

In the Cellar During a Power Outage, We Get Distracted

Here is the barbarous sabbath
of your mouth, napped
like light's rupture. Let there not be light
if blindness can land on us
like this, a tender bird. You are here
across solitude's black page

where shadow thins the dark
like an old shirt. Tonight, cemented
to the bottom of another dark,
we will lie down in our grit
and hear the dog across the street
bark at a passing owl.

But now the green face
of my watch is a meteor foreign
as the roaches that outsee us
down all the geologic ages. Though we have
no eyes for it, time tells us in every other part.

Boardwalk

You wear the pizza you dropped
at Hampton Beach when you were nine
like a tattoo, childhood itself
the dropped guard
where your father's folded hand
crosses over the jab of years
before and after he blew away
and reformed far out in his own gusts,
like leaves lifted and carried out of fall
into a winter they don't even know
to resist, the fist landing
after all this time on today's chin
which you keep tucked always inside
like reading glasses in their case.

That night's dinner drifts
to the boardwalk like sackcloth
and when you see it
mashed and folded on itself like a shirt
stained and splattered red
in its white box under
the smiling vaudeville Italian--you hope
this time when you you walk away
you can leave it there.

While Studying Spanish I Learn the Future is Always Completely Regular

Endings, my instructor says: *always the same*. Only the root changes, only rarely. Then we might expect the morning to polish up blue over the red rooftops of Zarautz and Spain itself to go softly on, and tomorrow would not cripple itself with its trivial and accidental slither mutating in the sun where we launch the roots of ourselves out into the far reaches. So I would always know what to look for: the gaseous rings, a surface pocked and dusty, the expanding space: the deadline will come, the bullfight roll to its gruesome conclusion, the crowds file out peacably together toward the exits.

Or maybe not:
How can the past be such a wild roar
muddled in my tongue
with irregularity—God *spake*,
the barbarians *overthrew*,
everything *has broken down*—
and tomorrow lie still
as a calm float into the rushes
where an old text can scoop it up
in a smooth, white, perfectly regular sheet?

Virus

The student's emailed poem,
"The Life of Man," has one,
and my security waves off the attachment
like a Park Avenue doorman—

reassures me, safe inside
the lobby of literature, the document
has been disabled for my protection;
the click of the mouse suddenly sounds

like the slamming of readers' doors
in the face of sick lyrics
all down the boulevard of metaphor,
the poem another of the homeless

shoved along in a deep loitering stink
by once-sympathetic authorities,
but now *The system's the system, pal*,
and what can you do?

So "The Life of Man" limps unseen
to the emergency room where its virus and verse,
linked by a frightening homophonic condition,
are made to wait by bored orderlies

with pockets stuffed full of filthy adjectives
extracted from overweight lyrics.
They refuse to look under its unsanitary stanzas.
An uninsurable and desperate case,

the poem gives up and staggers into the street
to beg for openings: *I am "The Life of Man,"*
it moans, rattling a few worn cadences in the cup
of its cadging, dirge of a stranded species

that can't be treated or restored, wandering
the space between us like the dream of a joke
that is always funny or the perfect word
we might one day say at the funeral.

Yesterday After Another Invasion

You said, *Say something that isn't so depressing.*
That seems depressingly easy to do, or try:
we are not at war, you and I. At least
it's easy to see no war touches us.
Take a Sunday like today, with no paper, no TV:
Woke late to a blue sky (no war there),
washed up and sang some Cole Porter, (a little flat you said)
shaved and smelled of *linden* and watched spring
row its dinghy through March's stubborn chop (no war),
the air brushing the back of my neck
like a turning page. In town, bought a few tubes of glitter
and some ziplock plastic bags (certainly no war),
couldn't find the right mask (don't ask),
walked happily in love through the drizzle
on Main Street (no war on any Main Street),
ran into Bill and Lena, and Helen who runs the theater.
Ate well all day: in the morning, oatmeal and banana
with a bit of maple syrup, a macaroon
in the Brattleboro afternoon, and later, home in a yellow kitchen,
some lettuce tender as a cat's ear grown by Mike
in Westminster West where there can never be any war,
and a plate of fusilli corkscrewed with roasted peppers
and Italian blue cheese. And when I lifted
the baguette out of the oven
like a newborn and the knife passed too soon
through the crust, a gasp of steam
arose like a suppressed thought
or the sudden apparition of someone
faraway we will never know.