

(1)

Butter

Each rectangular of butter
Fresh from its paper wrapper
Is a chance to do better
A chance to not hack away
At things like we do
A chance to not add
To the refuse
Of the day
The refuse of the world

It waits – the butter
On a white plate
Edged with sunflowers
Cold and sharply angled
Skeptical
Of our good intentions
But willing to say
Okay
Maybe this time will be better
Maybe this time
A skimming
A deft skimming
Of long thin ribbons of gold

(2)

This Is What Driving to Detox Looks Like

The notes I said

The bouquet I said

Describe the notes I said to Clare

The nose it's called as you well know

As he swigged from his last bottle of pinot grigio

Straw?

Lemongrass?

We took a wine class, Clare and I

All those years ago in the hotel-school at Cornell

He swallowed and was unable to keep his tongue in his mouth and panted

Christ look at me he said and although he did not mean for me to look

At him literally

I did because we were on a straight and deserted stretch of road

And what difference did anything make anyway

The sclera of his eyes were either

Runny like a sick yolk

Or like the Tyrrhenian sea at sunset

Painted by Toulouse-Lautrec himself

Depending on your take on alcoholism

When we got to the detox lot the grimness of the case

Gathered in the stopped car

He knew, Clare did, what he was in for

The voices and the fake shadows on the stopped walls

Oakiness I coaxed, not wanting to let go

He held the bottle up to measure what was left
A good third by my eye, which he unbelievably
Polished off in a single pour
He turned to me and smiled
Not jaunty exactly but ready enough I suppose
To start the familiar chore
Pear he said when he opened the door
Clare got out of the car and stood in the lot and nodded
Importantly, meaningfully, meaningfully Clare
Hints of pear

My spot in the lot gave a good view of the front door
He collapsed upon entry and women in
Blue scrubs and green scrubs and pink scrubs
Came without hurry to help him
As they do

(3)

It Feels Like Everything is Coming to an End

If you can move it
Then it's not broken
Yesterday I fell

Walking to the mailbox

Today I watch another hurricane
Spin calmly over West Texas
I hope the Exxon fields will not be disrupted
I depend upon the dividend

My wife used to recline
In the chair by the window
Used to hold in her thin fingers
A thin cigarette holder holding a thin cigarette

I got used to it
The way she quit so many times
The way the smoke turned the ceiling
The color of gold

The hurricane coverage is interrupted
By an ad for a product called
The Hurry-Cane
I've seen it before

And made sport of those
Commercial old people
So grateful and chipper
With places to go

Her last hours were so thin
Her last pack has six cigarettes left
Six slender soldiers ready

Slender but wiry; slender but able

The hurricane is back on tv

I remember when a Category 5

Was a real event

Worthy of pause; worthy of wonder

I hear the soft thud

Of paws landing (not falling) on carpet

I limp to the kitchen and find our reliable cat

Who chronicles for me her kills of the day

(4)

The Love Poem

It began in the canals of Venice

The redolence he explained

Vaguely dank was how he put it

Yet not unpleasant

A salty richness

You should have seen her

Provincial girl that she was

Riveted

Talk about provincial

He was born in central New York

Buffalo his richest trip

Another time he said Rome

The way the sun

Caromed of the cobblestones

Rusting the city as it fell

You should have seen her
Captivated is what she was
Or was it captured

Later came the concealment
Of amphetamines
Scratch-off lottery tickets
Prostitutes and whatnot
Such were his banalities
Never when caught did he come clean
Regardless of the evidence
His love for her
Left no room for truth