

You are Not the Mirror



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Engage

You are not the mirror
you are so much more
than what you can see there

Inside you
where the light can't go
there are worlds
and Captain Picard
says Engage

~~

Must be Inside Me

I long to write about my beloved
but the words won't come

Please spirits of the air
give me the power
to call up the stanza

How can she be mine
if she cannot read
the beautiful phrases
that must be inside me

~~

Who are you talking to

Who are you talking to
is it me?

A cleared site in the woods
is a strange place
to hear your voice

I'm not sure what you're saying
and I don't know
if you're talking to me
but it's nice to hear you

~~

What, Us?

Did you hear the commotion last night
there were police cars
and a fire truck
and all the neighbours came out
to see what was happening

What was happening?

What, us?

~~

Oh the Humanity

Thirty courtiers are lined up
outside your bedroom
waiting to take you to
the Hindenburg disaster

Whoever's not killed for love
is dead meat

~~

Lonely Man

We had taught him
but he forgot what it was
and so he drifts through life
like a caribou
on the bottom of the ocean
after the ice is gone

~~

Blind in one eye

He is blind in one eye
and won't see out the other
But he will tell you
that you are wrong
that blue is red
down is up
out is in
and ice cream
tastes of old books
found in your grannie's attic

He believes

~~



Or is it turtles all the way down

If someone calls it a thorn
and you say it is fake news
do you grab it hard
and hold up your bleeding hand
saying
See, See

Will you run
to the edge of the world
and look over?
What do you see?
Are there elephants?

~~

Why are you?

Who are you?
Do you know
or are you waiting
to be told

I won't tell you
I don't want to
and the ear trumpet of God
is on the fritz again

~~

Nice to be needed

“The ocean diver
doesn’t need snowshoes”

Is that some sort of reference
to fish and bicycles?
Because if it is,
I’d just as soon
take my drink to another table

~~

Maid of the Mist

Tasting the waterfall
by standing under it
with your mouth open
may not be a good idea
at Niagara Falls

I love you
but there's no way
I'm diving into those eyes
without a barrel

~~

Wild Jungle Drums

We could see it
It was so close
and yet
You asked me for an elephant
and I came home with
a dryer vent

It went downhill from there

~~

Manta Roadwork

A Ray is the person
casting the shadow
and a bed is the truck
holding the asphalt

Turn out the lights
I want to lay you
like a road

~~

Any Message Yet

The full moon is inside your house
How can you miss it?
I sent you the package
and told them to give you a card
so you would know it was from me

You asked me for it
last June
and it took me quite a while
to find it

I hope you like it

~~

Maybe the moonlit pool in the deep wood?

You are the fountain of the sun's light
and I am blinded
when I am with you

Please forgive me
when I miss your nipple
and kiss your sister instead

~~

You wanted an Elephant

I do not go along with it
I go ahead
breaking a trail
building a bridge
paving a road
with shingles
of Manta Ray

Watch for us
we won't be hard to see

~~

When suddenly voices from the crowd

You wanted a day at the beach
and I took you

You wanted an Orangeade
with fries and sauce
and I got them

You wanted to go swimming
when suddenly, voices from the crowd
shouted out
He's not the one for you,
camels don't swim

~~

It only seems like you left

Listen to presences inside poems
Do you hear?
Yes, that echo is you
So long ago we parted
you have probably forgotten me
but there you are
deep in the cadences
far down in the meanings
You have never left me

~~

Fine clothing

You wear fine clothing
and your hair is perfect
Your nails are exquisite
Fingers and toes

If only
you would spend half that time
thinking about anyone else
you might still
be with me

~~

Gorbies

They swim the huge fluid freedom
of too much money
too little work
and jobs with the family firm

These are the tourists
that visit each summer
drifting bored
up and down the streets
living on the yacht

It hasn't changed
since I was a kid
trying to get the tobacco tar
off my hands
with bleach

~~

Dusky Native Girl

The whole night sky changes
in a heartbeat
from hello to falling
down the cliff
into the black hole
that is the Athabasca Tar Sands
Your eyes

Suddenly, the stars

~~

Spiritual River Advice

A flowing prophet
drifts by, and a bucket
of you bounces on the bank
close enough for me to reach

