

## Boulder

The thing is, he doesn't complain—  
'Why are we following the same trail we took yesterday?'  
(And, I might add, the day before, etc., too.)  
Perhaps he doesn't notice, but of course he does.  
He just doesn't care! Part pit bull, part sweetheart,  
he plods along as if there is no *déjà vu*.  
He still wants to smell the plants and pee  
in the right places. It's all as interesting  
as it ever was. The path deserves its due.  
I have to admire his performance:  
a smell, a poke, a glance. Progress is slow.  
The leash often limits what he wants to pursue.  
But when we get back, I've been converted  
by his shrugged-approach to life's repetitions. You make it new.

## **Entering Wyoming, 1961**

We straddle the state sign. Mom takes the shot:  
four kids on a cross-country road trip.  
I'm almost eleven; my oldest sister  
will graduate from college next year.  
All of us are rarin' to be somewhere else,  
but Mom has corralled us for nine weeks:  
a final roundup before time's slaughter.

There's a frisky breeze that ruffles our hair,  
while the clouds in the distance horse around.  
We smile meekly before the mountains.  
You'll never forget these things, she says,  
promising me cowboy boots in Cheyenne.  
Soon nature calls: the future wants our lives.  
We get back in the car, and mother drives.

## Grains of Sand and Truth

I might have had an ant's experience  
of Earth, but I was born a boy,  
and, ever since,  
my life's been spent  
in a vastly different  
universe of pain and joy.

I might have been destined to work  
in a colony  
that pursued the greater good,  
and never, for the short life of me,  
shirk  
from doing what I could—

but not because I would.  
I might have lived underground,  
following others around,  
and earned my livelihood  
raising heaven's hill from tunnels of hell.  
But our lives aren't parallel.

I admire how an ant can shove  
aside a grain of sand  
by summoning uncommon strength.  
Yet to budge a grain of truth, to understand  
at length,  
requires reason's wrench, or a nudge from love.

## The Poem Clinic

*Accepts Medicare and Medicaid*

They walk in without appointment  
for a checkup or exam.  
Some clearly have symptoms of something,  
a tell-tale rash or itch.  
The waiting room is often full,  
and we are always open  
to hypochondriacs  
and malingerers,  
scoffers of taking medicine.  
We update insurance records  
and weigh them on the scale,  
measure their height against the wall  
and note their posture.  
We take their temperature  
and blood pressure,  
examine their tonsils  
and have them cough.  
We tap their knees for responses,  
inspect the arches of their feet.  
We probe their ears for wax  
and watch their eyes  
follow the finger.  
Most importantly,  
we listen to their heart beat  
for irregularities.  
We want to rule out the obvious.  
Some have caught the flu  
and are still contagious,  
some the common cold.  
The old have chronic aches and pains,  
for which there's not much we can do.  
Sometimes, it's all in the head  
or they just want to have that 'talk'.  
A few will require blood work  
and additional tests,  
perhaps an orthopedic device,  
or even the advice  
of a specialist.  
The screen shots of an MRI  
might reveal a lot

about internal structure.  
But results may prove inconclusive  
for a proper diagnosis.  
Causes of inflammation,  
for example,  
are fairly numerous  
and can be resistant  
to remediation.  
(Heaven forbid  
a cancer has spread  
to vital organs.  
It's not as rare as you think.)  
Treatment options vary  
from antibiotics  
and vaccinations  
to suggestions for diet  
and more exercise.  
We might prescribe a pill  
or salve, a regimen of vitamins.  
We stay current  
with the literature  
and will try what's promising,  
even acupuncture,  
herbs and homeopathy.  
We hope everyone  
will get better, of course,  
though it may take a while  
to recuperate  
from illness or injury  
and get back on their feet,  
to find their rhythm.  
There may be side effects  
we do not know  
and could not anticipate.  
We'll need to monitor  
allergic reactions.  
There's always aspirin  
and how they'll feel the next morning.  
So we don't rush to sound alarm.  
First, though, we do no harm.

## Cinnamon Bay

In the mid-60s, we had to rent a jeep to cover the four crow miles to camp, tentatively setting off from Cruz Bay over the rutted, steep, and windy road along the coast, my father at the wheel, honking at the sharp corners to avoid trucks and wild donkeys, the occasional sandaled native with her bulging satchel, while a rich vegetation smell, and sweat, cloaked us in the heavy humid heat.

The commissary where we registered is gone now, a simple stone edifice that fronted a card file for an office, and stored basic foodstuffs and frozen food. With our key to a screen-walled unit, we followed the trail past sway-backed palms to the corner of a cottage near the beach. There were two cots and a picnic table, a lectern stand of a grill, and a view of the water that no one could forget.

The sand stretched for more than a quarter-mile, curving like a smile, white as dental bone, water the rich turquoise of mouthwash. A few hundred yards off, a cay beckoned to be reached on a raft. Canopied hills rose sharply on all sides, holding us captive in its warm tropical embrace—I was simply awed by what my father found to share with me. Donning my swimsuit, I rarely took it off the next two weeks.

As you lay under a sheet, the night breeze brought you a pageant of smells from mangrove and bay rum trees, the padded sounds of feet pattering to and fro the shower house, the background noise of waves, exhausted, collapsing on the beach. During the day, the sun kept a watchful eye on its guests, families with children drawing in the sand, women reading and tanning in their beach chairs, snorkelers' heads, swimmers floating on their backs.

In course, I found a fifteen-year-old girl companion, and barely saw my father

after that. He took his early morning walks  
along the wet line of the beach, making chat  
with campers and beachcombers, or luffed  
in the light surf. At dusk, as the sun set,  
he would stand before the grill tending burgers  
in trunks and an unbuttoned linen shirt.  
I don't recollect what we talked about,  
or even if we talked, but rather listened.

Some times seem just so perfect, pure and plain,  
that powerful natural forces ensure  
they will be brief. Whenever I returned,  
the joy was there but not the sentiment.  
The Danish sugar cane plantation life  
had long since disappeared before our visit.  
The Park that we glimpsed in its infancy  
grew polished as a gem set with diamonds,  
till its jewels were stripped by Hurricane Irma.  
I heard that leaves on every tree were gone,

sucked up by her Dyson-like device.  
So have my thoughts gone into a vacuum.  
I have one picture of my island girl,  
but don't remember even kissing her.  
It's taken all these years to understand  
how losses grow gradually and more clear,  
as coral wavers in underwater light.  
The last time I was there, at the rock end  
of the beach, I looked in vain to find  
my father's ashes, now indistinct from sand.