Better laid plans [Fitzwater]

Bicycle rides lead inevitably to sex. That was the plan and this was to be a long ride

Plenty of time for sun and salt upon the skin, for conversation, sublimation, evaporation, passwords and cheap lines you didn't require

'Let me be your guide on the portage path, invent a new past for us away from that man

Forget that greyhound bus, \$98.00 +tax' on a blind stretch of Broadway July '16, Akron, O.

I wanted you in ways I don't remember, can't know now, I beat it out of me in the colorless dawn before I woke

In the belly of the morning, with red blood and swollen liver, sketching your arrival and inflating for you

Photos from days of skinner selves, grinning for the camera against a backdrop of staghorn sumac

Picturing happiness you can't quite speak but feel it between your teeth, crashing your body against mine

In my cheap wood-paneled apartment, scotching an elbow on the low windowsill was the summit of this life, I believed

We must have been brave, calling up and fucking on a dime, we must have fit together

Like spokes on a wheel. Thank you for this fantasy we made, we don't speak, but we're living in it still Instructions on loss [Riverview Rd]

You must cover your grief in seven inches of fresh powder, roll it over in your Snowcat in blue hours before dawn so it has that rippled, corduroy shine and carve, schussing diagonal over the low brow of the hill, allowing stainless steel edges to fight gravity and the accumulation of ice in your chest over many years before you are frozen out

You must take a drag and pretend not to notice concern on the face beside you, over salisbury steak, rice pilaf, the iceberg salad and tea lights, the endless nights laid out before you prone on the bed in white cotton boxer shorts

You will be soft and so was the night you held to the patter of rain on leaves and lovely stuff like that, the hurting time, across weeks and tables, greying hair, the childhood bed and the unfamiliar geography of your wife's body

You'll sleep, waiting for your own birth, the warp of wood around him shaking hands, remembering who you love remembering his cough in crowded rooms, lying still, turning green, tar macadam slowly fracturing on a hillside of ice

You will sit and wait for your ride to end as the car slows and gravity reaches out to hold you, the bumper of the Toyota in front of you lit by the screaming headlight, your cursing father in the snow, and purple night settling on dim fingers, the dead marsh by Riverview Rd Childhood, sketches [Boston Twp]

We must have been bored out of our skulls when your sister's boyfriend drove us in his van to tour the haunts of the backwoods gleaned from a GeoCities page

Crumbling "Helltown" awaited us: the upside-down cross beneath the "satanic" church's rotten steeple (even at age 11, clearly an architectural mainstay) the eerie backward motion of "Gravity Hill," car in neutral (I didn't feel the pull) idling at the side of the road, the brave kid among us yelling abuse at the melon-headed mutants who stalked these woods at night peeling away as quick as the Dodge would carry us all shrieking with laughter, heading home to potato chips and a nap on a green leather sofa

Older now, and we don't talk perhaps you're married or living in a duplex with your dog however, wherever you are mold becomes us bastard children of crooked New England from dust to midwest dust

Roads were hacked into the Whittlesey land (the colonel stole their name before he stole the earth from under their feet, swapped it with the rust-colored carpet we wove) tracts drawn and split, the groves receded, railroad stations, banker's homes, hotels and wooden schools, opera houses raised in mill towns you've never heard of where W.C. Fields stopped and drank for a night

Now the damp, grey ribbon of roadway cracks beneath snow and sun, straight, narrow and neat bounded by empty lots, clumps of weeds where the river and canal narrow dangerously, the life of one spills over into the other and we are changed

In every direction, if you look the farthest thing you see are trees The dull green of leaves in photographs remind us that we used to suspire, now the breath of rust, the damp, descending from barred clouds as the V-twin engine mutters through the valley

Ballad [Lonesome Lock]

This was a nasty stretch of the canal, no more than a mile or two in either direction were towns, taverns, churches, mills and post offices but barges slowed up here

The river bent and spongy land sucked the breath from the air, the low, crooked nature of trees here – a shout for help would catch in the branches, they say robbers prized this water

Mills have crumbled, trees deadened, fallen, the river caught fire, sank, blackened like a tire, it rained, settled, greened a cautious green again and the sun baked Stumpy Basin

They laid the turnpike, erected a wooden walkway where girls on training wheels skid to a halt, joggers go with phones and well-tanned triceps and saggy men photograph geese in the fog

The canal leaves behind its share of orphans they dance in the margins of my skull, bright swamps and stinks of July, dead limbs fingering the sky, pools, long and neat, nearly rectangular a few yards from the riverbank, painted turtles have their run of the place now bullfrogs are the only shouters

This is where you live, where you break the branch, here you walk the trail like a ghost when your lips returned a smile and I married those lips here you live and in the tin box in my mind Nocturne [Peninsula]

We park the car, late for the day, the day which holds its hat and runs to catch the tail-end of the dusk we rearrange objects in the photograph to see more clearly brush snow from the windshield, clap snowy hands together as the blue comes down, take turns recording each other slipping on the canal, fingering exposed roots, shelves of solid mud ice like quartz

3 years later and I'm buried at the trunk of a dormant ash tree nourishing the roots, tied and scotch-taped, burlap lungs and hands like jars wrapped in crinkled plastic bags

4 years earlier, I'm the gentlemen in the cold in the rearview mirror, smoking beneath the face of a neon lizard, winking buzzing into the night and down the years, I will continue to haunt you as you pull carefully out of the lot and into the dark push glasses over the hump of your nose five minutes to close

We don't have memories, not like they say with their yellowing concert tickets, their orphaned thumb drive in the purgatory drawer

it's more like having one foot in this world as the flash of the bulb hits your sole in the other negative-like, skeleton-like, hollow cheek-like looking hungrier back then

There are 2 worlds for us each time the human branch splits, 2 times seven billion eight hundred sixty-nine million worlds and that's only on this side of our rusty dime where I sit, scratching at the kitchen table, or still scrambling up that snowy bank in jacket and jeans, calling out from an enduring January evening Please understand, you're about as real as your toes and you only control those about two thirds of the day, the rest is given over to misfiring synapses, acid, heat, light and the dull electric impulse that floats between our bodies when I touch your hand, asleep