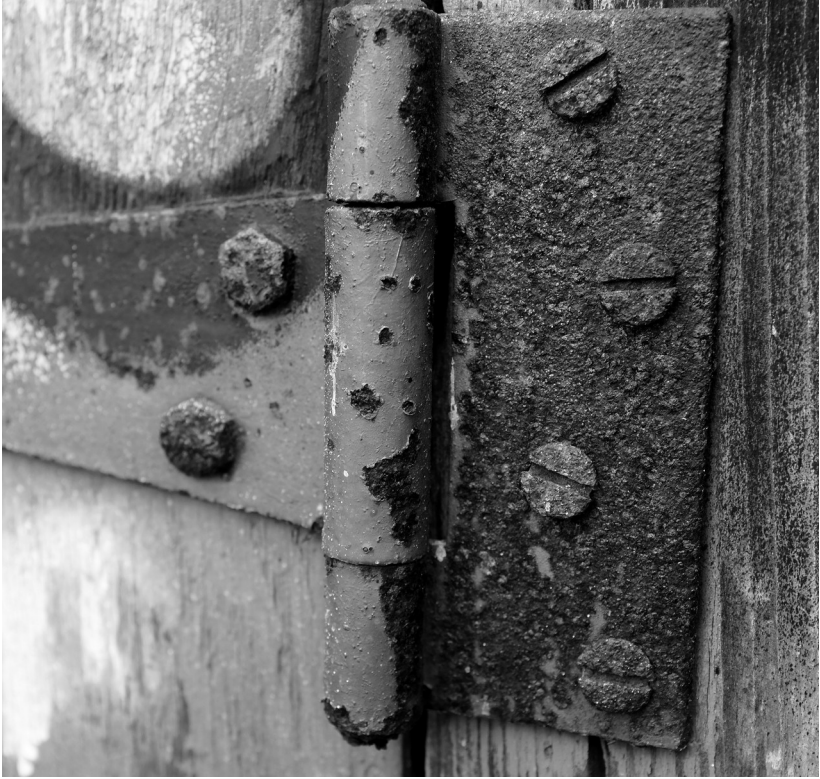
Do not be tempted my son
What is in that bucket
will distract you
from the great work

You will become trapped
in the

Nope, he's too far downstream

Who are you?

~~



Unhinged

I am unhinged
I am ripped open
by your love
I am an open door
hanging askew
Old iron
rusted by the years
Unhinged

What, she said
you mean like that hinge
over there?

~~

Estuary Dream

The door knocker
and the door
swing together

You want us to be like that
swinging in tune
moving together
in the same direction

Can't you see
that if the knocker
never meets the door
You and I
will be river and ocean

~~

Stagnant

The oldest thirst there is
would not be enough
to make me want
to drink from your well

There is water
in the desert
that is so brackish
that to drink it
is to drink thirst itself

Here is the rain
lift your face from the sand
and turn it upward
now open your mouth

~~

Emotional Receipts

Drinking as if it's a job
that has to be done today
A quiet, determined look
on her face
Concentration on this next bit
there, one more down
and she is reaching
for the next glass of figures
to be reconciled

The day is almost finished
and the numbers
are assembling themselves
into a wall
between memory and agony

~~

Your dad vs the guy at the bar

Drink the wine that moves you
Forget about that cheap stuff
that only gets you drunk
You should look for the stuff
that makes you insane

Be like the fizz and sizzle
in the brain of a squirrel
Be like the crackle and pop
of a breakfast cereal
that has buried snap
out beyond the treeline
Annoying little beggar

What point to dull your senses
when you need to fly
as high as the sun

So what if you crash
all feathers and wax
and Father's "I told you so"
Better to have felt the heat
than to shiver on the ground

~~

Love is like this sometimes

Through the hiss
the information comes
The battle goes badly
we need guns
Send guns
leave the spears and swords
in their storage rooms
Melt them down
to make bells and Buddhas

But still the static
is there
and Hideyoshi
hearing the static
and not his captains
sends spears and swords

~~

Don't be lazy

The Sheikh, on his cane horsie, came closer
and, having forsaken women
gave you advice

Excellent, will you take it
or will you now go to the barber
for advice on harvesting your crops
and ask the baker
how to catch fish

Come to me
and I will teach you
how to be happy

The barber has a farm
The baker has a hobby
Did you see the poles on his wall?

To receive advice
you must first answer your question
so that you know
what you are being told
is correct

~~

Western Woes

What's that over there
by the rocks
It's hard to see
because of the heat waves

There, just to the right
of that boulder
that looks like Boulder Colorado

Oh No!
It's Injuns!

