

MEN FISHING WITH WIVES

Who runs the motor who steers the boat,
knows what's biting on what and where,
who handles the anchor who ships the oars
who's too quiet or never quiet enough.

Who wears the silly hat who forgot the beer
or the bait or sunscreen or bug spray
who remembers what the other forgets
who is always right at least half the time.

Who wants to catch the big one, who
doesn't care if they catch anything at all.
Over the years they've learned things
upon which they've learned to agree.

Never let the fish get in the way of fishing.
Never let the holes in your net get bigger
than the fish you hope to catch.
Be patient. Keep your bait in the water.

HANDSOME MAN IN A FANCY BOAT

His outfits, all Eddie Bauer,
top of the line, his gear I'd guess
the latest and best, his beard coiffed
and silvered, his eyes, barbed and grey.

Mostly its old farts in bucket hats,
your usual worm and bobber crowd,
or the occasional husband and wife,
one ships the oars, one sets the anchor

or a kid in a canoe, toking a joint
or three shirtless buddies cursing
in a pontoon too big for this lake,
or a couple in kayaks with cameras.

He's here almost everyday day to fish
these shallows, weed-choked, pocked
by algae, all dragonflies and stunted
sunnies he tosses back barely hooked

and the undersized bass he stoops
to release without even checking.
But mostly he catches nothing.
Mostly we all almost always do.

LEARN ICE FISHING AT HOME

lately I've been trying since
it goes on right outside my window
sometimes so close to our bedroom

the sound of the auger wakes us,
you can tell how deep the ice is
by how long they have to drill.

They set their tip-ups and sit
on buckets and smoke and stare
down into the unseeable dark.

Nothing left to do now but wait.
I breakfast in my sunny kitchen,
the coffee bold, the toast golden.

There are many lessons to be learned.
So far I haven't learned them all.
I know why they sit alone but

where in the ice to drill the hole,
how deep into the dark you have to go,
how long is how long it is to wait?

ALWAYS EXPECT A TRAIN

says the new sign at the tracks near my house
I've crossed three or four times a day for years
on my way to wherever to get whatever
I need or want or think I have to have

but I've never seen one coming or going
nor even, as I've imagined, been stuck there
watching car after car rumble by full of whatever
going wherever or rumbling empty back.

I've not even seen a speck of one at a distance,
future engine speeding my way or red caboose
at last trailing away, vanishing into the past.
But some nights when the stutter in my heart

wakes me before dawn, or one of my old regrets
sits on the edge of the bed smoking and sighs,
the moan of a not so distant whistle haunts me
and rumbles in the dark I always am expecting.

TRACKING IN SNOW

Most mornings we know
the tracks outside our door,
bunny and Bambi, Rocky
the raccoon we recognize
even without his mask.

Sometimes we can't and don't.
Something feline the books say
though we've never seen a cat.
Something canine but dogs don't
run loose this time of year.

Once from our shore somebody
stepped off, walked straight
across the frozen lake
alone, in the dark, into the cold,
at least as far as we can see.

Fresh snow covers everything,
scratch of squirrel or crow,
even our own familiar trails
which took us somewhere and
brought us, this time, back.