

Sleeping with Books

In my dream the test is always
tomorrow and
as usual I am unprepared,
requiring me,

in the unquestionable logic
of dreams, to
take you with me to bed,
there to

whisper in my sleeping ear
all that I
will never again need
to know,

the five orders of classical
architecture,
for example, the significant
differences between

cambium and phloem vascularity,
or how to look at
a logarithmic table and not feel
like throwing up

or that I have at last been found out
as the failure
I was trying so hard to pretend
not to be.

O book, what have you
not tried to tell me
and what have I not tried
to forget?

In the last possible hour
of darkness,
my sleeping arms press you
to my

sleeping chest, skin to skin,
cover to cover,
so that I might return to you
the gift of

not knowing, the gift of never
having known.

Touchless

I don't look like myself.
On every screen

I come up short,
lacking resolution

if not resolve.
Or maybe the truth is

I've always looked
much better in the dark,

where, if you could feel me,
you could convince yourself

I was at least trying
to be sincere.

But now we're all
complete pornographers,

a mirror on every ceiling,
me watching

you watch me watch you.
And to what end?

All I ever wanted
was to lend you

a few astonishing
syllables. Now

what I want is
to shake you by the shoulders,

even better to be
shaken myself,

good and hard, then
we both collapse into

perfect
incomprehensibility.

To touch, having been
touched, and touch again.

The Racist Bone

Dem bones, dem bones gonna walk around.

I was born the loneliest bone.
No one claims me while alive
and autopsies are vague, at best,

about whether I might have ever
existed. I can understand why.
It's not like I'd make

a decent keepsake or can promise
luck, like a rabbit's foot.
Maybe I'd succeed as a piece

of bleached sculpture sitting on a shelf,
next to other primitive totems.
But I'm real, as real as Adam's rib,

and for all you know (for all I know),
I might have been Adam's rib,
first time around. That makes me

your ancestor's ancestor's ancestor,
as far back as you care to count,
can't outrun me, can't extract me,

deny me as you will. Who knows
how many other bones I hold up
or what I'm really connected to?

Who wants to take a chance
and give me up for good?
I do evil, no question,

I put worms in your brain
and blood in your eyes and dust
in your ears and a club in your hand.

And I walk you to the altar
where you marry death, again
and again. Yet you survive, just how

escapes me. I would tell you
to evolve beyond me, past me,
through me, if I could only talk to you,

bone to bone. I would encourage you
to find another bone to lean on
when the fire is at your door

and the water is at your knee.
Against all evidence, I would give you
a million reasons not to need me.

Cicadas

Mid-day late August and the cicadas are all singing
“Louie Louie” at the top of their lungs. They know it cold

and what it really means, like every seventeen-year-old
you’ve ever known or been. They also know, exoskeleton deep,

they’ve got six weeks, max, to lose their insectival virginity and die.
How would you act if you had spent your first and last

seventeen years buried in the dirt? Looey Looayyyy,
oh baby. Meanwhile the human teenagers keep taking on

the appearance of life forms newly emerged from the earth,
vivid and slightly shiny, strangely attired and no longer caring

to communicate in a language we thought we had in common.
Some will successfully mate, others will die in flamboyant car crashes

graduation week, hopped up on exotic intoxicants and endless potential.
It’s as seasonal as the flu. Most, however, will live to see thirty-four

and fifty-one and even sixty-eight before they turn back, reluctantly,
toward the undercrust. I remember those desperate nights – don’t you? –

when we were neither tired nor resigned and full of insane hope
for nothing we could have named but would gladly die for.

Exiles

We have been practicing
how to disappear

so successfully that
no one knows we are gone

or even pretends to mind
meanwhile we have

in our heads the next place
the place like the first place

which was not perfect
not perfect but getting better

the farther away we get
we have been practicing

arriving setting up camp
setting up shop laying down

the rules which we will soon
forget and the earth

barely notices how
inconsequential we have become

barely can be bothered
to fling us away like

flies on a horse's tail
when there were still horses