~~

Rumi is Angry

Rumi has stopped
being my prophet

You are snatching
my phrases
and using them
in silly ways.

Stop it.

~~

Duty Calls

Can you rub my neck
I'm not very horny
but I'd love it if you
could get that stiff part
right there

Sometimes you do
things you'd rather not
so that later
maybe
she will do things
she would rather not

~~

Ketchikan

It's quite funny
I was thinking about Ketchikan
just today
thinking that I should
write a poem about the place

But just now
well, a moment ago
I read a poem about Ketchikan
and I didn't write it

Ketchikan was famous
for having a brothel
and being on the way
to the Klondike gold rush

~~

The Snot of HG Wells

I'm reading a book
that I've owned for 45 years
and there, on the page
a piece of snot

Is it mine from 45 years ago
or is it mine from today

~~

I think he's my boy

Brutal self reflection
I tell my boy
Blame yourself first
Says Rumi, backing me up

Know who you are
and why you feel like you do

That's fine he says
but which me will I know
and how long will I last

Go, take your stoic ass
and study like your hair
is on fire

~~

Self portrait with string

I never pictured myself
beyond 23 and University
Not graduation
Not the extra 40 years

I never thought much
about sex
when I wasn't fucking someone
I mean right then
But I thought a lot
about waking up in the morning
the sun coming in the window
and there she was
snoring softly
with all the blankets
drooling on my pillow

Damn, I've lost the thread

~~



We Ran

We ran like maniacs
gassed by Scarecrow
through the streets of Guelph

We teased the cops
by squeezing through the spaces
between buildings

They played along
and didn't just walk around the corner
to grab us coming out the other side

Breathless, we would stagger
up the stairs to our apartment
climbing over the garbage

We would fall onto bed
and make love
sometimes we got our clothes off

~~



My new toy

My new toy
a used camera
sits on my desk
saying “use me, use me”
and I look at advertisements
and record covers
and think to myself

I really, really want to do portraits
of lots of people

But really
I just want to hug strangers again

~~

Eggs for breakfast

I want to meet the girl
the one that makes rotten things fresh
and go with her
to chocolate mountains
and see rabbits
fight bears
for the last piece
of laundry

I want to live
in a shoebox
dropped by China
when it tried on it's new boots

She will fry me the eggs
I ate in 1963
for breakfast

~~

This Opening

This drumbeat moment of red flowers opening
This Easter morning of chocolate eggs
This Seagull wheeling above a calm lake
This trumpet call of a brand new book

This spill of your hair
onto my pillow
as I watch your back
rise and fall
like empires
like continents

~~

Lovers Pray Constantly

Lovers pray constantly
for time to stop
for this moment
to last forever

How can this be?
A prayer takes time to say

~~

A coffee thanks

The banquet room was empty
as I entered
but I sat down anyway
in hope
in faith
and soon, she entered

Do you know what you want?

I want to lie
between your legs
and kiss your eyes
and feel your nipples
rise to my chest

I want to comb your hair
and soap your back
and love you
for all my life

Just a coffee thanks

~~

Make me happy

To my longing
she gave me an apple
To my desire
she gave me a book
To my grief
she gave me a castle
and a yacht
and a private jet
on a private island
with a private bank account
containing the incomes
of ten thousand people

Yet I was unhappy

~~

Tell the mountains

She dances for thrown pennies
and talks for sugar cubes

She throws off her gown
for old men
and gives them pleasure

She has done this
for 1000 centuries
and has been content

Who am I
to say otherwise
to tell her
that she is unhappy

Tell the mountains
they are not deep enough

~~

Slouching toward cedars

Down a dirt lane
is a rotting log cabin
there is a rusted spring
from a mattress
in one corner

Did she love him
Did he give her food
and six kids
Were the kids wild?
Climbing barefoot
through the woods

Or did he walk out the door
one wintry day
and fall into his bear pit
Did she wait for him
hungry
Until spring?

