

Someday She'll Adore You

previous poems 2005-2020



Andreas Gripp

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Beliveau Books

ESSEX COUNTY

Someday She'll Adore You

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My Cat Is Half-Greek, or Zeus Left the Acropolis Open Again

My cat communes
with the mythical, with the infinite
and glorious invisible,
getting an inside track
on the weather
and when the sky's
about to change its tune.

My cat leaps up and tells me
whenever it's about to rain,
by the way she wiggles her whiskers
and tilts her head
beside the bathroom wall.

My cat instinctively knows
when it's going to pour
in Noachian proportions,
when the neighbours
will pound the door
and beseech us to let them in,
their basements flooded
and the water still rising.

Silly cat, tumbling around
with slanted head
and twitching whiskers—
I'm only turning on the shower.
Go back to your bed of sleep—
and *dream*
of chasing moths
in the garden,
the sun more vivid
than an Orion Nova
and your shadow in pursuit
as you run.

Let's not talk of storms today
despite the warnings
you sense from above:

Perhaps those sounds you hear
are the thunderous applause
from the pantheons up from their seats,
as Taurus snags the matador;

the rumbling
that of Hercules in hunger,

starving for the love of Deianeira,
she who brings his eyes
to overflow
with spit and drizzle,

a few simple sobs
to remind us men and beasts
that the deities too
feel that which pains us all,
blotting out the sun
when there's none to share
their sorrow.

Or it may only be Aphrodite
who is beckoning
you for dinner,
unaware you have a home
with *me*,
cavorting with the mortals
since we bow to your meows
and purrs,

our closest, intimate link
to both the eternal
and the divine.

November Rose

It's a Jane or Johnny-come-lately,
the solitary rose in my garden,
a harvest holdover or belated bloom
that's risen when the others have died.

It has none to compete for attention,
isn't lost in a sea of red.

I ponder its predicament,
think of it as lonely,
regretting it didn't blossom sooner
when the buzz of flying insects
were droning their affection.

I'll water it in the evening,
as stars speck the sky in Autumn's cool.
I'll sing it to sleep
as I retire,
pray for grace
should the frost strike swift.

The Language of Sparrows

Our daughter is dead.

We plant seedlings
by her grave in April,
when Spring seduces
with all its promise,
moisten the ground
with a jug of water
and say how, years from now,
a bush will burst and flower,
be home to a family of sparrows,
each knowing the other by their name.

I ask you if birds have names,
like *Alice, Brent, Jessica* and *James*,
if their parents
call these fledglings
when it rains,
say *settle here in branches*
among the leaves that keep you dry—
not in English, mind you,
or any other human tongue
but in the language of sparrows;

each trill, each warbling,
a repartee,
a crafted conversation of the minds.

I then notice
that we never see their wings
amid the showers,
how they disappear in downpours,
seeking shelter
in something we simply cannot see.

When we're old,
when we come to remember
the beloved we have lost,
the *songs* will be shielded
in our shrub—
not a short and stunted one,
but a *grand*, blessed growth,
like the one that spoke to Moses,
aflame, uttering
I AM WHO I AM,

one that towers,
dense with green,

a monument
to the child whom we treasured
and the feathers she adored,
naming the formerly fallowed, *hallowed*,
sacred, *remove your shoes*,
Spirits and Sparrows dwell
and sibilate secrets
we're unworthy to glean.

Nine

There's a beauty to our numbers
that I note with admiration:

the shape of cipher 6
and its curving, crescent close;

8, with its weaving, double loop
that skaters strive and scratch to mimic;

3, and its ability to complete,
to divide as trilogy, to *manifest*
as Trinity;

1 which finds the wholeness
in *itself*, never wishing to *flee*
its core or essence,
for the sake of multiplying:

*One times one times one
will always equal one.*

2 is the sum of love,
the most romantic of all our digits,

and in terms of teaching math,
it gives a break to all our children:

*Two times two is four,
and the answer's the same
when adding.*

7 is Biblical,
the week for God's creation,
the length of telling tales
of *Harry Potter*, of *Narnia*,
the complement of 12.

5, the Books of Moses,
the fingers and thumb
on our hands,
giving us ability,
the gift of grasp
and molding, making shapes
from slabs of clay.

4, a pair of couplets,
the voice of poems
and song, the rhythm
and march of the saints.

Yet when I come to number 9,
my spirit starts to sink:

it has such *lofty* expectations,
aspiring to reach new levels,
only to fall so painfully short—

missing the mark of 10
by just a meagre, single stroke;
always being known for
“almost there,”
remembered for the glory
it could have gained
but never got,
its cousins—19, 49, 69—
bearing the brunt
of all its failings.

99 is but a stepping stone,
a grating *lapse* towards 100,
a number we only *watch* while it rolls,
a humble *countdown* to celebration,
unable to give us merit on its own.

I spent all of '99
yearning for 2000,
anticipating a new millennium,

the fears, excitement
we thought awaited us
in a dawning, changing world;
never enjoying the year for what it was,
practicing the writing
of an exotic date—

January 1, 2000

and eager to see
the masthead of that early morning paper,

ridding myself of the nines
that only accentuate defeat,

thinking I'll *pass* some kind of threshold,
a singing, flowered archway
bidding *come, enter,*
leave what troubles you
behind.

The girl I would have married

The girl I would have married
had we met
is on the other side of the street,
a walking blur
I only notice for a second.

And her hair is a shade of blonde
or maybe brown I can't recall,
nor anything about the jacket
she'd been wearing nor the boots,
only that for some silly unknown reason
we would have married had we met,

maybe at the bookshop
where I would have bumped her arm,
said sorry for my blatant
clumsiness, which caused her to drop her
classics and a dictionary too;

or it may have been at a party,
hosted by a mutual
friend,
finding that we shared
a favourite song,

or that we're social
democrats,
or that neither of us
can stand
the sight of blood;

then again,
it may have been something
random—

her seated in the row
just ahead,
in a theatre
with a paltry slope,
her failure to remove the hat
that blocked my view,
my gathering the brazen courage
to tap her shoulder,
whisper into her ear
that I'm unable to see a thing.

The Decoy

My hunter friend,
the one I haven't converted
to my "animals have feelings too"
frame of mind, uses
a wooden decoy
in an attempt
to lure some ducks,

the painted, smiling duplicate
successful
in its duty:
three already *shot*,
bagged and ready to carve.

