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Rumors | Poems

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The University of Montana

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RUMORS

Poems

by

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The Hotel And The Carrousel

Wives and children rode wooden ponies
and soldiers drilled and fought
mock battles. Years later everyone said,
Some sweet time--Bainbridge Island. Now
the motor is out, the canvas roof
torn, bottom sunk in mud. Across

the road what's left
of a hotel, the west side burnt beyond
belief. Fire must have caught there
and wound up scorching the walls black
till the roof exploded and the stairs
gave. I remember my house burning
when I was 8 and what remained
was splintered by axes. Here

sticks and glass cover the floor.
When I look up, it's half roof, half
sky. Nothing lasts, you say breaking
the silence but it's us you're talking about
not the hotel or the carrousel. Outside
a Great Heron settles
in the marsh. A Red-tailed hawk glides

overhead. You climb on and when I push
my feet sink in the earth, the carrousel
frees from mud and slowly
turns, you go away
and come back smiling, a strong wind
blows off the water. The carrousel
turns on its own.

What You Must Do

In the event of a fire
dial 5-2111.

Like eyes in the wind of hurricanes
clouds turn within themselves.

Give the nature, location, your name.

The sound of planes passing
in the distance means nothing here.

Use the street fire alarm box
when telephone is not available.

The moist earth
stirs. Behind the barn
cows rumble. The grass blows
in filaments, a thousand small birds
clap their wings in the wind.

Remain at the box until the Fire
Department arrives.

Now you hear the roar, sense change
in all things. Fire burns
the horizon into the sun.

Everything Has Been Said Before

We all presume too much. Your hand
stiff on my neck, the foreseeable dream
tomorrow: draw water, work the plough,
patch the south field fence
in the green sun. Already words repeat
themselves from memory. You taught me

the boundaries of land. White hills
shimmering to the north, an unending river
flows east, to the west, desert, south--
swamp and beyond all this
more of the same. We go back inside

the kitchen of our beliefs. Here
tendency looks beyond hills and deserts.
We all know, even I know
more than this. Behind our eyes
we see our eyes and everything
they see, deep down we know.

The Room

It's darkest at the far end. No surprise
when the walls fall away. Wind passes through
a blind hawk. My eyes
turn backward and I fall
turning, head in my hands, chest
in my knees. All motion
rests here. It is here in darkness
where wind turns into itself
a hawk circling the desert at night

and the cry for death becomes the cry.
The eyes, the mountains turn
this way. White waters
of the dead flow from cactus
and Yew trees. The wind whispers.
When I return, words
come out of nowhere, the whisper
of distant lightning
suffering winds.

Watching The Storm From The Barn

Broken door swings open, hay blows away
from itself. The wind comes
in green waves. In the field

you chase our cows. Stalks of plants break
beneath your feet. Heat lightning flashes,
the sky appears and disappears.

In a burst of light: wild stems,
leaves in the wind, the bright yellow flowers
of our garden.

Mushrooms

Suddenly I lose my sense
of humor. Where
does that leave me?
On the backside of a flat rock
prostrating myself to Loki
in the desert sun, the old
ten pound hammer at my feet?

When they come for me, hide
the rags, burn the relics. Tell
the old women, the sisters I owe
my life, I have returned
to sacred grounds bordered on 3 sides
by shrubs, cactus and mushrooms
running clear to mountains.

Storm

Leaves of wind shoot through us.
I see a black hole in your iris.
The sky grows suddenly dark. In the back
of my ear I hear a high wire of sound.
To the west, a long dark cloud

winds down, turns the wheat black.
The mad wind tears up the cornfield.
Cows are swept up and thrown.
A tractor leaps a hundred feet.
The whole farm flies up. My hair
pulls the eyes out of my brain.

Wind

In Africa, Rhinos turn trains upside down
on a whim.

This Is It

Put it on.

It isn't the wrong size.

It's not your left foot.

The shoe flies out of the past.

You aren't the last man.

The shoe of the future.

The shoe is a present.

The shoe gives itself away,

dies laughing, goes on

and on. The tongue goes

slack, laces knot. The shoe

wears out. New sole, new

heel, a new image. The shoe

in the room at the back, back

in the room the shoe lies

waiting at the foot of the bed. Ha.

Nothing Matters

Say what you like, some days the wind calms, I hear voices and words fly to the page. Today the sun shines, I don't care. Who am I, I have to deal with day in, day out? And who are these people in my house?