~~

A small potato

I have here, a small potato
she said, as the meeting opened
I will outline to you this evening
all the ways
this small potato
is better than a man

~~



Good times

It was always stormy
when we were together
Two years it was
in that rooftop studio
you with your paints
me with my books

And every time I looked
out the window
there were storm clouds
threatening

And every time I turned
from the window
The storm broke
lightning split the table

Rain flooded the carpet
and thunder
lived under our bed

~~

Pretty good price

I've been thinking about a book
by Jan Saudek
I found it used
It's in Czech
obviously well used
In fact, I just found it again

It looks like I paid \$20 for it
Even then, I considered it a bargain

What? No I don't have a point to make

~~

Finally

She might have been six
in 1990
when I first saw her
standing at the window
curtain in her hand
looking down the laneway

I happened to be back that way
in 2007 and she was still there
in the window
holding the curtain
she was a lot taller
She could see further down the lane

In 2020 I happened to be walking
I had retired to the area
and I walked past that house
As I looked
she was there, in the window
holding the curtain
but she was looking
at a car
coming up the laneway

There were bags on the porch

~~

Tumble dry

If we are joined together
prick to pussy
in a divine reunion
of the divided human
I am forever cast adrift
half a soul

Oh give me a bit of flotsam
throw me a line
don't leave me to roll
on the foam

If it were possible
for me to get hard
I would need the chemical
that would kill me

I am a shirt, no pants
Tumble dry
on medium

~~

It is hard

It is hard
as an old man
to watch a young love
drift sideways

Like a son or daughter
she finds faults
where she can shatter the bond
and get on with her life

~~

Waiting

Waiting here
for I know not what
I find myself wondering
how it happened
that I am alone

Waiting here
simply to wait
I find myself looking
out the windows
for Waiting to come
to my door

Knock Knock
Who's there?
Waiting

Oh

~~

I do not know how to love you

I do not know how to love you
for I am old
and cannot do those brave things
the young men do

If you ask me to topple the world
or count the grains of sand
or run to the top of the hill
to shout my love for you

I ask you to remember
that I am no soldier, my feet are flat
that I no longer see grains of sand
and my running is reserved
for the sprint to the bathroom
in the middle of the night

I do not know how to love you
for I am old
and such love burned out
with my youth

~~

Two chairs in a room

When you sit quiet
there is such a stillness
that I sometimes forget
you are here with me

In those times
I am angry with myself
Do I not love you
I should know your presence

Yet in my own stillness
I have caught you startled
to find me in my chair

Is it comfort
rather than indifference
that lets us be absent
one from the other

Here in this room

~~



Listening for the Spring Rain

I was sick then
and my neck broken
but she came
and rubbed my back
and fed me

Perhaps for remembrance
of the man I was
or long habit
of what we once were

I lay in my chair
hardly daring to move
the pain was so bad
and I would listen
for her steps
up the long wooden stairs

I would listen
like the seedlings
under winter snow
listen for the spring rain

~~

The opposite of love

The opposite of love
is not hate
any more than the opposite of light
is darkness

Darkness has no substance
just as cold does not exist
We cannot reflect darkness
We cannot project cold

Just as cold is an absence of heat
and darkness an absence of light
Hate is an absence of connection
it is a denial of connection

The opposite of love my dear
is indifference

~~

I held her in my arms

Behind cold stone walls
I held her in my arms
through fog horn nights
as the mist crept across the floor
as the tide rose over our bed

I held her in my arms
and because I did
I listen for her still
her tread on the stairs
I listen for her key
in the lock

She will never come
but I listen, my ears do not know
what my heart has learned

~~

Scales of love

Through long years of memory
and searching my heart
for its inner working

I have come to understand
that it is you
in the quiet still centre
of that heart

You, whose lips, whose nipples
those hands, the mole on your neck
your grey eyes,
You who I glimpse

You, that girl who is long gone
to my memory, and to yours
You are there, always

All others are measured
against a few glimpses
a few scattered impressions
against you

I wonder sometimes
if anything of me
remains in you
but it is of no consequence

Love is not scales
so much on each side
and the pointer at zero

~~

Kind Asshole

You ask me why
I seem to have girls
and lose women

I will confess
that I didn't know
for many more years
than you have been alive
but I have not wasted that time

I can answer you now
I think it was too simple to see
It is because I am a kind asshole
Young girls see a kind man
Women see the asshole

Young girls come, stay a while
and the woman they become
moves on with her life
leaving me
just a little bit smaller
a little more hollow

A man can live on memories
only so long

~~

Safe

Shall I open my heart to you
Shall I write here, what I hold most dear
I may yet
I can
You don't read poetry
and so
you will never read this