If objects had living souls,
I wonder how it would feel:

a *traitor*,

causing the *death*
of what it mimics,

floating on water
like a wannabe bird,

even feign it could fly
if it *wanted* to,
have its pick
of choicest mates;

like *Pinocchio*,
eager to be turned
into the real
thing,

hoping its rifle-bearing
Gepetto

will make it
flesh and bone, allow
a brook of blood to pump
throughout
its winding veins,

wish it might *even*
bring salvation
to this hunter's
calloused heart,

spot a chance
at its own redemption,

have its maker
see its feathered shape
as something
more than prey.

Before You Die

Before You Die, it seems,
has been springing up in bookstores
all over the place.

“1001 Movies to See Before You Die” —
double-faced in Performing Arts.

“1001 *Places* to See Before You Die” —
yields a tepid trudge to Travel.

And every genre,
it seems, has its own
Arabian Nights-inspired thing to do
before the hooded hangman calls:

“1001 Foods to Eat *Before You Die*”

“1001 Albums to Hear *Before You Die*”

“1001 Books to Read

Before You Fucking Die”

It’s worth noting
that with all this talk of death,
the titles continue to fly
and booksellers can scarcely keep up.

Maybe that's due to the fact
that you're never, ever told
exactly *how* you'll die,
for it's unlikely you'll see:

"1001 Dances to Learn
Before You Develop Cancer"

or

"1001 Liqueurs to Drink
Before You Get Hit by a Train"

OR

"1001 Puzzles to Solve
Before You Get Shot in the Head"

Perhaps we prefer that Death
keep its *own* swell of incense,
its *own* black curtain,
its *own* cryptic crossword,
one not deciphered
by reader or writer alike.

But why that extra *one* after *one thousand*?
That little bonus, as a P.S. or encore —

to make amends
for the penultimate trip or film?

Where you're much too anxious
about your impending expiry
to *enjoy* that stroll in Oahu ...
too *perturbed* about your nearing demise
to *laugh* through *A Day at the Races* ...

and only Banks' allusion
to *The Sweet Hereafter*
will make that final book
even tolerable.

Paris, Ontario

This one is not so Grand
as its river, no Seine
cutting at its heart
or couples arm-in-arm
amid *je t'aime*.

We can see
the eroding townscape
from this crowded
rooftop bistro,
and there's a soufflé
on the menu you'd like to try,
while I scan the varied wine list
for *Château Valfontaine*.

We made a *hard*, last-minute
turn off the 403, figured
Brantford would be dull,
there's only so much
Bell and Gretzky
we can digest, yet again.

And substituting for a tower?
There's the truss bridge
serving the railway
that traverses the muddy banks,
its lattice now a respite
for a dozen, migrating flocks,

and, upon which, the locals say,
some have confessed their love;
plunged down in *ultime liberté*.

Early Morning Rain

In the yard,
you felt sorry for the slug
that crept so slowly up the stem
of one of your greens.

*Poor thing,
it doesn't even have a shell
to call a home.*

Afterward,
I compared it with its cousin,
the snail, several of which will
gather in the garden
after an early morning rain—

sturdy,
in the swirly cave it carries
on its back,
a place to retract its head in
when it pours,

feigning it isn't there, perhaps,
should a desperate, homeless mollusk
come to call,

knowing there *isn't*
any room
for two,

and yet burdened
by that extra weight,
its inability to travel
wherever it may wish,
at its turtle-like, sloth-like pace,
like a car that's always pulling
a camper/trailer,

never having the mettle
to face the world
when things get tough,
even ducking in its hovel
when there isn't a cloud
in the sky.

Tanka

My daughter races,
attempting to catch the birds.
If she had the wings
of a pigeon, she'd leave me,
dropping occasional notes.

A Place Beneath the Water

We drive to the beach
the day you're released
from the hospital,
the pills afloat in your glass
currently a memory
taken by tides;

and I suggest a brief, brisk swim
in cleansing waves,
to wash the stress
from your battered mind,
and you strip-down rather hastily,
splash about as a child might,
as you did when you were a girl,

and I lose sight of you
in a panic of thirty seconds,
as you submerge your head
and hold your breath
for a protracted half-a-minute,
attempting to touch
that part of yourself
where the air cannot reach
nor light tell the world
what you've hid.

The Carnation

The carnation I left you
was given with much pondering—
not as romantic, they'll say,
as its more beloved, historic rival,
the rose;

not as many songs and poems
describing its allure;

without plethora
of oil paintings
to capture its pale pink *petals*
on canvas—

but please remember, darling,
they'll endure while the others drop,
even if but a day,
those extra, precious hours to say
I love you, I'm sorry, come back to me.

Psalm for Aquarius

During the days &
nights of my naiveté,
when hope blasted blue
in carbon cloud,
the constellations
stepped out of line,
formed new patterns,
gave my dreams the names
that they'd discarded:

*Pisces, someday she'll adore you,
hold your hanging head
beside her breast,
pluck out poisoned hooks
inside your heart.*

And of love, it lost
its battle with beauty,
lives on to cut to the quick,
chain the *soul*
in heavy iron;
to thrash hopelessly,
like fish in a sweeping net,
then hauled to shore
while salvation ripples beneath,
so cold in all its glory.

Metronome

You never had a clock
within your home,
just a single metronome,
keeping tempo
more important
than the time;

its clicks a call to dance,
without the chains
of *start* and *stop*,
that never
issue edicts
to awaken,
no pre-set ring
to jolt
from peaceful dreams,

no big and little hands
that point to numbers
which command,
saying *when* it's time to eat
and when to leave,
when to walk the dog
or check for mail,

just a steady, rhythmic beat
of unfettered sound,
the passing of the hours
all unnamed.

Another Hallmark Moment

On Valentine's,
I didn't think of hearts
but of shamrocks,
of St. Patrick,
the lush and kelly greens
of the Irish,
the luck that clovers bring.

So leave your blood-filled, beating
organ at the door
and your chocolates, flowers, with it.
Let me pine for almost Spring
and a romp under leaves,
through grasses.
You can have your snowy day
and diamonds, pearls, to go.
You can have your lover's kiss
and night of heated sex —

no, I'm lying.
Forgive me, Triune God,
and Mr. & Mrs. O'Shea.

Your time has not yet come,

for I need to *hold* and *be* held,
love and *be* loved and *make* love,
and dream of Dublin another day,
another month, when the vestige of red
has melted with the white.

Haight-Ashbury

The temperature in our apartment
is always moderate,
20 Celsius, or as our friends in
San Francisco call it, 68,

never too frigid,
too torrid, as pleasant as its people
who birthed a twentieth-
century love of gay and poetry,
where Ginsberg howled
and Ferlinghetti kept the city
lights plugged in,

grateful for their dead, their '67
a narrow notch
before some elusive ideal,
one that ever-hovers
within our reach.

