

Bait

A stone sinks. The water's surface
ripples, no longer its own
perfect mirror. The stone wakes
everything: the heaviness

that slept there, the heaviness
that now circles, calling far
coastlines, calling blackbirds
nesting on the shore. And we, too,

are called to harvest
this song, this late bird
as it perches on a dry twig
guarding its notes.

And we are called to witness
how tree tops point north,
how a rose bleeds through
leaves, how the migration

of birds hangs in the air
like ink on blotting paper.
Listen: a stone wakes everything.
It is morning but not yet light.

Schiessen Aus Allen Lagen

Some day, the old man in the ankle length coat
said, those who supplied him will also stand trial.
To be called to account: the sole duty of the powerless.
Where were you?
In a locked, windowless room.
Near a body of water.
Seagulls, yes, there were seagulls.
And a dog. A dog chasing
The seagulls.
What did you do?
Mostly, I smoked, avoided the two mirrors.
The authority takes notes.
My pleasure. to feed you. My pleasure.

In/Cont/In/ent

Everything falls to the same depth, sooner or later.
Spring means: standing by while things decide to live
and let live. The temptation is great—to bend
and pick up a struggling fly, to step across the grass,
to yank the chain—to reduce all to April's cruelties.
But around the corner, at the end, you have *carpe diem*
anyhow. Every change in weather could be your last, now.
Poems take on sinister personas. You drive past cemeteries,
in yellow taxis—a certain jealousy arises, surprisingly.
How nice, they're done, you think, one eye on the meter,
minutes pass in twenty dollar increments. You take up
diving, looking for treasures becomes a full time obsession.
You have the same dream over and over: everything
returns, happens again, time has been cancelled, or you
have stepped beyond it, somehow. You leave footprints
to remind yourself the future is behind you. In Rome
you do as the Greek did. Four years you spend polishing
marble into an image of yourself. Most things are gray
you think, but then you decide to quit explaining yourself.
Water breaks at a certain temperature, but then it's not
water anymore, you insist. New clothes for an old emperor.

Taking Care

It could be worse, of course, it always could be
one step from the greased slide into a mix of booze
and boredom—this is how Dick Noire would read
this, played out in two black and white
hours. There'd be dames, shimmering from
car to bar, wearing a procession of furs (so freshly dead
they still purr) even in a New York heat wave
when fire hydrants arc water over half-naked street kids.
We (you and I) look at it with much more pedestrian eyes
(if eyes could walk!) and find much to repair: a touch
of white paint here, a coat of wax on hard wood
floors (I see my echo), a gray hair in a thinning multitude—
a list of small sadnesses. Cutting open a bag
of dried tomatoes becomes a heroic act, selfless
abandon in the face of an angel crashing
into your balcony and staying dead: first you think
at least he didn't hit me and then what.

Not The Same

For R.

It is understood there are certain things we will not talk about
 And certain things we talk about all the time. Don't think
 For one second *what lasts is what you start with** or that one wild dive
 To the bottom will yield the answer. Numbers are appropriated
 For art. For art you hang on to the shipwreck and I sweep the straights
 For mine. This division of labor works fine--besides, we can always
 Buy new China with the gold—until wham! There's a waving of arms,
 You ask about the cheese. *What could have possibly happened?*
And It's \$15 per pound! I chew slower, nodding—*expensive*, I say.

*Charles Wright

Insomnia

The whole night's been like that: on/off, on/off—
 First the neighbors' dog's barking (by two he's found
 A rhythm), then the neighbors themselves come back
 From some wild, exciting party, doors slam, shoes drop.
 My bubble of sleep gets punctured again at 3 a.m.
 With a wrong number, someone looking urgently
 For John. John must be greatly loved, a fine man,
 Certainly, and I console the caller, even though it's beginning
 To rain, loud drops, yes, I will tell John you called.
 And then it's quiet for half an hour until my wristwatch
 Begins to chirp. I don't remember having set it to do that,
 Not deliberately, but perhaps accidentally, in an effort
 To account for daylight savings time. The rain's picking up
 Now, wind's added to the mix, not quite howling yet
 But precisely at a point where I must wonder
 If you can trust the roofers—chainsmoking guys crawling
 Untethered across very steep inclines. I inaccurately remember
 One of them to be John. Where is John at this hour?
 Shouldn't he be home, dreaming of roofs, strong roofs,
 Roofs holding up to category two hurricanes?
 That didn't sound like his wife; that was the voice,
 The urgent, longing voice of a lover, someone still new
 And persistent, someone who will talk John into building
 A house on a beach, someplace where the dog can fetch
 Interesting looking driftwood and leap across white fences.
 John, where are you at this hour? The weather is bad,
 And the roof is questionable, and when the phone rings again,
 I let it. I close my eyes, and John comes home
 To his wife because he never liked the ocean anyway.

