
reminded me of my student days  
And certain of my friends.

~~

# Imbalance

-Lorna

There was an imbalance  
She provided daily proof  
that she loved me  
and I demanded it

She asked for proof  
I loved her  
and I rarely provided it  
Eventually we tipped over  
~~

# Take Good Notes They Say

Chunks, loads, years are gone  
and I don't know where they are  
Photographs, Negatives, Journals  
The ones I want are gone

They may never have existed  
Damn that quiet life  
of no torment, no emotional scars  
Damn that steady keel  
that grinds stories to sand

~~



# April 23, 1986

I take advantage of you?  
you take advantage of me  
God plays games  
I take advantage of myself

~~

You look for direction  
some sign  
some signature for your life  
Your shoelace is untied

~~

Isn't it terrible  
what they're doing in South Africa  
we all think it's horrid

It must be  
It's on the news all the time  
all that oppression and injustice

There's no choice  
those people are going to have to fight  
you can't talk to racists

Riel died for nothing

~~

First warm days of spring  
flowers in a shop doorway  
Perfect

~~

Secretaries are always dressed well  
But they speak  
worse, they smoke

~~

And weddings, what are they  
Mother's joy  
Father's respect  
Friends drink, laugh  
and weep

It's a party  
like Easter  
the government likes it

~~

On the radio  
Dire Straights  
sing about MTV  
Theme song of video  
absurd

~~

# In Conversation with Nancy Watts

(May 27, 1986)

On the value of psychology: It has none

How one arrives at a decision, and one must always decide in the end, is of no importance at all. Why one acts as one does is of no importance, only the act itself is important.

Understanding the process which leads to a decision does not change the act which follows from the decision. The consequences of the act are not modified, excused, or dealt with by an understanding of why the act occurred.

Knowing the childhood trauma one went through, or realizing the deep rooted cause of our "neuroses" will do nothing toward changing who or what one is. Only the act of change will bring about change.

So your father beat you, or worse, so your mother refused you the teat.

You exist  
you must act  
Act  
Decide and create your life

You are NOT the sum total of your experience to this point in your life, you are the synthesis, the product of your life so far.

No, you ARE your life so far and you ARE the future.

No more, and no less.

Act, don't decide and do not seek the roots of the decision process. Just live. Nothing more and nothing less.

~~

# The Meaning of Life

June 26, 1986

There is none.

Simply because function derives from form, not form from function. Form does not dictate function, but instead delimits it. A certain form can suggest or accomplish certain functions, but a function cannot create a form. Form creates form. The environment (form) creates the low-energy state form of a rock. The form of a rock is such that it can be used as a paperweight. The need or a paperweight does not create rocks.

The environment of the Earth several millions of years ago was such that self-replicating forms arose. These forms were capable of replication simply because of their form, not because of a need for replication.

Form responds to its environment with no direction from outside, other than the dictates of entropy. Change the overall form and the component forms will change. Rocks exposed on a beach wear down, in the earth's crust they are created, no secret there. Replicating forms change. Replicating forms also represent memory (as do rocks, they represent the conditions of their formation). Form or pattern which persists for a certain time (a certain period of change in the environment) represents memory.

On to trees and dogs. Trees act on memory to respond to the environment. Memory in the guise of DNA, protein, chemical signals etc. Dogs act more quickly. Man's memory or

signalling capabilities are extended to rapid communication between individuals, this allows patterns to be passed between individuals and gives rise to the function of abstraction, otherwise known as imagination, or perhaps as consciousness. This in turn gives rise to the speculation that there is some meaning in all this form and function. The question is natural, most if not all forms can be shown to have, or can be assigned a function. What is the assigned function of man? Or, what is the meaning of consciousness?

Of course one cannot prove the non-existence of anything. One cannot say that there is no meaning of life for there might be one, well hidden or perhaps evident but beyond apprehension by present means. One can only suggest that there is no NEED for a meaning to life and suggest that there is likely to be no actual meaning.

~~

# I Walked Into Her House

I walked in to her house  
like I used to walk in to our apartment  
She looked up as I came through the door  
A frown, then puzzled, then shock  
Hello I said  
do I look so different after thirty years

Of course you do, she said  
why are you here  
I came to tell you I was sorry  
After thirty years? Sorry for what?  
For how I treated you, for the pain I caused

Look, she said, I'm glad to have your apology  
will you take mine?  
What would you have to apologize for?  
You are such a dear sweet boy  
you probably think it's all your fault  
Well it wasn't. I hurt you as much as you did me

I was stunned  
You did, you hurt me?  
Don't you remember, she said  
Not at all, I really don't think you hurt me  
Do me the dignity then, of believing  
that I don't think you hurt me, we were 23

~~

# As She Walked Into the Bar

As she walked into the bar  
I saw him walking out  
"Oh god I hope they don't see each other"  
I said to the rest of the table

But of course they did  
She made a swing for his head  
that he ducked  
He grabbed her by the shoulders  
spun her around  
and propelled her out the door

I needed a beer  
so I wandered a bit further  
just in case I was needed



"You son of a bitch, how could you do that to me"

"Leave my mother out of it"

"With her of all the people, my best friend"

"Did you take a swing at her?"

