

From 12 months and 24 streets

June 1981

This morning our Jr. Lifeguard instructor gave us a chance to go in the water. I had a new kickboard I wanted to try out so I drove my body into the 59 degree water and my lungs spasmed with the first wave, intercostals pulling in, retreating. I swam way out, to the outside break, my fins slicing through the concrete soup. Fog muffled light and faint calls of other instructors sounding off pushups on the sand. And then a swell rose up suddenly out of the mist, I turned into it, kicked, made it half way down, pearled the end of the board, and folded over sharply onto my back. Darkness and gurgling echoes. My board was gone, the shore existed somewhere behind a wall of static. I have had this feeling a few times since: after my father died, before that Jr. High debate on euthanasia, when I found my first wife had cheated on me. A decision had to be made to continue. But I had to wait for another wave to gauge my orientation. I swam with detached fists and iron legs, made it to a standing position, methodically telling each muscle group how to function to walk in. I found my red kickboard 100 yards down the beach. I came to my squad far up on dry sand, none of them had any reason to go in. They were lucky, I suppose.

Elwood Beach Dr

*Just lay out the different units you will teach
on this calendar and submit it to me by Monday, she demands.*

Plan the entire year, don't you think that is a tall order?
I replied to our Education professor, not able to fit

everything needed into my words, into a Tuesday in March,
or into my chest wall. I don't think I had that power

which allows a person to believe that unbelievably
complex and harrowing tasks will eventually be mundane.

And I had not been able to control the sneakier students nor the
uninspired students in my student teaching classes.

One evening I just left squawking lessons, essays, lederhosen full
of backtalk and guile at my apartment and walked through

high fennel groves, past mountain-bikers, metamorphic rivulets
of dry tracks, stepping onto a crumbled asphalt table over

Elwood Beach. I watched the pacific be monstrous, syncopating rivers
of wind and deep bulk, silently destrusing the gravity behind it.

I thought of all the power there, of just what I can glimpse here;
I have so little. My concerns are no concern compared to even

1/billionth of the California tidal push. How must the dead pity us
that we believe we can hold this, control this, manage this?

Poseidon and Hades share a pomegranate, arils dribbling from their beards,
laughing at this year's fools pretending to rule the dry light places

above the ground.

March 1995

No one searches out a *bad trip*,
but tonight the screams circle me
on the top of the San Joaquin hills.

I take that last hit of acid I was supposed
to share with her, but questions keep pushing in.

I walk alone in the sepia dusk, up the fire road
switchbacks. On the way, the LSD makes several things clear:

1. No one can be superior to anyone else because the willowy
sparks which make up everyone's atoms are made of the same glinting magma.

2. Even if I can see auras around people and trees does not mean
I am more evolved, it just means my eyes catch more fabric.

3. Purpose can be decided.

4. My girlfriend does not interest me sexually, that is horrible.

5. I am a wretch bastard who hurts women. I am going to break up with her.

All that in ten minutes of winding around paths, sniffing sagebrush in
my fingers, scuffing the soil with my boots to hear the scratch of earthbones.

I make it to the top and the oak and coastal sage scrub below, climb to a flat scapula,
sit and weep. I can't love her, her body, anything. Why can't I set boundaries

for my students, why can't I grow spines like words to stop them from hurting
each other, why do they not respect themselves or me? Why did my father

die so young? Licorice smell from fennel stems and waves of despair roll out
from my kidneys, my bowels, my cauterized limbs. Quiet, distant cars,

disembodied crickets clicking binary. Then cramps in my torso and crying, ripping
open to a shout and another, spit and gristle in the coalshaft, plutonium

shooting blue sobs out of my gums, water and charred lungs. Silence. sirens.

More bitter dandelion sap spouting in bursts, and again calm, twenty times, more.

Until I am a carbon metal being, cranium bare, charcoal in my marrow.

When I am denuded I walk back down, each step lifting lighter
than the moon's chalk.

12th Ave NW

Our roommate is moving out, calls from Craigslist move in.
Her cellphone rings, I flip it open. It's *his* wife
asking her to not go to *him* today. I don't know there
is a *him* but I know who *he* is, a co-worker,
much older, bald with a 2-year-old daughter.
The liquid in my veins churns aqua antifreeze. I listen,
between premature ventricular contractions
that *she has been in love with my husband for years*
that *she is going to meet with him today that they have been taking lunch*
walks in the park, holding hands that she has a secret email account just
to communicate with him. I ask *are you sure?*

Yes, he tells me.

This is enough. And my wife made it a point to have sex with me this morning,
is now in the shower cleaning up. *Get the fuck out of the shower and get some*
clothes on. She responds, *she called you? What did she tell you?* She somehow
has the capacity to show anger towards this woman. *Take your ring off.*
Take your ring off. If you go to him today we are done. She squirms
off the platinum band etched with an infinity double oval now resembling
two bloated goat stomachs. She leaves. I stack her clothes on the bed,
poltergeist style, have to say a prayer to even touch them.
You will not sleep here again she hears when she returns.
Her eyes stop on the open tongues of suitcases.

117th St NE

Find a room upstairs, buy a new bed
fresh Ikea couch nothing to remind me of that

other place. Molly fills every stale alveoli
just sitting together half-following

the first season of “Grey’s Anatomy.”
The fifteen-year-old Lhasa Apso

sometimes hobbles his way
up the stairs when his master is at work

to roll his silver body at my feet
like a snoring pillbug. Molly nicknames him

Abuelito and we care for him while his
father flies to Nepal. He pines for his person

searching around the hardwood corners
for his carsounds. I mourn a different

loss, fold laundry, clean what can be
cleaned, weep sometimes, look down

at the hard-breathing grandfather
searching my movements

for clues.