You say *never touch*
the thermostat
and I mildly acquiesce.
What we call *warmth*
is but the middle,

the centre of some utopia —
absent of fire and ice.

Yes, the ground there occasionally
quakes, much like our walls and
ceiling do, whenever the tenants
upstairs
argue about the bills

or break into a dance
we've been curious to behold.

The Ruse of Mild Air

In this warmer than normal winter,
the trees are budding early,
in February's
rain instead of snow.

I feel I ought to go outside
and *bring* some soothing tea,
play a tranquil song
for harp and strings,

be the sandman for a spell,
send the rousing leaves-to-be
back into their shells,

lest the winds return from the north,
puddles freeze over,
and greening branches waken
to a bird-less lie of ice.

**Fabric Carnations,
or My Dog was a Vegetarian**

The flowers in my house are a fraud,
marigolds that never wither,
forsythia forever fake
with vibrant yellow
that doesn't fade,
daisies dotted about
as if I had an eternal supply,
the faint of sight
and squinters
never guessing
the awful truth,
nor those who call, congested,
unaware
they're counterfeit.

For years, *before* I built
what's bogus,
this simulated sham of silk,
every bluebell, phlox and lily
were rich in wondrous
redolence,
concealing the smell of "Spot" —

my shaggy, shedding dog
with neither blotch
nor original name,

who'd eat the roses
when in season,
plucking petals
when backs were turned.

The dog was mine for a decade,
had a couch he claimed as his own,
an old stuffed cat
with which he played
but never thought
to bite or chew.

When he died,
I was told to go back
to blooms, genuine,
the ones that I'd discarded
after "Spot" had overate,

rid the rooms of imitations,
inhale the fragrant scent
of life.

It's *all* a fabrication
I replied: aromas
from the freshly
cut, telling the world
they're bleeding,
their beauty-in-a-vase,
embalming;

that flowers too
love living
as much as a man
or departed pet,

that my *forgeries*
are better,
no perfumes
to pronounce what's dead.

Cassiopeia

On our anniversary,
we spend the evening
gazing at the stars

yet not as lovers do,
making wishes
on ones that fall,
but imagining instead
there's an alien couple out
there on some distant
speck-of-a-world,

not quite as human as us,
with a few of their organs
flipped around,
but still the kind of people
we'd relate to,

not as deeply "in love"
as before,
yet *enough*
to never leave
the other,

and we wonder
if they think
they'd each be happier
in another's arms,

if they too
have awkward silence
in the aftermath
of a quarrel,

if they believe that they can last,
at least, until the offspring
are all grown up,

if they envision
what it would feel like
to have their spouse,
unexpectedly,
pass away,

and if they'd ever survive
a frigid night
looking *up* at the sky
without them.

This is the Reason

I've never written you
a love letter, as I did for the girls
I crushed on in school,
vowing a childish *forever love*.

I've been told that *both*
can never be truly promised,
there are too many variables
upon which they can falter—

an unexpected loss
of mind and memory,
the foreboding phantom
of infidelity,

that our lifespans
are simply too long,
the decay of what we were
befalling while we breathe,

that the warbler outside my
window, his years but a
jaunt through junior high,
says it better,

his skyward pledge
to his treetop mate
daily putting me to shame.

Francesca, Weeding the Garden

My daughter, all of six
and bursting with a Big Bang
sort of energy,
zigzags across our fenced
backyard,
picking dandelions she holds
in her fist,
for an "I love you daddy" bouquet,
like the lofty ones
I snagged for her mother
before the tumors took her away,
their sunny heads of yellow
jutting freely from curling fingers,
my steady, sturdy voice
now a downcast, trembling shell,
saying *they last a little longer*
than flowers,
we'll wish you better
when they turn to spores.

Winter Solstice

Christmas
with an ex-lover
is spent whenever
there's time to spare,

so *today* I invited you over,
with the promise of friendship
and fire,
hoping for kindling wood,

but the flames are merely embers,
like the Sun in its tepid glow,
forsaking us much too soon
on this shortest day of the year.

So I'll make you Darjeeling,
my darling,
suddenly *clasp* your hand
into mine —
for gauging a glove size, I'll say,
feigning I've shopping to do,
the warmth of tea and touch
creating such a beautiful lie.

La Belle

La pomme de terre,
the potato, the earth apple,
its womb a warmth of ground,
unable to tempt the eyes
of unfallen man.

The apple, *la pomme,*
kept cool among the branches
by an evening's autumn sky,
painted so very often,
the centre of our lore.

In French they're more poetic,
sounding
that much better
on the ear,
no bitter taste
that settles
on the tongue,
no judgement on their worth.

Le poème,
the poem,

that hovers in the vacant space
between,
the fruit of ground and tree,

the one I wish I'd render
en Français,
to mask the many flaws
that come when beauty
can't be seen.

Miracle

Tonight I will ask you to marry me.
You will surely say I am mad,
in the British sense of the word,
then laugh off my promise to love
and commit as I-must-have-stopped-
over-at-the-pub-and-had-a-few-too-
many before our coffee date on this
insignificant, middle-of-the-week
kind of evening.

But this day is anything but ordinary:
Look at my hands, they are stained
from painting my kitchen
the colour that is your favourite

though my eyesight has been failing,
and I'm convinced that both our God
and the birds have given us their blessing
as shoots sprouted in my garden overnight—
from seeds dropped from above

and the weather person on TV
said there'd be no rain
for the next seven Saturdays to come.

Marooning the Muse

We sat at the beach *together*
but I didn't write a thing.
I looked to the horizon
and its meeting of sky and sea
and the cerulean they both shared
at the point where we see
the world is round indeed.

You wrote of sandpipers
on the strand and the seagulls
encircling the trawler
traversing the harbour,

and I left you the metaphors
to find while I was lost in a reverie
that had Magellan meeting
Eratosthenes
on the edge of a precipice,
saying yes, it's all an illusion,
this vortex of birds and their fish,
this looping of ships and our poems.

Flower Children

It's hard to believe that crotchety old man
and his wife hobbling into the store
where I work were once hippies.
Their faces creased like a shirt
I forgot to put in the dryer
and had no time to iron,
the man's pants pulled up to his chest
and his wife muttering something
about the pie she has to bake
for the Sunday church social.

I try to picture them at Woodstock,
a farmer's soggy field overrun
by painted young ladies
showing their bouncing, naked breasts
at a time of dawning liberation,
the man then bearded
without the faintest hint of grey
and both of them smoking pot
and waiting for Jefferson Airplane
to hit the stage.

