

WHICH DARK?

Which dark—late dog's dark?
Are the stars in their figures
passing massively overhead?

Which dark? The dark of first
sleep's spiral descent,
instant the eyelids are joined?

Or leaping dark, filling dream
ledgers for day's dazed recall?
For the dreadfulness, for the
beauty of it? Then put away
in the box that sleep keeps?

Or hovers at dawn, all-over
black as nothing, and dawn is
poised with the slow rose arch
of a new damned day? Which

dark? Tell me without waking.

CONJURE

With the nail across a steel pot bottom.
It imitates a bird's cry, draws the bird nigh:
it stands on a limb just higher than my head,
looks at me with one and then the other eye.

With a stick's drum-tap on an old clapboard.
It sounds like foxes barking, and foxes lurking
in the woods come forward cautiously, red clay
colored and their bright brown eyes sparking.

With a comb and paper call crowds of bees;
bees wrap each hand, each bee a pure land
bee whose wings won't stop chanting for its life,
and with a poison, in case you misunderstand.

Then night crosses its bridges. Scuffle through
dry mats of leaves, see will the crickets seethe,
but sleep is tending—bolted foxes, birds dimmed,
dusty hived bees. Far away a barn owl grieves.

FORTY FEET OF SAND

Inside your house is a ruin.
Rats fear to whisper in there—
your books unabridged piled
on decayed fifty-year shirts.

Why not throw away stinks
and cries? Where the fuck
is morning's new broom?

He says, "Imagine the clouds
on fire *except over my house*;
or dream seas erupt *except not*
in my yard, no—earth quakes,

landscapes slide, all wiped
over with filthy towels *but not*
my house: my body inside

multiple scores of generations!
If I sweep this away—big fingers
tapping every what-have-you
that would be lost to the world—

what's left for dogs with future
noses, dowsers for real bone teeth?
No, they'll dig through forty feet

of sand, finding a house filled
to the attic with my fine north
European body and this tuned,
coherent, lush unwasted trash.

You don't need a respirator now.
Sit on the Jello davenport. We'll
share the wine left in this sponge."

SURPRISE

An acquaintance asked me to supply
foodstuffs and party paraphernalia
for a Surprise and a Commemoration.
I knew nothing of the event I'd been
chosen to decorate.

The day arrived
with its cold rain. I left each High Street
shop carrying armloads of fluff—long
streamers, lights, confetti, sweets and
ribbons, till I thought I'd perfected my
task; then I walked up

to Guild Street.
I expected I'd hang wreaths and paper
chains, string many-colored lights on
the mantel and spill cookies and cakes
on white paper-covered tables. At their
door I gave five knocks

through an echo.
Voices within were stilled; the door fell
open. Came a hushed refrain: *Surprise.*
Surprise. Surprise. The floors were cut
away, save a two-foot strip at the walls.
I could see the rafters:

among the rafters
the sky and the stars. Under me, more
stars; there was no ground or earth.
People were standing, all that I'd known,
eyes wide, no touch, no whispering now.
A bare-walled room:

its adornments were
what I carried: cerements, shroud, limp
sack for dust. On a threshold of water
I balanced; to fall in was to fall forever;
to fall out to the brick walk behind meant
more weeks of days,
gray and unheeded.

MARTYR

I can see where it hurt you, round your neck,
the bruised and bleeding body amendments,
hair knife-cut, black blood under your nails
and the sky-high flowering froth of scalping.

I can see where it killed you: I think it's death,
that oily smell, your brain in a jar: Sergeants
wait in line your immaculate heart to see, your
pitiful gunshot heart on its chipped blue plate.

I can see where you were exalted—not saying
much to the angels, hiding in trees when God
goes by, scars not faded from the rebuilt body:
flashing like neon and embarrassing everyone.