~~

Blind Hope

More than once
each night
I get up to pee
I rise, eyes closed
and blink only enough
to avoid the bookshelves

I keep my eyes closed
as I pee, and closed
when I go back to bed
because I am hoping
that I will go back
to dreaming about you

~~



Her Kindness

She goes into the store for me
I don't know how better to put this
how to explain what that means to me

In a time of plague
she goes into the store for me

~~

She said goodbye

She said goodbye
like she did every morning
and she went to work

I stayed around the place
puttering really
cleaning a little
hanging up clothes

Around 5pm I made supper
as I always do
and waited for her

I didn't think much
when she was late
Or later still
as I listened for her steps

She came through the door
and said "traffic"
That's OK, dinner is ready

~~

The clever poet

He was admired
for his unsurpassed technical virtuosity
the vast range of his intellect,
He drew easily
from an extraordinary variety of literatures,
art forms, social and political theories,
and scientific and technical information.

The problem
she said to him
after a reading
as he suggested a drink

Is that you are clever
but clever is boring
and clever leaves no room
for feeling

~~

The Birth of the Universe

We lay on the summer grass
and one by one
we placed the stars
into the sky

I looked at you
and saw the birthplace
of worlds
the womb of comets

When I looked back
you had finished the sky

~~

Proverbial Paws

I had so long forgotten
the tender arts
I had resigned myself
to living alone

Then you came
on the proverbial
little cat feet
sneaking up on my life

You insinuated, squeezed,
slid, drifted like mist
and snuck on little cat feet
into my life

and suddenly
there is poetry
once more in my heart

~~

The first time

The first time
you lifted your shirt
and stepped out of your jeans
Nothing else on

You stepped out of your jeans
and walked toward me
open, not even pretending to be shy

You stepped toward me
and I could not breathe (so cliché)
Under the covers
I pinched my leg
because I needed some air

You weren't smiling
you had that determined look
that let me know
I'd better be good

I pinched my leg

~~

Freedom

Oh this fake
this imposter
Freedom
I would spit the word
if I could

How stupid
How stupid I was
the day I told you
I had to have my freedom

And now I wait
each night, I wait
Just before I fall asleep
I think of you
In hopes
that I might dream of you

~~

You want to know who I am?

Fibreglass in cottage roofs
middle of July
Holes drilled in concrete boxes
hunched over inside
Reinforced cement broken up
by sledge, chisel and jack hammer
Tobacco tar so thick on the fingers
you need to wash your hand with bleach
and you watch the blood well up
at the bottom of a half inch callus
Car loads of wood to be graded
and stacked
Tool handles dipped in lacquer
with a window for ventilation
A gym floor removed
with a crowbar
A steep roof shingled
three floors up
Logs ripped from the gumbo
of a North Alberta sawmill

Do you know me now?
I'm a Stompin' Tom song

~~

Die for love

To die for love
is a silly statement
you cannot die for love
you cannot die from love

Love is in you
you do not do things for it
it does not go from you
it is not infectious
You do not catch love

You can kill yourself
for love, but that's you
You can be miserable
because you are in love
or because you are not
in love

It is within
it affects you
exactly to the extent you allow it
all the rest
is you wanting control
over another

That's not love

~~



Bertha Mason

You are mine I breathed
into her ear
You are mine I wrote
in a poem

Look you
she told me one day
when she'd had enough
Do you imagine
you have me locked
in the attic
of a gloomy manor?

Your name is not Rochester
and I will thank you
to remember mine

~~

Get away

You keep me away with your arm
You keep me away with your words
with your eyes
with the language of your body
You keep me way with your attention
rather the lack of it

Fine
I get the message

~~

Lovers

Lovers are not great students
They do not study books of philosophical thought
They simply fall into each other

Not like a Black Spruce
falls into another tree
more like a falling foot
falls into the gumbo of Swan Hills

One step and in you go
Another step, more clay
another
then another and you can barely
lift your boot

Finally, after about a foot of gumbo
a foot with a foot all around
it falls away

But you start again
with the next step

~~

Honey and Milk

As honey blends with milk
to feed a fussy baby
You blend with me
to feed my fussy love

The milk is what I need
but the honey is what I crave
I need, I must have, a partner
but let's face it
what I want is sweet
and sticky
and unlike honey
comes from between your legs