I can't imagine them
listening to acid rock

or Led Zeppelin's vinyl debut
with its flaming Hindenburg crashing
to a hellish death in New Jersey.

I can't see the man swapping his
Arnold Palmer polo shirt
for a psychedelic tie-dye
and the woman with her midriff
bare and smooth, a peace sign
above her navel.

They ask if they can pay by cheque,
say they've never sent an email
when I suggest our online specials,
that they've yet to see our Insta page
and that TikTok is something
they never would have imagined
when they rolled in the mud over
half a century ago, dancing
as if they would never age a day.

Coda III

That page at the end of my notebook,
the one that is blank,
is the best poem of mine you've ever read,
you say to me as I choose which to keep,
which to toss and pretend I never wrote.

*I went through it
when you were away, you reveal
in a tone bereft of innocence,
like a boy boasting to his friends
that he managed to swig some vodka
while his parents were in the basement,
perhaps sorting through laundry
or checking on the furnace
or doing something that required him
to be cunning and to seize the moment
like a vulture that dives to the ground
while the corpse is still warm enough
to pass for something living.*

*Your metaphors are silly, you say bluntly,
your analogies make me laugh —
those of scavenger, Russian drink,
mischievous youth.*

*Take the last sheet in your book,
the one without any writing:
it made more sense than anything else
you've rambled on about.*

I reply that you are right,
that pallid vacancy and lines of blue
have more to say than verbosity,
that I should just write "white"
instead of "pallid,"
that I misread my spiny thesaurus,
that what is simplest
is most complex
and lives in a realm
no words can elucidate
or yield direction to;

that it's a sign of literary innovation
to have an entire volume
of nothing but lined paper,
that the next time I buy a notebook
I'm best off to merely scrawl my name
upon its cover
and wait for the accolades to pour in
from those who know the work of a
genius when they see it.

**My lover hates Roy Clark
but hasn't heard of Sufjan Stevens**

My composition of song,
for you, has been rejected,
not because the sentiments
were bad, or the structure
of verse and chorus,
but that I played the chords
on a banjo
when I should have used a guitar.

You say the *banjo*
is a trite,
hee-hawed thing,
for barefoot, hick-town loafers
with dangling straw
between their teeth.

I'd like to change the words,
dedicate it to another,
one who doesn't ridicule
the music of the mountain,

one who'd know its origins,
before Burl Ives' arrival.

Bania,
in the Mandingo tongue,
from the minstrels
of the African west,
whose moonlight lovers
never shunned
their poignant serenades.

América

The isthmus
was the adhesive
always holding us
together,

like fraternal twins
conjoined, locked
by a crooked rib.

And *though* it looked
quite thin,
brittle and ready to
snap,

the mightiest ships
of imperial fleets
could only
turn away,

to round Cape
Horn at a crawl,
to meet Pacific waves.

El Canal de Panamá,
christened in
'14,

in the summer
of the Serbian
shot.

Yes,
this brings us Yen
and Yuan.

Yes,
this hews in half
the journey.

But brother,
earthen-brother,

your breath
is not as close,
and strangers
sail the space
between our scars.

Strings of the Great Depression

In your chair,
covered in a shawl to warm you,
hot milk by your side,

arthritic, gnarled fingers
pulling limply
on elastics
(ones that held
your meds together),

you speak of your farmer-father,
coming home
without the radio
he'd promised,

and of rubber bands,
how he stretched them
over a can,
plucking them
with his thumb.

For music, he said,
while you eat.

The West Coast of Somewhere

As a boy, I saw only sand and sea
and stones I pitched with a splash
beneath the shifting animal clouds
that I envisioned.

As a single young man
on a day of sun and cirrus,
I knew nothing of rocks
and waves colliding with the shore,
only the flash of skin and curves
exposed for browning.

Now middle-aged in wedlock,
ambling along the beach
beside my wife,
I see the patterns on pebbles
and the gulls that dip for trout
while the crew of college girls,
jumping for *frisbees* in the surf,
are supposedly a blur below
this cumulus of savannah cats
overseeing their great,
ephemeral kingdom.

Omnipotence

*I, more stolidly, tend to suspect that God
is a novelist—a garrulous and deeply
unwholesome one too.*

—Martin Amis

As a novelist, you say,
you have the powers
of a god,
the death and life
of characters
in your potent, scribing hand—

deciding who is loved
and who survives,

who is buried
or burnt to ash,

strewn into the Ganges,
perhaps,

or left to *rest*
in a marble urn

over a family's
fireplace.

Piddling details
aside,
let's promote the *poet*
to the omnipotent Lord of yore,
a God unmatched by others,

mould the *world*
to what it really should have been
(from the start of *Genesis*),

when the Spirit had hovered
over the waters' face;

make a *Pangaea*
that never splits,
do away with all division,

trim the *claws* of carnivores,
let the lions chew the grapes
of flowered fields,

and if that's deemed
exorbitant,
at least allow your hero
the saving *kiss* of his beloved —

do not let him
drink himself
to a shrivelled, pitied state,

nor allow his *neck*
to fit into
your frayed and knotted noose;

show the mercy you believe
you never got,

show the dead
and deities
how it could have been much
better —

if only *you*
had been in charge,

and do not await a Messiah's
return
to get the work that's needed
done—

do it now
and do it quickly,

in the loving,
triune lines
of your haiku.

Fidelity

*This is the fluid in which we
meet each other, this haloey radiance
that seems to breathe and lets our
shadows wither
only to blow them huge again,
violent giants on the wall.
One match scratch makes you real.*

—Sylvia Plath, *By Candlelight*

Our shadows, faithful followers,
super glued to our
forms—
ever-loyal,

whether we're good
or whether we're not,

and there—
if the right
kind of light
will allow—

in our lovemaking,
our murders,
our scaling of mountains
and stairs,

and here, leaping
off a trestle,
when all's become too much—

see one dive
towards the river,
disappearing
in water's crest,
engulfed below the
ripples,
in darkness
where flame is lost.

Initials

After you left,
I carved our initials
into the stump of a fallen tree.
I tallied its age before death,
thought of its stunted remnant
as a trunk, soaring
to swirling heights, with arms
that housed the bliss of many birds,
our love now wrapped in the rings
that spoke of years, to a time
when heart and bark and wing
were very much alive.

Past Life Aggression

Perhaps I was a ruthless *Khan*,
vengeful, without mercy,
who cut down peasants
by the thousands,
taking an unsheathed sword
to young mothers and their babes;

or I may have dwelt in dungeons,
coaxing heretics to confess,
beat remorse from wicked witches
and any soul who wouldn't kneel
at the foot of the pious,
Papal throne.

