

Tired Thoughts Stranded in a Late Night Dunkin Donuts, Southwest Chicagoland

It's strange, the exhaustion, helpless lack of control,
fed on scattered brief compassions.

A girl stopped around 2 o' clock today

Rolled down her window, "Hey man, have a peach"

It filled my fist. I recrossed the road pressing
my thumb into the fuzzy skin, just overripe.

Almost brings me to tears at times.

I forget who I've become,

Swallow hard and move on

To the next place,

hoping in my toes,

where no one can see.

At Sunset

Just off work, at sunset,
I walk the last dirt mile up Verdolaga,
Smell of sage on the damp air.
Passionate rapid electric guitar
Rips from within an otherwise lifeless home.
I wonder if the musician knows
Out in the dusky road a lonely young man stands
Listening for a moment in vicarious joy.

Breaktime

After pulling mean musk thistles all morning
in rain coat and welder's gloves
he told me to take lunch.

I spread peanut butter in the driver's seat of my old pickup
Parked in the pasture, up to the side mirror in shining grass.
The cows browse around, sun glaring on the black muscles of their backs,
and test the new fence line.
The young calf just ducks right under.
Sunlight plays in the field as clouds shift shapes and float on east,
the insect trill heightens with each flash of heat.

I want to learn to see the wind in the grass as a girl I love
And she as the grass in the wind.

I think that'd be my heaven.
Keep the rest.

Thirty more minutes
lost track of and it's
back to work.

Moon Chat Transcript #10

I get up too late, sit in soft moss
and wait for some rustle
in the leaves to wake me.
No wind. Not even a breeze.

Past girls I might have tried harder for,
friends I lost track of, come to mind.
The gratitude in full attention,
elusive as an owl,
or unassuming as a daddy-long-legs
going light and alone.
I wonder what screens me often from that
straight shot look into the real skin of things.
The creek runs silently down ravine.

The word is another body turned up in the Cuyahoga valley.
Two kayaking ranger's found her in the river north of Boston.
She'd been missing ten days.
She's not the first.
Men tend to dump them just off the trail
where they think no one will look.
I imagine, in their guilt, that bit of forest
seems like the only place to hide,
a shred of second-growth woods boxed in with blacktop,
dim light through the damp canopy,
a murderer's one hope at forgiving himself.

The Pawnee of the Great Plains say death
was brought into the world when the wolf,
who'd been forgotten at the council of creation,
stole the bag that carried their people
from the Storm That Comes Out of the West,
and released them into unfamiliar land without buffalo.
The displaced people killed the wolf in anger.

Leaving my camp,
I find my feet among the undergrowth.

And look for the dead shades of brown
leaves decaying beneath my formless worries.
The forest, wherever no one is watching,
is where forgiveness starts for me.
It's where you take a leak without a seconds thought of decency.
It's where men leave their old bald tires and
flowering weeds grow right up through.
It's where consciousness of self gets dropped like a set of clothes.
I'm simply that which,
makes the pond frogs leap,
and set the water shimmering.

Yardwork

With each twig lifted from thick grass
I screw up my face to recycle tears into at very least a heavy humid breath.
I came here to scape land that I guess the man tends
so diligently in this narrow green floodplain to escape the stark aridity
that might whisper him awake on the edge of town.

For weeks, before I bring the mower through the tallest grass,
I've been filling tarps with skeletal fragments of Siberian elm,
sometimes brushing up against the quaint cabin
where now I find out his son swallowed a gun barrel one New Year's Eve.

The boy had been found a month before
crossing the Bitterroots into Idaho half frozen with only a pocket knife and blanket to his name,
committed to asylum then released.
He would be my age now.

I grow quiet, leaning on a leaf rake.

I would've walked beside him on the highway shoulder,
long into cold Bitterroot night,
borrowing hope against the darkness,
against the snow lit slantwise in the rush of headlights
like showers of Gemini.