

Bubble

Our billions begin
as cell knit to cell.
We're always
shifting
to something
else. A stacking
of cosmic bricks.
Ancient shells
over time
become limestone.
This graphite
scratching words
at the tip
of a pencil.
This diamond
for the bride.

Atoms
come together
to be stable. How
do you name
their need
to settle? They level
like clouds
spark to ground,
like lungs release
breath. We're
half carbon,
the stuff
that straps together
the universe.
Vigor or structure
in every living
thing. We're
buttoned one
to one, all bound

to earth. Energy
can't be made
or destroyed, only
changed, one form

to another. Leaves
part from trees,
molder into dirt,
rise again to leach
sugar from sunlight.
Without breath,
we'll burst
into leaf, once
unleashed
from this bone
and flesh.

The Definition of Friction

Two bodies so close. To move, one body
must overcome inertia. It's easier to keep
still. A force resists. A daughter
leaves her mother. She packs
a small shoebox full of clean
underwear, stomps her way to the top
of the street before returning. A few years later
the daughter runs to the woods, stays
until a thorn pierces the bare arch
of her foot. It's the constant battle
with momentum. Once bodies move,
they tend to keep on

going. Slide a key across a table, friction
stops it. Maybe the key to the house. Maybe
the key to the car. Bonds form, heat
releases. The afterglow
of an open hand, its imprint rising
on her face. Look closely
at a surface that appears even --
it's rough, pocked with microscopic
hills and valleys. Tires slap against blacktop,
the rougher the surface the more the friction.

A physicist says someday
our levitating cars will zip
from coast to coast by little more
than a touch. How much will be enough?
The touch of a mother's lips brushing
her baby's dreaming eyelids? A balled
fist, breath released from a sigh? For now,
it takes gallons of gas
to get the hell out, to escape
the pull of air, of wheels on the road.

Delmonico's, At the Turn

Bernhardt orders bisque. She really wants
a nod from Tesla, the fair-eyed inventor

just back from Paris. It's hopeless,
he's given up sex for science. Not

to mention his aversion to germs, ladies' curls,
pearls. Each night before he dines, he shines

the already spotless knives with spotless linens.
In the satin-lined dining room, fellow patrons

choose alligator pears from Peru, steak Hamburg,
pommes frites. Mirrored walls reflect kidskin gloves,

lavish plumes, and the silver chandeliers' new wattage
gleaming gold on mahogany. Over Maryland terrapin,

Twain tells how in Tesla's lab he was electrified, hair
a shaggy nimbus, fingers tingling. *New energy!* he extolls,

predicting Tesla's patent will be the most valuable since
the telephone. After supper, they'll stroll one by one

through the garden at Madison Square, soft leather shoes
leaving impressions in the gravel paths. But now

Astor and Vanderbilt polish off the Baked Alaska.
The *New Century* editor takes note. Bernhardt

bats her eyes over a cold bowl.

Dynamo

An inventor's job is to lay the foundation for those who are to come and point the way.

-- Nikola Tesla

Given to visions, Tesla
has seen the air around him
*filled with tongues of living
flame.* Accosted by the ticking
of a watch, the dull thud of a fly
alighting, it's hard to still

his thoughts. He walks, as a friend
suggests. Fresh air. The riverside
park in Budapest. The February sun
wheels towards horizon, setting
the Danube aflame. As the sun slides
to light another sky, Tesla lifts his arms,
quotes Faust to his friend, *The glow
retreats, done is the day of toil.* In a flash

he sees a wheel of power. One
current fades, another blooms.
A dynamic orbit, an endless loop
of energy. Grabbing a stick, Tesla
sketches in the sand, this, his perfect
motor. *No more will men be slaves
to hard tasks. My motor will set them free.*

(Oh Tesla, this success will leave you
penniless, without love or family.)

Soon, he'll make his debut
at the Chicago World's Fair -- energy
passing through his body until his suit
seems *to emit fine glimmers or halos
of splintered light.* How his mind,
his brilliance, shines.