When I'm ecstatic, loving you or leaping off the edge of my thoughts, it's the angels who carry me in flight and when our dance loses all sense to ritual, I see the dark and sensuous spirit in you. Love is a bottomless well we draw from and fall into but today, moles bury themselves in my ears and my thoughts limp like rats. I have no part in the world. Things go on, a top spins in a vacuum.

Absence

In darkness the dog's growl
becomes you. There is no moon.
Make no mistake. My bones
scrape like nails. The legs

of the bed, broken. I'm lying
flat-backed, the smell of mothballs
in my mouth. The closets lie
open, hangers without clothes.

Love

Sometimes it gets to where I can't stand
to hear another word. Lips up, eyes
wide, I smash your face close fist.
It changes a minute, then
it's back, the same.

So don't ask why, half way through
cutting fresh salad, I slash
the left side of your face--eye
to chin and the knife is clean
again at the tip. You cry two days
and I think now we start again.

Scars

Her eyes open doors. My drink half
gone, The present, she says,
is all we have. At 90
her Jag cuts time in half. Her place

she pulls my belt and blows
the doors off. Before dawn cracks
she's up and dressed to kill.
Not one good word all the way
to my Sausilito flat. Out front
I turn her wrist till it snaps,
you get no thanks. Three months later
at Kings I ask, How's the wrist,

sweetheart? She laughs and that night
we come together. She leaves 8 cool lines
from my chest to my prick with her nails.
You'll remember, she says, my name.

Trouble In Tamany's Bar

Nine times I've swallowed your bait,
every time I'm left cold alone.
Your words ring, 22's in my ear.

Slick rain shoots holes in my shadow.
I don't check back. Fog hangs
a trenchcoat. My reflection

in the bank window, not half bad.
I swing into Tamany's. Who's here
tonight, looking for trouble?

Suicide

Live fast die young, have a
good-looking corpse.

No melodrama. Outside
a 62 Vet, bored out
to 451, holds the moon
in a split-glass, blue tint
windshield. Maybe tonight
when the life-lights of the city
turn back, and young girls
and old men sleep
house by house, maybe
tonight when my right is fast
on the stick as William Bonny
and my left foot clutches
slick as a well-oiled
Smith & Wesson 38, my right leg
will stiffen like oak in winter
and I'll meet tomorrow right then,
between the eyes.

Flamingo Lounge

Faces you've known years grin
when you dance. The girl you knew
in school returns your gaze.

Two drinks and she's
sister. You tell her
The dirt you love is so dry

the crow scoffs. No crops means
no way out. The floor erupts
and a bottle shatters
someone's ear. Fists hammer home
everything wrong. You can't
get out of your own way.

John Bull and Cheryl get nailed.
You cup your ear and hide
in pain. Everything you thought
you knew means nothing now.

ie
Christmas

This is the city. Open the door. Let's go.
Balloons rise and converge. Sounds
run together in tracks and overlap.
Hold my hand, we'll lose each other.
Flowers, statues, tall buildings.

Sidewalk's jammed, a party
of strangers buying presents for friends
and relatives they see
buying presents for friends
and relatives. Bells and music do not
get in the way. People are happy.
Jack says, the crass commercial quality
does not detract from
real emotion. Is that a geranium?
I ask, in your buttonhole.

General Health

In the cornfield wind rips the stalks
in half. Pick them up, you say, your hair
in wind. Sun pulls sweat
from your shoulders. Look at me
you say, the shirt you throw
in my face filled with the dust
of the past. Your dress half off.
Whatever was, is gone. I want
you now, like always. Life
has no next scene.

...

Life is a soap opera. I am divorced.
My wife is having an affair
with my best friend. Occasionally I see
his secretary. Everything is just
so.

In the eyes of the audience
I am a hero,
a misconception, no doubt
based on my life-position. Still
I give advice, smile
innattentively, put words in here
and there. People tend to gather,
What are you, they ask, thinking of?
Oh nothing, I quip.

...

"Who did kill Dr. Brewer?" Nurse Kelly asks in the caf on break.

"I resent your asking."

Her eyes flit about the room. "I know you've been seeing his former wife," she says, "you had an affair with her sister-in-law, your wife's sister, who Dr. Brewer raped in blind fury one night because she brought up his son as a homosexual whom you also had relations with though no-one knows but your wife's sister, the only woman you ever loved despite her sterility from Dr. Brewer's rape. She tells me everything because I am her one true friend."

Perhaps, I think, but how in God's name did she get all that out of Sandra unless there's something I'm not in on. And if Nurse Kelly knows, who else? The police?