~~

I weep

And when I hear people
speaking of you
I crave, I want,
I feel like I will die

But I don't

~~

I am sorry to end our friendship

The love letters and matchmakers
written in the bar
by those I pursue
point me to you

And I look over
to see you looking at me
Suddenly I see you
for the first time

I am horny
I am selfish
and I introduce you
to a different man

Not your friend
but a lover

~~

Finish you bastard

A flickering storm cloud
appears over the lake
it threatens to make land
where we lie
making love
on a picnic table
outside your family cottage

Covered in mosquitoes
slapping those little demons
as much as we caress each other
I look into your eyes

Finish you bastard

~~

Holy books

Inspiration can come
from holy books
but only holy books
You will not get inspiration
from any old book

First you make it holy
then you expect inspiration
then you find it

~~

Gridlock

It had been a long summer away from school
So these two were lost in their sexual trance
But nobody complained
We were so starved for love
that we were transfixed
Our own trance of observation

And when they finished
to thunderous applause
The traffic moved on

~~

Before and After

When a grain of barley
approaches
a grain of wheat
it is important to remember

One is for bread
One is for beer

Beer is for before you meet your love
Bread is for after
Don't ask
Just "after"

The bread is made from scratch
as an excuse to be in the kitchen
when questions arise

Was that wise?

~~

They take them in

What do lovers do
when they are so besotted
that they stay in their bed
for weeks at a time?

What do lovers do
when they finally realize
they must rejoin the world
but their pants no longer fit?

~~



Take out this trash

She was beautiful
and gentle
and wise
All I could have wanted
for a first lover

She taught me well
and often that first night
I thought I had learned

When we met again
I reached for her roughly
I wanted to show her
what a man I was

She simply looked at me
a gaze that froze me
dropped me to my knees
and said
Take out this trash

~~

Science cannot cure stupid

Wash in wisdom-water
like you wash your hands in soap
and for the same reason

~~

A cargo is not baggage

The captain does not return
to the port
until he has a cargo

You should not return
to a love
unless you have a cargo
Fine wines
Rare cheeses
choice meats

The captain does not need
to buy his boat
with a cargo
he takes a cargo
because he owns the boat

You do not give your love
delicacies to eat
to buy her love
You feed her
because she is your love

You feed her
because she is you
and you are she

There is no buying
and selling here

~~

Base and Common

I need more grace
than I have

This love
This rare earth
from the hidden mines
of a dark country
on a dark continent
Is beyond me
I am common
Base and common

I dare not think
too much
I dare not say
too much

I will pretend
to worth

~~

Some games are not games

The chess master says nothing
he simply watches
as his opponent moves
Only then
does the ideal play reveal itself

This chess master
victorious
sits at a bar
with his beer

A girl approaches
and knows his name
and asks him for advice
and asks him for a game

The chess master
resigns instantly
knowing that he is not ready
to play this game

~~

The fertilizer of sinning

She asked me once
if she could get pregnant
from a blow job

Just as the seed
must fall on fertile ground
the fertilizer of sinning
must find the seed

~~

The way I've been

We are old now
You've forgot the way I've been
Once I was handsome
Once I was strong
and skilled
a fearsome fighter

My bragging
would have shamed Coyote
Every word
was matched by deed

Please don't look at me now
with the pity in your eyes
Remember the way I've been

Remember me now
Remember that now
is 1989
Always 1989

~~



They Complained

They sat at the bar
the bunch of them
strangers along the rail

They complained
these young men
about women, about their jobs
about their team, about their life

But one man was always laughing and smiling.
And each evening
he left the bar with a woman

Eventually these young men noticed
(It took them a while)
and they complained

How does he get the women?
He must be rich
He must be famous
He must pay them
Women are so unfair to us

~~

I went wild and had to be tied up

One evening
when my lover sat quietly
expecting nothing more
I returned to our apartment
burst through the door
with blazing eyes
and electric hair

I went wild and had to be tied up
After that...

Oh you know what happened
after that

~~

Winners and Losers

We know better, but
That better than is still strongly in us
We tell ourselves
We are told
that all men are equal before god
that we are all born
and we all die
and what is between
is what we make it

But that “better than” is still strongly in us
We tell ourselves
that poor man
is less deserving than I
I worked hard
to make my father happy
so he gave me his money

~~

The most important lesson

What does a woman want
he said to me one day

Why are you asking me?

If you want to know
what a woman wants
Ask her

Let that be your first lesson

~~