Was I simply just a gadabout
who cheated on his wife? A *rogue*
who left his children
for the warmth
of a harlot's touch?

Did I ridicule the Crown,
crudely scrawl on Cambridge walls?

Did my horse
trample *Queen Anne's Lace*?
Had I ignored its defecation?

My dearest, would-be betrothed,
is the reason for your “no”
the fact I deserted my troops in the war?
Had I fled from German flags,
escaped an ambush out of fear?

Or was I incredibly initiative instead —
start a firestorm in Dresden,
drop a Nagasaki nuke?

Did I watch as the Chinese starved,
give my approval to the Red Star State?

If so, please forgive me my transgressions:
taking the Name
of the Lord in vain;
my callous *killings* of the innocent;
my drunken, playboy ways.

Impart to me your pardon,
your blessed, fragrant kiss —
not the one that Judas gave
but the caress of *Juliet*,

the embrace of *Bouguereau*, eternal;
the one that ends the cycle,
trips karma at the finish line.

Curbside Café

I thought she watched me
as I wrote,
a girl with beret cliché,
Irish cream and lemon Danish,
who'd smoke a cigarette
if legal
but it's not;

and she's reading *Schulz*
and Robert Frost
and the many roads to heaven,
and I thought to ask her what she thought
of love and death and living
amid our own self-
sought carte blanche.

She wasn't there, really,
nor am I—we weave and thread
and move about
as atoms from the sun,
that settled here so predisposed
to birth and fear and loathing.

I see her sometimes, singing praise
when the moon
is halved,

and if the evening tide
has soothed,

when the waitress looks for dollar tips
and the closing chimes
ring sweet;

and I have no time to end the verse
with lights that cue to leave,
the sax that fades to hush,
and the cop who walks the beat
looking through
the tinted glass,

ideally dreaming
of a night
without a single
shout or crime.

The City

The city you say we hate
has grown on me now
and I feel no enmity with it.

And I walked today,
through the city you say we hate.
I stepped in snow
and slipped on ice
but I didn't really fall—
a railing there to rescue.

It was cold today, in the city
you say we hate,
and the homeless sat
on sewer grates
and felt the heat blow up.
I thought it ranked of methane
but there wasn't an explosion.

I was accosted,
in the city you say we hate,
by a man panning for coins.
No change, no change, no English,
no change, I shook my head at first,

then turned and flung
two quarters at him —
from the both of us,
though I knew you'd disavow.

A fire truck roared past me
in the city you say we hate.
Its sirens screamed like murder
but then that would have been the police
and there were none at all in sight.

A house must be aflame,
in the city you say we hate.
I hope right now it's vacant,
with a mother and child away,
shopping, or on a visit to a friend.

If it's you who've befriended,
tell them not to worry,
that there's a hydrant
on the corner where they live;

that all will be rebuilt
by kindly neighbours and their kin;

that they needn't feel embittered,
blame the gridlock, shunting trains.

Tell them, while you too
have time to love,
a little.

The Fence

On the other side of the fence,
the neighbour's grass is lush
and weedless. I see him kissing
his stunning wife, tenderly,
without hesitation.

On the other side of the fence,
I see the public school
where hordes of children tumble,
laugh, dust themselves off.
Recess comes twice daily,
and at lunch the shouts
are louder.

On the other side of the fence,
I see the skyline miles away;
towers holding clouds
but for a moment,
the ones that sail through sunlit blue
and I think I see a window-washer
dangling
like some *Spider-Man* —

with binoculars I make him out,
and though I'd never do it myself,

I imagine the pulse of life
that throbs around him,
five-hundred feet mid-air,
his beaming face
bouncing back at him
from the translucent,
38th floor.

The fence in my back-
yard is far too high.
I'd like to see much more,
see what lies *beyond*
the banks & monoliths,

the foothills in the distance
which rise and drop,
like breasts that lift and fall
in heated breath,
like those of my neighbour's wife,
who sunbathes
while he's away,

a *hey there* look that's thwarted
by the noble tenth commandment
and six feet of cottonwood.

And Then There Was Light

With your hands wrist-deep
in the black of
loamy soil, you tell me your
infant daughter died
at break of dawn,
on a day our star
had benignly risen,
without a
hindering cloud;

and you mused that early morning,
as you sadly went and found her,
stiff as a *Hasbro* doll,
her unblinking eyes
locked upon the ceiling,
that to call it “sun” is a misnomer,
for it’s connected to *Mother* Earth,
and either “u” or “o”, it says the same
masculine thing.

It’s the *female*
that reproduces,
you said, gives seeds
a place to call home.

“Daughter,” you decreed,
call it Daughter.

It will surely love us more
and our longing will be greater
on the days it isn’t there.

Anthem

The path to peace it's said
is found in sacred books of old,
on parchment, scrolls and ink;
in a choir's hallelujah,
ringing bells and fervent prayer.

Let's scribe our wishful reveries,
our old prophetic songs,
say the bomb will never fall;
that police will join the protest
and the judge will grant a pardon
to the Harlem kid in chains.

For it's not that hard to add a verse
and paint a pretty picture:

Governments disband,
there's no more need to demonstrate;
and prison gates swing open,
those who leave bear violets,
while violence drops as dust.

Faith begets trust,
trust begets love,

and the one who was your enemy
brings you candy in the night,
saying all is calm in Jerusalem,
and flags are neither waved
nor burned.

Hearing Ted Hughes at Plunkenworth's

Our friend dropped in again,
the one who always says
he's met some rather famous poets,
like Billy Collins, Rita Dove,
Molly Peacock,
boasting he's taken them out for beer,
that in their drunken state
they've read his work
and said it was the best damn thing
they've ever seen on paper.

It's been difficult to prove him a liar,
authors and their tours
have coincided with his claims

but this time he was sloppy,
saying he'd heard Ted Hughes—
last night, at Plunkenworth's,
the run-down, downtown gallery

that *exhibits*
molds of vomit
by its barely-on-its-hinges
front door.

He's been dead
a quarter-century, we said,

snickering, knowing we finally
found the lie,
that he'd admit it's been a charade,
the name-dropping, the tales
of autographed books
(that we've *never* been allowed
to see).

But he didn't blink an eye,
unfazed, undaunted in his delivery,
saying that Ted had read
a *dozen*, brand-new poems—

one about Plath—

how he would have *rushed*
to save her,
turn off the oven,
inhale the toxic fumes
if he only could,
calling it "Sylvie's Stove,"

and we corrected him,
saying it was *Sylvia*, not *Sylvie*

but he said *no*,
that was an affectionate name
he called her, very *French*
as she really loved the
language,

that he'd come back from the grave
just to read it,

even if but a single
person
listened, believed
that he was sorry,

that the dead
could be so sorry.