"Alright," I say, grasping her hand under the table, "let's go."

The Toy Factory

Days pass like plastic airplanes on an assembly line. I screw springs into pilot's heads and at home, attach them to my bedroom ceiling.

Juiced one night I collided with seven planes. King Kong swatted them on the Empire State. I see what he meant. Knock one away, another springs back.

After that it wasn't the same. I couldn't put another pilot in the cockpit, send him out into the blue knowing I had destroyed the work of a dozen men and women. Never again between George, old enough to call dad and Mary, so fat she took up her space and half mine.

Now when I get my socks I say, Hello George, to the pilot I keep in my bureau. Late nights we talk shop. He has an orange face, goggles, mustache, helmet and a red suit with black gloves. No legs, he doesn't have any legs.

The Edge

We're fooling ourselves. Laughter
floats up in balloons. We tie
ponies to our seats. Impossible
shapes surround us in
unanswerable questions. Sad
wonderful words in disparate
groups huddle in corners
and run laughing away. You grow old

before my eyes and smash
the last pane of glass. Your hand
shatters, my thumbs go up
in smoke, we drop to all fours
and come up with a handful of dust--
Shake hands, mark the dry
clean quality of our palms.

Remote Regions

Our cabin breaks up the wilderness.
Polar Bears roam the white horizon. My wife
burns the deer steaks. Pojo, half dog,
half wofle, eats the remains. At the table

I fall into deep sleep and my life
runs out my hands. My wife sets
a pan for the blood. Pojo's eyes
burn through my pain, and I wake. The door
of the cabin bangs open, roaring wind,
a white bear.

Dream Of A Wash At The River

Sun blinks behind a mountain.
A shirt finds the eye
of a whirlpool, the dirt
of the past washes up. Fresh
footprints lead to the river's edge.
Three hills line the horizon, shoulders
of sorrow where shadows double up
in pain, you appear, pale
and elegant, walking my corpse.

In The Forest

My brother, last of his tribe
soaks his hands in the blood
of an antelope. In a thicket
the antelope sighs under mountains
of ants. Faint stars stand back.
A bluebird makes horrible sounds,
leaves torn from the trees cry
in the wind.

Birth

I was born dry. That was your first
mistake. You thought you'd die,
then you thought I'd die.
They soaked me in oils
till I grew soft and beautiful. Now

I wake at night scraping my skin
with my nails till it bleeds.
I am again dry. In darkness
I scratch, slowly at first
then my nails are yours and the blood
is warm. I am alive. I am alive.

Grave Mistake

Janice was bewitchingly beautiful. At least I thought so. Surprisingly enough, others found her utterly repulsive. She had been gone for over a year when one afternoon I heard loud pecking sounds at my door. I live alone in the country and people seldom visit. I opened up to an enormous chicken. Oh I'd say five feet tall. It came in clucking three years ago and hasn't given me a moment's peace since. I hear it pecking now in the other room. It takes all the grain I have and I had to sell the other chickens and my last cow. The few guests who used to stop in won't come anymore. I can hardly blame them. That chicken is very rude. Dresses have been shredded. Rugs, furniture, everything I own is a shambles. What am I to do?

The Way It Happens

Swimming upstream in Glacier,
six eagles wind their hunger down
and lodge claws in my back. Screeching
and the muffled clap of wings. Half
unconscious, dull with pain, land

and river fade, everything I once loved
gone. The air impossibly thin,
an aerie, nowhere in sight, birds
of misfortune where are you
taking me now?

Hard Times

Matt takes us out back and we all watch him bring up a bucket from the well. You'll see, he says, (what a character this Matt is). Well the bucket comes in sight and it's filled with something thick and bright. Matt swings it out into the crisp air, it's blood alright. Fresh too.

Since we're out of water, Matt says, it's all we have.

Sandy, Josie and Matt head back to the house with the bucket. I'll be along, I call. I turn around and look down into the darkness. What have we done?

Jump. Jump, the well says. And I walk quickly away from the well and the farm and Sandy, Josie and Matt, into the dark sounds of the woods.

Anything You See Is In The Past

Blue stars burn the darkness. Cirrus clouds
glisten like toenails. Every time I look

into your eyes I see a cave. Find me the sea,
I ask your hand and hope leaves for home.

Instead wanders into the mountains where losers
sight eachother forever. No-one's heard word in years
don't lose faith. Killer turn over, I'm talking to you.
Outside the animals conspire unconsciously.

Panda Bears press close to the glass, eyes like peas.
Questions, black and white faces.

Running away slowly comes to the peak of a rise
a wind of change in my hair.

Taking my time in a presence of mind until I reach
sanctuary I refuse to wait or even think.

Often anything disturbs me. Will you come? I call
knowing you out of earshot, lying somewhere

arms crossed, you are drifting in darkness
I know the zenith of everything lost.

These Days

(grains of sand)

Let the dead concern themselves with death.

I'm happy to get through this day
with its unending corridors
and innumerable signs. It's not
an unusual day. So many things, you say
going on in the world. Armies of men
and factories of women. Children dull
in classrooms and outside playing children.
How many on the other side of the world
asleep in canoes drifting on dreams
of rivers while scientists again test
and again. Police patrol alleys
anything can happen. Soldiers cover
the map with blood. Grown men go limp
from hunger on the sides of unfinished
roads and children collapse like dolls
in Bengal. Beautiful women and men
change their skin and grains of sand
shift in Acapulco.

(letter home)

Dear Ed, We ignore our own death like a bad cousin
and waste everything in sight. We have hidden
the parts of ourselves we don't understand
with inventions. We cover the earth with tar
and drive it at 60. Mountains loom
in the distance through windows, "that land
is no good for cattle," Peaks of the Tetons
cut through clouds before the desert--

"no crops grow there," the desert, foreign
 as the moon. "The good thing
 about rivers," Thoreau said, "you don't
 have to float anything on them." Yours, Yours.

(off the road)

At dawn a tandem oil tanker rumbles the rest area.
 Baltimore blazes blue the tint
 windshield. Chevy Two's,
 Volkswagons and Swingers--
 someone I don't know drives them.
 On the dash a telephoto
 aerial shot: Baltimore in rows,
 boxes that cover everything
 once believed in. Someone
 I can't imagine is responsible for this.
 On my way to visit some other lover,
 I'm off the side of the road. Hail
 dances like electrons on my hood.
 Darkness contracts and light lines
 the delicate edge of an oil refinery.
 Yellow Calf said, "The world is cockeyed."
 I don't know him either. All I know
 dawn, I'm hungry, can't get this damn
 thing started.

(traffic jams)

Executives sip martinis 50 stories up, the city below
 is a map. Pan Am and United talk traffic jams
 in the sky and U.S. lands Mars July 4.
 Tractors tear up earth in Carolina,
 Montana, Arizona. Hopi says, "these machines
 make great holes in our grounds." In Glacier Park
 a ranger shoots a snowmobile six times.

(stars, cards, bones)

In Russia a woman stares at a fork and it warps.

Arizona Indians soar in Astral flight
to the fatherland. Hindus dance
on burning coals. Solar power is food
for the church of the new Christ.
Psychic heat survives the winters
of Tibetan monks. In seance the dead talk,
they want help. Energy burns up the backs
of Yogis. Clairvoyants map the future
in stars, cards, bones.

(these days)

Friends, we have been moving slow as caterpillars.

"You better forget about machines."
Let the reptile brain wander off
to the burial grounds. "Better stop
messing with grandmother moon."
Buddhist scriptures and Zen parables
have floated across the great waters.
Time the opposed turn to face
their other halves. Roll the heavy
stone intellect uphill. Friends,
you better do what you know right,
the spirits of the dead will carry us
in flight through the gateless gate.

Hub Mail

You wheel push-button jacks in the back
of 20 wheel trucks. Green sacks tagged
Austin, Phily, L.A., chew the fat
on break. Luis says, Leathers
for 50 at the docks, need
a tape deck? The bells rings.
Swing the jack in an arc. Where
does this sack go? You hear
Frisco is ok. 2 an hour
isn't much. Your wife
so full of love at first.
Little Maria is her smile.
You write home. America
is hard. Don't let on how
hard. It's only right
relatives die at home.

Spring

Asleep, six years old
in the treehouse, my older friend Johnny
tells stories: Africa bananas big as trees!
Sounds of the woods breathe around us.
When I wake it takes time to remember
which year this is, Am I really 30?

Friends where are you? Outside
the mountains are losing snow.
The sun rises through a tree behind
the house. It will be another
beautiful spring.

Cancer

for my friend's father--
bombardier over Nagasaki

Your son Charlie died of cancer
and sometimes in dream it's him
you drop the bomb on. Reporters
ask how it feels. Your wife

and children never ask. At dawn shot
with gin you fly a high whine
into the sun. