

## ODELET TO A TOAD

Not much bigger than a golf ball, you  
relax as stolidly as pebbled concrete.  
While day lilies thrust tall and fiddlehead  
ferns unfold, you wait to ambush insects.  
If a passing fly eludes your tongue,  
you'll find something juicy under leaf.

I know you keep your warts to yourself  
and can't inflict them on us humans.  
Can you fathom why some call you ugly?  
Unlike athletic frogs, you stumble  
when you hop. Your mien is contemplative.  
Hey, I could do with more of that myself.

You appreciate places you spend time in.  
For you, *getting* there is less important  
than *being* there. If I were to reach  
down and clutch your soft body so we  
might discuss this matter face to face,  
I suspect that you would wet my hand.

## **PHASES**

*from the Man in the Moon*

Embarrassment? A half-moon realizes  
that losing face is only temporary.

Viewing my full face, the world finds time to  
celebrate, dally, plant crops, reminisce.

In third quarter, I rise while people sleep;  
the restless worry and prioritize.

The side you've never seen is glowing now.  
Hop a shuttle if you dare. Look around!

## IDIOT

Coaching a baseball team of twelve-year-olds,  
I watched our second baseman take a bouncing  
throw from the outfield as the runner  
rounded third, brashly heading for home.  
The buzzing nightlights made the ruddy  
dust of the infield glow like a moonscape.

“Throw to the plate, Jason,” I shouted.  
But he ran the ball toward it instead.  
“You idiot,” I called, “*throw* the ball.”  
After the base runner scored, Jason  
handed me the ball and looked confused.  
His parents rushed me to make a rhubarb:

“Apologize!” they whispered through clenched teeth.  
“You called our son that word.” It hit me:  
Jason was slow witted. I’d forgotten.  
The team’s parents voted to bench me  
for the next game. I apologized,  
mourning Jason’s plight along with mine.

Jason’s mind was too good for that label.  
I recalled how in the early grades  
schoolmates taunted me with the name “moron,”  
goaded me to fight or try to get smart.  
Now that I’d done something dumb, the mantra  
“You idiot!” choked deep in my throat.

## **JOURNEY TO THE HAIRDRESSER**

Sometimes I take my wife's dear mother  
to the hairdresser for her weekly  
freshener. She's ninety-five years old—  
comfortable here with several peers  
getting their color foils taken down,  
washes, haircuts, twists onto curlers,  
or that oxymoron "the permanent."  
Heads under hairdryers, magazines  
in hand, they speak their News of the World.

Arthritis has forced her to give up  
making and repairing jewelry.  
She gave away closets full of clothes,  
forsook high-heeled shoes by the sacksful.  
She still tries to write checks to hungry  
charities. Beautiful hair—the last-  
ditch battle against disintegration.  
Each time we leave I say how fine her hair looks,  
and she chirps: "Rose always does a good job."

## SEASON FINALE---THE WHITE ANEMONES

All summer the Perennial Revue  
of flowers energized by years of composting  
and crowded elbow to elbow in the front yard  
have upstaged one another for sun space.  
Each chorus of lungwort, bluebells, tulips,  
lilies, and black-eyed Susans charmed us  
for short spans of days or weeks, then bowed out  
before the next bevy of ingénues.

Now October inches toward a hard frost.  
Trees hold half their leaves. Some are still green.  
I've raked away straggly brown chads hanging  
from day lilies and bald rhizomes of iris.  
Hostas crew-cut to the ground show hollow stems  
like stumps of graying, close-packed teeth.  
Spiky rudbeckia seeds stand ready  
to feed roving finches, come wintertime.

Today white anemones steal the show  
from a die-hard rose here or pale sedum there.  
With petals bright as a Shasta daisy's  
attached to intense green and yellow heads,  
their supple necks bend in a chilly breeze.  
These svelte fractals sport double and single  
blossoms waving from the same plant.  
Arrayed together so over-the-top

above their wilting neighbors, they will be  
the last ones standing when the show closes.  
Holding court with red winterberries  
and blushing sweet spire, their splendor  
gives pause to school kids and an elder woman  
who walk by open-mouthed. We're here for  
the swan song of summer. Enjoy the day  
as anemones are enjoying theirs.