"No, she's my best friend"

"More than that isn't she?"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean before I cheated on you with her  
you cheated on me with her"

There was silence

I watched as they looked at each other  
for quite a long time

Then she took his arm  
and marched him off down the street  
toward her friend's place

~~

# Overalls

My my my  
I just remembered your overalls  
How you would wear a short t-shirt  
and panties underneath

That wonderful view  
and not view  
of your hip  
kept my neck swivelling  
for hours  
~~

# She Had Cold Feet

She had cold feet  
so I scrunched over  
and bent my legs  
to help heat the space  
around her legs

Hoping  
that I didn't soak her  
with my next hot flash  
Hoping  
that her cold feet  
would bleed off some heat  
~~

# My First Job

My first job at the University  
was as a life model  
and it was one of my favourites

Standing exposed  
alone or with another model  
all the eyes aimed inward

I soaked up those gazes  
I absorbed the confirmation  
that I was actually there

~~

# The Years It Took

The years it took  
to be able to stand and speak  
without preparation  
without thought  
"You're so articulate  
you must love being in public"

Thirty years, forty years of practice  
Forty years of training  
and yes, I can speak without hesitation  
but that is where I live  
That is my home

Take me out, set me down  
and then ask me to speak  
You will hear nothing  
~~

# My Duelling Scar

A new razor  
a new blade  
a present for Christmas  
and a man who has shaved  
for almost fifty years

I begin with a small movement  
of my hand to the side  
and pull  
Now, suddenly  
My duelling scar  
~~

# Viagra?

I have not had an erection  
for three years  
I tell my doctor  
Do you think Viagra?

Four different heart medications  
What do you think?  
I think that it's a good thing  
that I have no need for an erection  
~~

# Tougher Than She Looks

Delicate as the wing of a moth  
she was  
Translucent, transcendent  
and the moth's name  
was Mothra  
~~

# Let Us Eat Fugu

Let us eat Fugu  
and declare ourselves gourmand  
and declare ourselves brave

Let us trust the chef  
Let us pray his knife  
has not slipped

~~

# Lying On The Couch

All my life  
I have loved to look across the room  
to see a girl lying on the couch  
reading a book

Even better  
is when she has her legs crossed  
and is so absorbed in that book  
that she doesn't notice me at all

~~





# Things that I have loved

A woman in the shower  
running her fingers through her hair  
to get it out of her face

That giggle  
as she does something naughty  
and realizes that she loves it

The jeans-dance  
as she pulls them up  
over her hips

That special wrap  
of a towel piled up  
and wound around wet hair

The lower back  
seen at dawn, the light glancing  
and all the dimples showing up

That twinkle in the eye  
that tells you  
you're going to get laid tonight

The arm  
that snakes across and pulls you back  
as you try to get up and go

Her hand  
taking your hand to her breast  
as she coaxes you back to bed

The little squiggle  
as you stand in line  
and she backs into you with her ass

The intake of breath  
the very first time ever  
that you touch her waist

The wicked look  
in her eye as she walks over  
to your spot at the bar, hello

The sad look  
in her eye as she leaves you  
to go back to her boyfriend

The way the hands rise, clasped at the chest  
and her leg comes up  
when you say she looks amazing

The shiver  
that runs through her whole body  
when you stroke that special spot

The first time  
she drops to her knees  
and undoes your belt

There are many things I have loved  
and I hope I never forget  
a single one of them

~~

# My Godfather's Place

The cottage, long since gone  
on the hill overlooking the town  
In the winter, through bare branches  
you could see the bridge  
and the harbour and beyond that  
the lake, gone unfocused  
by too many twigs

At the foot of the hill  
the BA station  
and the memorial cairn  
To the right, my grandmother's house  
to the left, my father  
and over the bridge  
on the hill on the other side  
my great-uncle

The cottage had a veranda  
along two sides  
a stone fireplace  
in a large living room  
bedroom around the corner  
and a tiny kitchen  
Big enough for a single man  
I always thought it would be mine  
~~

# I Walk Through the Woods

I walk through the woods  
white mist moving up and over  
my snowshoes as I keep to the trunks

I smell woodsmoke  
and move a little faster  
She has arrived, and started the fire  
~~

# The Marks of a Fox

As I walk through fresh fallen snow  
I am distracted  
by the marks of a fox  
who has jumped up  
has dived into that snow  
after a small furred thing  
who thought his tunnels  
would protect him

A small benediction  
for the food-mouse  
and a gratitude  
for the fed-fox  
then I move on  
~~

# Before The City Lights

Once, my grandmother said  
you could look up to the stars  
and see them on into infinity  
once, before the city lights  
dimmed them to nothing

And now, as I move  
north and north into the dark  
I look up to the stars  
and see the junk-scape  
man has dumped there

So much metal spins  
between us and the stars  
that they must dodge each other  
These pitiful faux-stars  
will guide no ship home  
~~

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