Juanita

The email labelled as “junk”
by my vigilant catcher of spam
says “dearest one”
in the subject.

Though I wish it weren’t so,
I confess I don’t recognize
the sender,
Juanita McTavish,
of Spanish-Scottish descent
no doubt.

She’s indicative
of the many others
who send me junk,
all with unusual names
that speak of cultural
intercourse:

Vladimir Cobb, Horatio Singh,
Mumanabe Parker,

all just saying “hello,”

or the pleas from the African rich,
from the widow of Todd Buwakadu,

who left so many millions
she doesn't know where the hell
to put it.

I then decide to add
all of the missed opportunities
I've had,

all of those British lottos I've won
but never bothered to send in my claim,
always *hastily* deleting the message
because it's labelled *virus B.S.*;

why I've suffered through all my ailments
when the cure is found in the link,
the one so kindly included
since my sex life
is *Mannfred's* concern.

But getting back to the matters
of heart,
my Juanita's endearing message
that's been clicked and purged, unread;

I'll wait if another is sent,
if I'm still her dearest one,
and perhaps I'll take a chance,
those one-in-a-million odds,
ignore my email's discerning filter
and see if tonight true love
be mine.

The Fall

I sigh at the sight
of the moth I find so lifeless
in the garden,
rarely noting
its beating white
in the days or weeks gone past,

and my friend who'd passed away,
from a toxic mix, concocted,
said the reason why
he longed for death
was to grasp the love
he'd missed while still a-breath,

that after you have died,
others speak well of you,
spill eulogies of praise,
assure that you'll be missed,
say your poems were *beautiful*,
your paintings, *works of art*,

that all the things you'd ever done
are now *immortalized*,
once ignored, *beatified*,

that he did not want to take his life
because he loathed the sun,
its warmth upon his face
or the birdsong of the dawn,

but in the *hope*
he'd somehow feel
the intangible touch
of love,

its too-little, too-late
arrival,
its better-than-never embrace,

its invisible kiss that's heard
when someone weeps
at the foot of your grave.

Priscilla, Asleep

I've noticed,
whenever you roll to your side,
you take much of the blanket
with you,

my legs and feet bereft,

left bare
but ready to run,

into some sentry owl's
night,

through ethereal
sheers of fog,

should I renew
my dream of old,

our missing
child's
help,

with neighbours
roused
by ruckus,

the slaps
of a shoeless
dash.

Minus 21 and falling

It is colder than before,
the other night
I complained of chills,
and frost embossed
on windowpanes;

that which they call *cancer*
eating away my insulation.

Bring me a second sweater,
my cherub. Wrap me
in scarves and a toque.

Clothe my feet in woolly socks
and give me tea to drink,
hot enough to warm my hands
when they hold the steaming cup,
but not so hot they burn
or bring me back to vibrant nights
we spent on other, merrier things;

when my hands had cupped
your breasts & ass
and I knew nothing of the cold.

**The excuse I use
to avoid cleaning under the stairs**

How lonely it must be
to be a spider in the basement,
one that's sitting on its web,
in a corner without light,
awaiting that *rare* arrival,
the hoped-for, off-chance encounter,
when an insect-thing
will venture where it knows
it really shouldn't,
get trapped in sticky white,
kick its hair-like limbs
in a panic,
sensing deep-down in resistance
that the end has inevitably come,
there's no escaping this alive,
feeling the webbing
beginning to bounce
as its maker at last approaches.

I sometimes have to wonder
if the spider ever pities,
considers *mercy* for a moment,

seeing its tiring victim struggle
in the seconds before the kill;
being tempted,
not by pangs of some *compassion*,
but by those of *isolation*,
supplanting that of hunger
and its drive to feed and hunt;

taking an instant to say *hello*,
in its sly, spidery way;
relish its company's
heated breath, meeting
of insect/arachnid eyes,
wish it could *share* a tale or two,
get to know this flying creature,
fellow cellar-dweller, *better*,

hope there's no karma-bearing grudge
or vengeance *doled* by divinity,

that its prey will understand,
know the slaying isn't personal,
that the pinch and bite are quick,

that the blood that's drained
is a *gift*,
gratefully received,

that *calming* sleep comes first,
so deep in life's last ebbing
there'll be the precious chance
to dream.

Watchful

—*for a sculpture by Walter Allward*

In the hours after dusk,
we deduce he plots the *path*
of distant suns, waits
unabatedly
for Antares to explode,
its cradled remnants
to feed five fetal stars,

or stares so sanguinely
at the halved or crescent moon,
hoping to behold

a *crater's* new creation,
amid the burst
of meteor impact.

At the pinnacle of noon,
we can't surmise the subject
of his gaze, always skyward,
note the sun
should bring his eyes
to squint and narrow,

fancy
if he's witnessed
every shape and sort of creature
in the clouds,

wonder if he's worried
about *the big one*,
the asteroid that is
due to smite the Earth, if the flesh
of what he emulates
will follow the *fate* of
dinosaurs,

praying
that some *God*
will part his lips
if he should spot it,

beseech us both to kiss
then run for cover.

The Ellipsis . . .

teases amid the white,
leaving us to guess
what's been omitted; cherry-
picking its many biases,
filtering out the
disparaging in every
book and movie review.

See it there, at the start
of a neutered sentence,
as though the initially
penned words
were never scribed,
not critical enough to share,
like lifting a stylus
above the grooves,

lowering it precisely
into the record, *after*
the opening verse
is poorly sung,
singling out the chorus
as if that alone
were more than enough.

I was recently told
I was doing it wrong,
failing to leave a space
between this trinity
of dots. *It takes up*
too much room, I replied,
looks peculiar on the page.

Do not leave me
wondering what these lines
conceivably said, in the heat
of an angry moment,
within the quote
of a love confessed,

this trail that leaves
the ending to conjecture,
a search for the
discarded
we were never supposed to know.

Raking Leaves with Anneliese

She holds open
ruptured bags
as I heave
loads of coloured
leaves
into their crinkled,
paper mouths
like a backhoe
dropping dirt
into a pit.

*The Stasi
took my father
into the night,
she firmly sighs.
I sent letters
to the prison
but I never heard
a word.*

I note golden,
scarlet foliage,
fallen
like unpicked apples.

Some have twisting
worms, limp
as flimsy laces
on my loosely-knotted
shoes.

She says *mother*
stayed in sackcloth,
with a veil
that wouldn't lift
in public places.

