

THE CHANCE OF A CHILD

One night, behind the screen – and they are lovers.  
Everything changes, all the same changes, when  
two people are lovers, and everyone knows the ways.  
Their cautious physical government is now established.  
They know the law without having been taught the law.  
They use words, and reach again with equal enjoyment.

When two people are lovers, they share the same room  
with a difference; for neither yet is there a settled extent.  
Some parts are already holy. They will find connecting

rooms, no less their own, and maybe ill-made or unfit –  
they will align and array, or they will thrive in disorder,  
from the surprising first room and to all places after.

Minds, bodies all lawful, and the novel space sharing:  
these among the most memorable changes of measure  
when two people become lovers. But soft and lit softly,  
twin strands come spiraling around the chance of a child  
– distantly or suddenly designed. Here paces the woman,  
should it be, planning her flight to the healing female past.

Look at each other one hundred hours a day is the best  
for now: but soon gather up and follow the roads through  
the vigilant world, which counts, and makes its wagers.

RED-HOT CROSSCUT

Let's build a shack on ground ready  
cleared and flat: fill its four sides  
with itself. Stone corner blocks,  
half-buried and leveled by eye. We'll hook  
lengths of black bog wood from hundred-  
year alchemical bath, pocketed with minerals  
and tannins, squeezed four inches  
square in various ready lengths, fiercely  
magnetic. Day's hauling stewed sticks –  
good sleeping tonight.

Lay sills on stone piers,  
raise posts at each corner, star-plumbed.  
Lift mineral plates to the tops of the posts:  
now we've somewhat four sides  
and a top and a bottom. Stand studs  
sixteen inches apart, tap them true.  
All straight, all following – there's a crow:  
after he shoots the sky he's left  
the straight etched line of his flight behind.

No rafters in the swamp, but this old  
bridge – two thirty-foot logs laid  
bank to bank in iron-clad wood-wheel days,  
with two-inch thick hard pine planks  
put pegged across – can work the planks  
into rafters. Your red-hot crosscut  
mates new rafters to the risen ridgepole,  
all nicked with a birds-mouth  
to sit on the plates. Skeleton of rafters.

Clapboards and shakes – natural  
and heathen sources: high voltage hills.  
Blind lightnings will tear the treetops and  
with following fire the trunks are sliced  
to the ground. Lightning's a drawknife  
and froe; white cedar sliced to six inches.  
The boards fall in fans  
around the charred stumps, cedar shakes  
likewise – carry up to the half-a-shack

in the wood wheel barrel. Shakes cling  
to the roof like bark to a tree –  
hot days they shrink; long stripes of sun  
figure the floor. They swell in the rain  
and press together: you'll be dry  
as a spoonful of hour-glass sand.

Gather clapboards around the warm  
cedar butts. Red-hot  
crosscut makes the right lengths  
to close up the walls. We sit on the future  
oak floor. We eat.

What holds them, no nails?  
What keeps them? I tell as I know –  
it's powerful, direct and eternal  
pressure from this unpeopled forest,  
affirming small changes to the ground  
which changes just a little of nothing,  
kept private, done quietly. I guess.  
You'll be here longer  
and know all this better than me.

Tomorrow we'll find and fit a door, insert  
windows where we left blanks in each wall  
for a window. Glass is rolled,  
I'll show you how, from the running sap  
of sugar maples. You'll want to lay  
a line of smooth stone flags from the river  
to your granite stoop, for days when I visit  
– so my feet will be sure. I'll be here on  
my days off from labor. Got boots for that  
bridgeless river. You'll hear a warbler.  
I'll call your name.

CAPTURED GIRLS

For days and years I was west.  
What is west, that I remember?  
There was the deep-set green  
river in its grand coiling canyon,  
canyon slotted between crowds.  
Sheep-herders kept their flocks  
in the rotaries. Some buildings  
so hot, so whispery-dry outside,  
I heard thousands never came  
out of their rooms. And crouching  
right in the way, devious town of  
San Francisco, on its bay, with its  
bridges. Its taverns were green-  
houses, exoticas of fern fronds  
descending, sipping your draft.  
There's a cavern in Arizona with  
thousand seats in the Hall of the  
Titans: national and Christian  
hymns all day, with colored lights  
bathing melodramatic limestone.  
I was west then with my father,  
tramping roped walkways into that  
live earth abscess.  
But I won't bear to the west again,  
not for the cactus creams, not  
for the housed-over hills, and not  
for the dry thick timber in flames.

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In the deep south, storms big as  
the moon crawl out of the ocean  
and tear up industrial skin. Down  
shallow south I have cousins, their  
blood and mine matched halves  
out of Prater Creek, Floyd County,  
Kentucky. Those shallow south  
towns – little house trailers roll.  
Coal is the matter – a seam failed,  
a tipple turned over and burned.  
My cousins have their mouthfuls  
of words as ancient as trees, drawn

right out of Prater Creek, a sweet  
tongue, saying each a gentle thing  
I beg to hear. No passage for me  
to the sad shallow south after my  
eighty-year cousins are lifted to  
paradise: that sorrow. They bide.

\*

The more north I've been – more  
silent and blue. A friend stands  
up to a cliff-edge on Dirty-Gray  
Glacier – I want to push him:  
see the ice scald him.  
Black spruce, sheep laurel and  
labrador tea, all rooted in ice.  
Under the ice is the rusted earth:  
bones buried in skinned canoes,  
crystal radios and coloring books  
of the voyageurs. Planes out of  
storms scatter leaflets, detailing  
significant Canadian actions at  
Passchendaele. I've been all over  
the ground, from Whitehorse to  
Red Bay. I walked the Great Lakes  
shorelines with Francis Parkman.  
I gained the Pole, blind wordless –  
the air, if I had to breathe, burned  
the stiff tissues of my corpus.  
I'll never go again so far as that  
far north – except when they cold-  
cremate me in a lonely ice boxcar,  
myself and my pure white dog.

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And after all it's the East pulls  
in the braided rope. I lie in the  
original cabin, dreaming of small-  
pox and tiny spice lots. Eastern  
southerners made the law-box  
we live in today. Remember them  
raising the frame? Eastern men  
forced the inked turkey feathers  
onto the parchment, until everyone  
signed. The trees of the eastern  
woodlands were axed at once by  
farmers, grew again less quite  
so high, knocked down again by  
timber princes. Connecticut River  
valley hails us to colorful long-ago  
Indian Massacres and Captured

Girls. Some states (Rhode Island) –  
folks cross so quickly – they’ll ticket  
you for presumption, for missing  
the point. Your fine is two weeks  
of sightseeing. And my house is all  
east, I can’t help it, few miles from  
the harbor, where they tight-chain  
the ships and the Brazilian-Greek  
captains ramble the streets until  
one tavern looks better than most.  
East I am, far east enough that I’m  
cold, wet and salty.

In the east I’ll keep to my house,  
caring for its infirmities, never more  
than a fathom from the phone – one  
Captured Girl or another may call.

ONE SQUARE DAY

Say you'll cook lunch for us:  
for everyone a horseshoe cake, some slip-slaw  
and twelve apple'd starlings.

Fill the four-foot frying pan one inch deep  
in denatured motor oil. Use the gas burner whose  
blue tongues singe cobwebs on the ceiling.

Call in the johnnies from the yard.

I'll make the table with silver-dollar spoons.  
I'll bench the kids. Your old dinged oak stool,  
one table end. My red-painted tractor seat.

After four bowls each one of ozone meringue,  
kids beat it back to the yard for cards & dice.

You've chosen the egg with a pearl inside.  
Lunch is done, and you are still beautiful.

We'll take the skates down the orange setting  
sun's pine trail to the pond. It's frozen all year.

We'll practice our double infinities. You spin  
first-in-the-world triple differentials, make disks  
of ice crystals round as the chalk-rubbed moon.

We skate like twins in the blue August twilight,  
then turn our backs and walk away – it's gone.

We'll climb the stairs to the Sacred Grove, gone  
pretty tired. We'll maybe hear stars before sleep –  
they plink and they plonk at the window glass.

Soon asleep, both in one boat and floating.  
Next year, this time, you'll be the narrator.

DARLING SUCKS HER LAST ICE

I looked out my window and into my spring's blue rain.  
Spring speaks in all of the nations, among the misruled.  
Spring is local – I may not, but you may have a bluebird.  
It's *just before spring* weeks before it's just before spring.

Winter shakes over the land its bewildering fans. Winter  
Viziars measure the cold in your body and in your soul.  
First, unpuzzle your ten frozen fingers as you were taught.  
In winter our ice-boys dance on their hard bald heads.

I added hours all summer but the days declined despite.  
Tastes from the fields are direct and live summer wires.  
Fusion of contrary summer tempers make apples at least.  
— The weight of the heat of the intimate summer decay.

Autumn's not done when its first colored songs are done.  
Carved autumn yard-long cigars, carved autumn boots.  
We slid shut the windows before autumn's early rebukes.  
Ring-side I asked them why autumn has no opponents.

*Spring: Heavy elements, waterborne, will foul your speech.*  
*Winter: Tree rings unwind & Darling sucks her last ice.*  
*Summer: No more dripping into bottles behind the barns.*  
*Autumn: We have attended its billion blank shutdowns.*

*These baroque systems can be harnessed again, by you,  
even if ancient fittings and instructions are with the wind.  
We come to ask, Have you the science? Have you the salt?*