

ANTHROPOLOGIST

I walk home alone
sometimes close to dusk
especially in winter
wrapped in scarves
the chill air singeing
my cheeks.

Hesitating
counting steps
redoing steps
has to be even
starting over if nine
has to be even
back to the beginning
if eleven at the elm
tree, the stop sign,
the sidewalk crack
has to be even
stutter stepping
down the street
a ten minute walk
turns to thirty
delaying knocking
with a mittened fist
braced for a mother
manic distant drunk
once removed
from a child
standing at the door.

Sometimes when all is even
stutter steps not needed
I stop before a house
lit from within
soundless movement
on the other side of glass
I slip into the comfort
of a family gathered
for supper, faces
smiling, food steaming
I become their child
sitting at the table
telling of Mrs. Manning who
said my story was sloppy
or Susie who snickered
I wasn't her friend
or Austin who smiled at me
for the first time

ANTHROPOLOGIST, page 2, continued stanza

the warmth of connection
the safety of acceptance
knowledge once removed
from the anthropologist
standing at the window.

EULOGY: Sanitized and Unsanitized

Good morning

We are here to celebrate
The too short life of George T. Prescott
Upstanding member of our community
Here at Greenwater Country Estate
Contributing to our garden each week
Loyal participant in our predawn swim

Beloved husband of Doris Prescott
Beloved father of Henry, Sally and Jack
Many of his coworkers are here today
To mourn the passing of their revered boss
Who guided them from nine to five
Working harder than anyone

We will miss him greatly
May he rest in peace

OK guys

We all knew George. Hardly upstanding
Mostly falling down
How many have seen him lying face forward
In our beloved garden, flattening petunias
Planted by the Lady's Luncheon Club
How many have seen him thrashing in the
Early morning pool to shock his stuporous
Self back to a semblance of life
In order to appear at work

Doris you look so radiant now
We could hear the noise, feel the bruises
Late into night after night
And Henry, Sally and Jack you can come
Home now, no more couch surfing
Dark rings under eyes, homework forgotten
Fellow workers I know you are here today to be
Sure, absolutely sure, George will not show up
On Monday morning.

MEMORY

Holds the truth
of who we are
each moment recorded
by an unseen scribe
labeled and filed
in a musty library
untouched by time
maybe

A patch of light over my crib
a knee skinned at six
pushed by my sister
first sex St. Patrick's Day
seductive, satisfying
all solidify my existence
tell me who I am

Perhaps I shoved my sister
and memory's reversal
assuaged guilt
perhaps first sex was New Year's
slightly drunk and disappointing
and that patch of light
something I read in a
biography of Einstein
maybe

Could memory be an outdated map
Louisiana belonging to France
Malta part of England
Germany divided
USSR intact

Do we go back and back
to stagnant places
trapped in stories
that no longer fit
a suit outgrown
but squeezed into
for its familiar feel
are memories cryogenic
tales frozen in time
foreclosing possibilities
maybe

What if we soften the seal
of certainty, let memories
fly skyward, floating,

MEMORY, page two, continued stanza

fleeting, colors fading
who will we be without
our memories
will there be no
ground to stand on
no self to recognize
 maybe

WITH WHOM

Plenty of time when
my body has burned
to ash or been eaten
by worms or slugs or other
hypogean creatures
starved for the taste
of flesh

no eating, sleeping, sex,
no gym, flossing, errands,
taxes, traffic,
toenail clippings

all mind, no body

free to compose
Beethoven's tenth
or Brahms' fifth, free to
prove particles can

exceed the speed of light or
write the sequel to Moby Dick
Ahab rescued, retired
from the world of whales
for whom

meditate for days on a
virtual cushion without pause
for a turkey sandwich
no mayo
enlightened at last
for whom

fleeting phantasms
flashes of light
existence blinking
in and out for
all eternity
a fleshless specter
thinking about life
without life
thinking about
death without death
bursting with inspiration
dying to discuss it all
with whom

SCOREKEEPER IN THE SKY

Let's hear it for the Scorekeeper in the Sky
An unsung hero toiling 24/7
Surviving on espresso and ritalin
Abacus beads clacking, flow charts flowing
File cabinets overflowing
Hoping for an Apple computer this
Christmas, if Santa would be so kind
How relieving someone is taking care
Of justice, knowing that all good will
Be rewarded here or hereafter
That all misdeeds add karmic debt
To be burned off now or later
Comforting to know your neighbor will
Pay for his two am Bruce Springsteen
The storekeeper for skimping change
Comforting to know your donation
to Women for Women
Will give you heaven points
As will contributions to Kiva
Or making soup for old Mr. Martin
At the end of the street
Struggling with his new hip

Impossible you say? no one could sustain
This pace for all eternity, tracking
Seven billion souls, noting each act of kindness
Each moment of cruelty. How many points for
Giving your seat on the bus to a woman,
Two or ten? what if the woman is
Pregnant? elderly? limping?
How many points lost for saying "firemen"
Instead of "firefighters," perhaps five?
What of gossiping about Mrs. Peale
Who leaves her shades up at night
As she entertains gentleman callers

Einstein and Hawking combined could never
Accomplish this, nor would they choose to spend
Tedious hours totaling rewards and
Punishments for each person each second
Each minute, each day, each year
For all eternity

So where does that leave us?

FUGITIVES

Just now I went to the kitchen to get...
All set to make...
And serve it in a...

Fugitives from memory
Where do they go
These elusive nouns
Once they escape the
Tips of our tongues
Are they frayed, dried up,
Wistful without a home

Or are they dancing in Afghanistan
The persimmon with the scissors
The pencil with the sponge
Perhaps playing checkers on the
Shores of Croatia, the potato
soundly defeating the rhubarb
The paperweight looking on
At a loss for words

Maybe our memories mix
With those of others
Arranging a soccer match
Between Merry Mittens
And Speedy Spatulas
Cheered on by a pair of
Enthusiastic slippers
And three muddy trowels

But now I am off to buy...
A present for my...
Who lives right next to the....