November's
biting wind
scatters half
our work away,
our faces
turning numb
in waning light.

Lionel

lays down tracks
like he did when
he was a kid,
predating *The Neighborhood*
of Make Believe—
he was already in college
by then, getting A's and getting
laid, evading the Draft

till the excuses had run out,
a frontline Private—
ducking the marksmen
from the Viet Cong,

returning with his leg
blown off and his carob skin

scarred by the spray
of shrapnel.

Today, both the medal
he was given and the pin
of *Old Glory*

will ride in the caboose,
behind the Pennsylvanian
coal that's out-of-date—

as all of it is, really: the freight
cars disappearing
into a tunnel, like a rodent
that darts in drywall—

a baseboard cavern
never patched,

puffing smoke
as if a gambler
who is sucking on cigars,
smuggled from Havana

when the Cold War
brought us all to our
boney knees,
shuddering under our desks
though we had told ourselves
fervently
that this is just pretend.

Osmosis

The way our cat
sleeps on our books
has made us appraise
osmosis, her head *reposed*
on the cover's
title, her paw outstretched
over the author's name

denoting some kind of kinship,
as though the writer
forged a portal
for lazy felines
to stealthily enter.

I've heard that whiskers
help a cat
to navigate in
the dark,
are conductors that channel
info to its *brain*, in a manner
much quicker

than the antiquated roundabouts
of a podium-chained professor.

Let's wake our dearest pet
upon sufficient assimilation,
see if she spouts some Shakespeare
as none other than Shylock could —
or replace

The Merchant of Venice

with a treatise of greater use —
than a reprisal's pound of flesh,
done in a hush that doesn't disturb,

buttress Hawking's

Grand Design

beneath her chin,
await the meows
that would otherwise
beckon us to *feed*, to stroke,
to clean her kitty
litter,

that speak instead
of cosmological aeons,
the *pull* of black holes,
the deep red shift in stars
much too far for us to see.

The Lesser Light

“Then God made two great lights:
the greater light to rule the day,
and the lesser light to rule the night”

—*Genesis 1:16*

No one writes of the moon of day,
the one that's overshadowed
by the brilliance of the sun,

the one that sits in blue,
that's pale and white as cloud,

its craters scarcely noticed
and its phases gone unchecked.

At noon, lovers holding hands
do so in a golden light,
beams that warm the faces
locked in smiles from solar shine.

While ignored at 4pm,
our satellite must reckon
that its time is slowly coming,

when its giant, yellow rival
will sink *below* horizon's line.

And it is *then*,
when couples feel a chill,
that Luna's lamp aglow
alights their footsteps and their kiss,

casts a suitor's shadow
'neath a window washed in song,

that daughters eye its pockmarks
from their fathers' telescopes,

that poets pen their verses
for this orb of wolf and tide,

that nature finds its way through dark
in the shroud of a sleeping sun.

Saturday

The backyard birds
have competition.

I came here
to hear them,
their morning melody,
rousing like a symphony
with a wind-blown branch
as baton, small and so frail,
severed off a tree
by a sunrise *gust*
from the south.

The men next door
are re-roofing their house,
hammering shingles
while their radio blares

a wicked country brew:
a cacophony of twang
and Texas drawl,
with *she's-a leavin' me*
behind
in muh tears

accompanied by raucous
talk, the snap
of beer-in-a-can.

I'm plucking the weeds
from the garden, ears straining
for the inimitable notes
of nature,
wishing the robins
could drown
the pedal steel,
the pedestrian
commercial pap,

their crescendo
devour the chorus
of pounded nails
and *woe-is-me*,

stain the fresh-laid
black with white
when they are finished.

The Blues

*Got to pay your dues
if you wanna sing the blues*

—Ringo Starr

I'm melancholy enough to sing the blues.
There's surely no shortage of sadness
to birth despondent, lyrical quatrains;
my voice just a coke & crackers away
from that gravelly, soulful sound
that makes an authentic virtuoso.

But then there's my name—
with no notable ailment or physical loss
to grant entry to that Hall of Misery:

Blind Lemon Jefferson

Peg Leg Howell

Cripple Clarence Lofton

Blind Willie Johnson

James 'Stump' Johnson

Leukemia Louis Brown

Let's be perfectly honest:

Stubbed-Toe Charlie doesn't cut it,
and *Runny Nose Ron* isn't
worthy to strum
of endless pain and woe,

to gain empathy from the folks
who'd pick *Chess Records*
from the stacks,

their singer in midnight shades—

who knows of poverty, oppression,
infirmity;

that I in my tripping-over-the-cat
will never comprehend.

Socks

The *most* insulting reason
you can give
for declining an invitation
is that you have to fold your socks
(or maybe rearrange
their drawer).

There's nothing exciting
about socks.

They look plain silly
in sandals,

wearing white
a winter *faux pas*.

The only heed
I pay them
is when I check they're not
mismatched.

I'd never give a pair
on Christmas Eve,

or Valentine's,
or even Office Workers' Day;

and what they cannot
and will not be,
aside from a token of love,
is an excuse from a family function
or an escape from a date
that's made,
with the girl you think is
homely,

the one you'd like to flee from
though you've never checked her out
below the knees.

Church Bells

The steeple bell
from the Anglican church
chimes every 15 minutes,
doing a double at the bottom
of the hour, and nothing short
of a *concerto* at the top.

I check my watch:

it's a pair of minutes
ahead of what I hear,
on par with my phone and
the shortwave station

set to an atomic clock.

They say on WWV
it's accurate to
within a nanosecond
every 3 or so
million years, though
the *Australopithecines*
who got it going

couldn't have *foretold*
the competition —
from Rolex, Samsung,

and the Rector's
reliable ringing
just a block-and-a-half away;

that these simple-minded
crosses
of apes & men

were wrong to envision
such accuracy, above that of
even God,
think His Holy House of
Worship

will be one hundred & twenty
ticks behind the times,
that I have no *clue* of what to do
with this brief but priceless allotment

which the good *Lord*, if He is right,
has given me.

The Wisdom of Rice

Don't pity the rice
Aunt Josephine
had said, during her usual
mirth and merriment,
and we wondered
what she'd meant.

Now, with news
of her earthly passing,
her mantra is remembered
and its meaning
now translucent:

*Rice, my children,
will likely fall to the floor
as it's poured,
a grain that's grown
for nothing
and yet it grows,
in tawny fields and tall,
the height of pride
and triumph;*

*not concerned if it's
crushed by a farmer's boots
nor spit aside in mills;*

*neither worried if stuck
to the bottom of pots
nor wedged between the teeth
of a fork;*

*and, if it's not to be consumed
as food,
it will leap in the air
in a second of joy,*

*to be trodden
by a bridegroom's shoe,
perhaps caught
in a wedded wife's veil,*

*swept in a pan
by a janitor's broom,
resume its endless celebration
with the dust.*

Like Darwin Among the Gods

Christmas, and the word became flesh
on our scribbled, Scrabble board,
an empty bottle of wine
and a record strumming chords so calm
in lieu of breeze or fire.