Heroic Piece

A poodle had suddenly died on his head that morning.
An otherwise perfectly healthy poodle: well-groomed, tight
Curls. Shiny black curls. I'd seen the dog around
The neighborhood, usually with another, larger dog, a mutt
Looking thing: mostly Lab, some Hound. I hadn't
Figured the poodle for a suicide, not in the usual way, any
Way—he had shown an affinity for bridges, ledges, high
Points from which cats waste one of their lives. Let's call
The dog by his proper mythically Germanic name: Siegfried:
victory peace. The man had a small handicap
As well: being able to see three moves into the future, he saw
Weak opponents crumble before their skin even touched
Land. He was celebrated in various languages, none surviving
The contact with reality. Before he knew how it happened
(Although knowing that it would), he was famous. He spoke
To the assembled masses; they listened. Rain or snow.
That morning it had snowed. Snowflakes cascaded in perfect
Harmony. They bounced off the dead dog's curls. The man,
Sensing the impact three causes ago, drove his car the wrong
Way up a one way street. It made the inevitable even more
So. Mid-century portraits often surprise the unprepared: all that
Hair comes as a shock. They tremble before the image.

That Woman

Drives too close to the curb, children play here.
A squirrel sits at attention. Young sparrows pick
Seeds from my lawn. Later, the jogger, this time with wife.
If I kept paying attention to the cicadas, I'd go insane.
God Bless America, this most Christian of Christian nations.

God Bless America, this most Christian of Christian nations.
Let me tell you about this man.
Or better not.
You wouldn't believe it.
But listen: there must be millions of them.

I've counted them: exactly 47 trees on the right side of this street.
If I wanted to, I mean really really wanted to: this.
Taken into python, sliding, waving in and out, no
Edges here. No. I drive the rotting chicken to the gas station.
God Bless America, this most Christian of Christian nations.

God Bless America, this most Christian of Christian nations.
In dumpsters we trust. This one has a lock: only certain garbage
Admitted—whoever gets there first—and flies. Fat, sluggish
Flies. Something for every man: meat. We eat. We eat.
The neighbor's leaves are burning.

Short, stubby calves. Peasant calves. Calves that dance
The flamenco. Portents of demographic inevitability, say
Hola to the new Mommy. Virgins come and go.

We appreciate the sacrifice.
God Bless America, this most Christian of Christian nations.

God Bless America, this most Christian of Christian nations.
It's dark now. And late into the night, I sit here, counting
Cars, estimating their speed. Too fast, the lot of them.
That woman is home now. She tells her husband about nearly
Ditching it. About starting over. Getting it together.

Early Universe May Have Had Snowflakes

*Before galaxies, stars
or planets, exotic snowflakes
fluttered through*

*the universe in the first
and extremely
dark cosmic winter,
astronomers theorize.*
--CNN, 11.28.02

I.

And then a bunch of happy happy atoms came and gobbled up the snowflakes and that was the end of that particular golden age. Before too long there were accountants, and Orange Glow and free-range chicken (how unheard of!) and someone looks in amazement at a book discovered in the vulgar (yes! Look it up!) cellars of the Capitol building. Autographs in that book would go for tens of 1000s on e-bay. In another country, neighbors think that 12 winters in black nylon is a cause for concern. The child is bound and gagged and roughly pulled from the anorak (a rebirth of sorts) and inserted into fuschia silk. This winter turns out the warmest on record.

II.

Divine! Yes, absolutely, the silky voice croons: *cloves from Zanzibar, rubies from Persia* and now they are behind, dead last. I pass rubies after breakfast and call my broker. He fired several cruise missiles at someone making an illegal left. He's busy collecting prizes for first-time novelists. He hasn't written anything in decades. He may have to get a job soon. Byzantine bureaucracies depend on his peculiar ability to sharpen a pencil, draw a line, and divide by zero. It's a mircle, really, how one man can eat all those burgers-- hair, jacket, belt and all. He's hungry all the time, or so he says, and starts gnawing through the asphalt parking lot. When he hits oil, he comes up drenched and swings out his arms like James Dean.

III.

Honestly, it hasn't snowed here in decades.

North of Route 80

This is the time, time to turn the child's head
in advance of the body being carried down the steps, slowly
don't break the dead man's sleep. There's no specific piety
here, just a momentary stay against beach resort fun
in the sun; it's that easy, and when he's shipped to the mainland

men with bright smiles and high hair take him in,
some smelting cannons in backrooms because the war must be
recreated, here now, and with the greatest accuracy.
Faith, they say, you gotta have faith, faith, man,
that everything will work out, that the long gray line

will come to a stop, that someone will name a street after someone
not butchered, the monkey will sit on another man. But living is cheap
here and there's hardly any crime—we take our murderous rage
and go elsewhere—and it's not that anyone's pleased
with the sagging trailers and the roof-high junk

piled to the porch. It does lend the place
a certain authentic image. If nothing else, the tourist can pick

a well-used washboard and later display it, prominently,
in a case devoted to preserving the oral history of this improbable world.