

## Snowy Owl in Connecticut

I enter memory,  
as I entered the woods long ago,  
cracking the ice-laced earth,  
seeking my voice,

what does it mean to see,  
to take the mind's tangle  
and make it familiar to foot,  
open to airs,

to find a path's or poem's double texture  
that brings one deeper in the wild,  
but closer to refuge,  
that fuses sound with light,

that salvages from shadow  
winter's shimmered gaze  
on beech leaves' yellow skins,  
sycamores' port-wine stains,

hornbeam's Chinese lantern shells,  
catkins void of their green fruit,  
bittersweet on gray branch,  
rouge upon a corpse.

This life that lives in death,  
my scientist father would endorse,  
all decay will yield to birth,  
on this we could agree.

From a cedar's  
green cabinet, it came -  
a snowy owl,  
rowing wingbeats,

round head in crystal air,  
yellow eyes that caught the sun,  
a ghost sailing in blue sky -  
I was, still am, undone.

He could not take my word for it,  
would not share my vision,  
seated in his book-lined study,  
blanketed in reason.

For many years,  
its afterimage traced a phantom  
in a thicket of vague thoughts,  
more myth than memory,

more whimsical than wise,  
like Harry's pet, Hedwig,  
a child's totem,  
fantasy-derived.

Now, two winters  
since my father's death,  
I finally see it clearly,  
see its silver sweep,

its dappled feathers,  
white as the rabbi's robes  
on the holiest of days,  
lofting my prayers,

white as pages  
laid before my pen,  
an irruption of the possible,  
the wingbeat of my words.

I see, with a predator's sight,  
The cruelty of choice – how sometimes  
we must release our reason  
for others to be free.

## Proposal

On a Vermont hillside,  
her vintage wooden skis, waxed,  
mine, rentals with plastic slats,

she made me feel,  
as I slipped and fumbled  
in my incompleteness,

my wobbly me-ness –  
I was enough,  
and that I loved her.

At that same spot, I later proposed  
what she, with her mom,  
had already guessed –

for a moment she swayed,  
*Give me just a while to own it,  
to sight our path ahead.*

No photographer behind a tree,  
no best friends, parents, siblings, cousins,  
stepping over the hillside's crest,

no rented restaurant, prosecco iced,  
just us,  
taking the cheapest room in the local inn,

opening a window  
to a retaining wall,  
counting the dinner's cost,

making half-panicked love,  
then huddling like two sleepy pups,  
tired from the day's full chase,

trusting, with a minimum of guile,  
the balance of years would steady us both,  
on the track we'd agreed to follow.

Dave Righetti's No-Hitter, July 4<sup>th</sup> 1983

1.

Out of rags,  
a whole cloth conclusion,  
a finished quilt of nullity.

How does one hold in consciousness  
that which did not happen,  
the no-thing,  
the undone done,  
the with-held,  
the held back,  
the absent guest,  
the lost chance?

How does memory curl  
around the punctured thought,  
poke like a tongue  
where the missing tooth belongs?

Gone, gone, gone,  
grasping for the negative space,  
the diastolic moment,  
straining to recall a kind of death,  
the resolute negation;  
to freeze in mind  
the impotence of action;  
to love equally the pause  
and not the note,  
the breath,  
and not the word,  
the loss,  
and not the gain.

2.

Let us begin again with nothing,  
with a child's blocks,  
piled in the playroom,  
inconsequential as a schoolyard game,

one random October afternoon –  
not the last day outdoors  
with bat and ball  
before winter's abrupt ejection,  
but the bardo just before it.

Begin with structure-less structures,  
and build block by block,  
an architecture of absence,  
of that that is not there,  
of towers filled with air.

Memory works by forgetting,  
the selective letting go of fact  
enables the fictive glow of truth;  
the fireflies in the mind's dark eye  
coalesce as immanence  
in the shadow world's relief.

3.

Here it is:  
as the party ate and drank above,  
the T.V. in the basement room  
unfurled its blank assembly –  
twenty-seven outs and not a single in,  
the man that watched with us,  
long since dead, the beauty  
of his rounded head,  
and Van Dyke beard crumbled,  
so too the image of the woman  
he married and  
ultimately divorced,  
frozen in her thirtieth year,  
the other guests  
drained away like rain water  
down the grate,  
nothing, nothing, nothing  
remains,  
but the sublimity of nothing,  
the high art of restraint,

the discipline of denial,  
the one day,  
those few hours  
in which nothing worked perfectly.

## Song

Come play in the moonyards tonight,  
make of their light a lanyard to lead you,  
far out to sea where the smallest bird wearies,  
stutters to land on the prow of your ship.  
Now when the moon floats in the water,  
go to the place where the ice mountains rise,  
walk on the earth that smells of no land.

Then will you mix the snow with your sleep,  
send the bird home though he follows your step,  
go on alone, know the cold till it numbs you,  
walk in the land of the heaviest slumber.  
Live in the last yard of the moon,  
inside the hollows of its skull,  
somewhere the cool air will seep to your neck,  
follow its breath to the lighted way,  
then will you rest, your wandering done.

This is the other side of moonlight,  
diastole that holds no darkness,  
only soft glow, hum of sleep;  
rest now, you are here, the night is behind you,  
even death could not be this kind.

## Six Month Cleaning

I don't care who my dentist is,  
my hygienist must be Andrea,

her posture straight, her uniform crisp.  
She leads me to her station,

high priestess of hygiene,  
I am an acolyte in her mission.

Her light radiates above my head,  
my bib, a cleric's collar,

her dedication to her calling,  
the probing, polishing, plaque removal

has the purity of purpose  
that summons Galahad or Percival,

her round table of silver instruments,  
honed in the heat of holy fire,

flash and dance within her grasp,  
her floss glides through each gap,

and as she practices her ordinance,  
she talks of the loaves and fishes of her life.

Childless, she loves her rescue dog  
who tracks the deer behind her home,

her husband's loyal hiking mate,  
she details his adventures,

the six-foot snake, the coyote pack,  
the skunk, the raccoon,

the possum hiding in the grill,  
fussed at until her husband

opened the silver doors  
and revealed two beady eyes.

Her words are the hymnals of the everyday,  
quieting my fretting brain,

in the very month  
that my father died,

they point the way  
through the forest dark

when the straightforward path  
has been lost,

she stands above,  
I lie below,

and then I rise, moist-eyed,  
renewed, rinsed of sin,

she leads me, posture perfect,  
to the check-out station,

somehow, she has turned  
my grief to gratitude,

Now the next six months  
are up to me.