"Calvinist" to your "random,"
with "stop" and "go"
branching out,
feebly, with little imagination
or points.

And we discuss
the interconnectedness
of all things,
how life is tangible—
dependent on dice and chance;
how the meeting of hearts
is coldly decided
by the lefts and the rights,
the ins and the outs,
of daily mundane doings.

Look, a physicist is born
because a young cashier has smiled
at an awkward, foreign stranger;
had he foregone the pack of gum
you say, he'd have married another
woman who'd bear a son
that serves hard time—
20 years, no parole, no remorse.

Watch the atoms collide at will
and all the faces disappear;
observe the cells dividing,
for they too will reach dry land.

When Reverend Tucker
quotes the scriptures, he says
"I ain't no ape."
Show him how his sins hold fast,
how he fails the Lord of mercy,
how he strains at gnats—eats camels,
ignores the tailbone of his ass.

If I leave you, my love,
at 10:03, I'll make it home in peace,
write a tender song for you,

how your scarlet locks are streams,
flowing to and fro' in dreams.

You'll be enchanted,
consider my proposal,
say "yes" for all it's worth.

But please don't let me tarry,
say a word or phrase ill-thought:
for if I go at 10:04,
I'll catch a damned red light,
my car side-swiped by drunkards,
my chest pinned to the wheel,
legs crushed,
spirit floating somewhere
to a place of God's own choosing.

And it is there, as Dante warned,
amid the howls and shrieks of loss,
I'll die a second cosmic time
from a flash of what would
and should have been;
your breath pulsing on in bliss,
the ignorance of the not-yet-dead.

The Porpoise

That's
not a dolphin,
our niece and nephew
complained,
wiser-than-the-norm,
their hands and faces
pressed
upon the aquarium's
massive glass.

That's
when I felt sorry
for this poorest chap,
the porpoise:

sent to the
ocean's second division
for its blunt & rounded snout,
its smile not as cheery
as its beloved,
famous cousin,

without kids
to toss it a ball
with which to balance
and entertain,

few to care
if it's caught in a net
that's cast
to sweep our tuna,

lacking loving liberators
to mass upon the sands,
newsmen
leaving its beaching
on the evening's
cutting-room floor.

We decided to take the children
on a hired boat one day,
sat still in the calm of the bay,

instantly forgetting
every porpoise,

waiting for dolphins
instead,

watching for fins
that slice the water
always reminding us
of the sharks,

wishing for *leaps*
that announce their
arrival,
the happy grins
that say *we're here*.

Poison Ivy

The lawyers had stamped and signed,
the executor divvying up
what was left of her possessions,
and content or so we thought,
we paid a belated call
to the scanty cottage
she'd called her home,
two rooms of creaky floors
and a kitchen more mildew than tile.

Grandma's *abode* had been neglected,
no one paying visits
while she rotted her final days.

We expected something pretty,
the irises we were pledged,
the gladioli and ripe persimmons,
not the brambly knots of branches
free of foliage,

the prickly green popped *up*
where the perennials once had stood,

leaving us to wonder if the bulbs
had birthed a miracle,
somehow dug themselves
out of their dirt,

snuck *away*
in the thickest night
while the owls and bats bid adieu,

and later
found the graveyard
where she rested,
draping her headstone
with dangling
blooms

as we took out
our corroded spades,
our hoes and bending saws,
and cut away the chaff,
wiping foreheads
with our forearms,
soaking in our inheritance.

As Spring Yields to Summer

I only see her when she's out,
the woman across the way,
pushing her lawnmower
that has no engine,
the grating of squeaky wheels,
its whirling, rusty blades —
the sound of a hundred haircuts.
A fumeless, slicing symphony,
the grass wafting fresh
and green.

Day and night
through my windowsill
and all is
as it should be:
cat eyes narrow to slits
at the first burst of light;
squirrels play tag;
bumblebees collect, send static
through the afternoon;
dogs howl at three-quarter moons —
and backyard Copernicans
marvel
at the shadows on lunar scars.

A couple kiss and rock
on gently swinging seats,
embrace, sigh into sleep,
and dawn comes back again,
announced by startled yawns
and gabbling larks.

As Spring yields to Summer,
tulips slump head-first,
vibrancy fades, reds go rose,
goldenrod yellows,
joining the ordinary
around us.

There's my neighbour
riding his bicycle, narrowly missed
by a milk truck,
Ms. April May's delivery,
twice weekly, half a quart—
that, and measurements
long thought dead
still heaving
their penultimate breath.

Exhalation

*Breath is the bridge which connects life
to consciousness, which unites your body
to your thoughts.*

—Thich Nhat Hanh

My muses
must have fled from me
before
my coffee fix,

in the crash
of afternoon,
my pages white
and naked,

in clamour
that comes
from *nothing*,

leaving me feeling
foiled,
unable to pen
my poem.

I opt instead
for inertia,

open windows
bringing breezes
from the west,

sibilating
stories
of the sphere,

wind that carries
exhalation
from workers
in the field,
who groan
while bending backs
and picking rice;

from mothers
in their push
to birth their babes,
and the cries that come
the moment
they emerge,

corde cut, bottom
slapped with care;

from oration
from the senate
of the world;
the homilies
of the holy;
the prayer
of all devout;

from the schoolboy
spouting love
into the ear
of his first
crush;

an alcoholic's
song of rote
into a stumbling,
crooked night;

the death-bed gasps
of the sick and grey
in the seconds
before they die;

from a waitress
and her drag
on cigarette,
in her too-short break
from servitude;

from all the creatures
of the forests
of the earth,
the hunters and their prey,
the yelps and screams
of the kill;
by the will
of currents, carried,

then mingled in jet-
stream,

abating breath
that lightly ruffles
the adjacent
chimes and sheers.

Poetry, it heaves.

This
is poetry.



for my mother, Maria



Andreas Gripp was born and raised in Treaty 6 Territory (London, Ontario) and in 2024 moved to Leamington with his wife, Carrie. He's the author of over 40 books of poetry, including *Unhallowed Antiphons: new and selected poems 2023-2026*. His writing has been lauded for its narrative and lyrical merit, accessibility, and for its blend of comic and poignant storytelling.



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