

Collective Nouns for the Live, Dead, and Dying

A skulk of foxes

A shrewdness of apes

A wisdom of wombats

A clowder of cats

A pride of lions

A mischief of rats

A quiver of cobras

A murder of crows

Murmuration of starlings

Exaltation of Larks

Dolor of dodos

Destitution of auks

Pang of passenger pigeons

Waste of quaggas

Oppression of monk seals

Misery of ibex

A crime of gorillas

Disgrace of dugongs

Desolation of langurs

A heartbreak of ferrets

A woe of snow leopards

A sorrow of dolphins

Decimation of polar bears

A calamity of pandas

An anguish of tigers

Dread of orangutans

Atrocity of vaquitas

Depravity of rhinoceros

An outrage of elephants

Disgrace of humanity

Green Heron

I wish I knew a woman like the elegant green heron,
A stiletto standing keen
and watchful in the water,
Claret-throated,
Blacksheen clad in polished gun-metal ,
Exquisitely lithe and sure.

I'd love her for her patience
And allure.

Time spirals
Languid in the weedy emerald glow
Where snapping turtles lethargically tread and
Small frogs hide unblinking in their own green stillness,
The heron
So deliberately strides the shallows,
Statuesque and yet petite,
So silently abides
Until the instant that she
STRIKES!
Then rises,
flapping thrice
and glides up to her nesting place.

I'd love her for her quickness
And her grace.

The yellow-beaked chicks
Hopping branch to branch
Are homely things
And scruffy
As she is sleek
And lovely.

Yet at the shrieking challenge of the hawk,
Green heron flares with passion to protect her nestlings,
Leaps to meet the cruel and ravening talons,
Flies to duel in fury,
Spear of her bill against grasping claws,
Beauty risen to ferocity.
And in triumph with a piercing cry
She settles to her perch,
Enfolding all her delicate strength,
Refined, a cool aristocrat,

I could love a woman like that.

Last Eclipse of the Moon

Last night

What drew me out to the street

In a coat and thin pajamas?

Not just that baleful, bloody moon

Hovering over the black rooftops,

But more the fact that I had read

It's the last one of the year,

Last total lunar eclipse –

At least from my spot on the globe.

Astronomers console me:

As sure as time and tide,

Another “umbral event” will occur next year.

But I am old enough to know

They cannot promise that *I'll* see it.

No telescope exists

To gaze through black infinity and say

If this one really was *my* last.

In fact, with scientific certainty

And a different mathematics,

As sure as time and tide,

One night *will* come a last eclipse,

One night a last full moon,

Last moon,

Last night.

Haunted

The ghost of our love still haunts this house,
Having slipped away,
Unremarked,
Like an old recluse
In that run-down place with weed-strewn lawn
Darkened windows
And ripening stench.
It was barely alive anyway,
A frail thing with feeble pulse,
Just a vague puff of breath on the mirror.
Yet the dim spirit stubbornly
Refuses to fade away
Or fly to the hell it deserves.
It lurks in shadowy corners of resentment,
Lingering at the regretful edges of our days.
Powdery footfalls pace the ancient attic dust,
Creaking disappointment through shrunken floorboards.
Hovering over our bed at night with voiceless moans,
Rattling chains of habit and hurtfulness,
It feeds on unrequited need,
And thrives on bitterness.
I fear the dread thing descends on me in sleep
To suck the tears out from my skull
Before my eyes can weep.

Whose Hands Are These?

A dinner plate hits the floor with a crash.

“Damn it!” he cries.

Spaghetti sauce spatters ceramic tile,
The cabinets,
His slippers
And baggy pants legs where
Lester stands staring down,
Shoulders hunched, stooped and hump-backed,
Standing, staring.
Not at the shards scattered over the floor.

Looking at his hands.

Whose hands are these?

He wonders.

Gnarly-boned claws overstretched
with mottled, blue-veined skin
As thin and transparent as tissue paper?
Are these the same hands that darted and flew,
That boxed at the gym in McKinley Park?
Are these the hands that every day
Gripped a pipe wrench long as your wiry arm?
That held the handles of the fifty-caliber gun
When you shot your way through Belgium in '44?
Hands that splayed across the keys
To chord a Rhapsody in Blue
Or pound a boogie-woogie cadence just for fun?
That deftly balanced a sable brush alive with color and
Made it dance across a canvas?
That caressed a woman and made her a wife?
Cared for a family and made them a life?
These hands?
That once could fix a thing?
Or fight?
Or love?
Create?
These hands that can't even hold a plate?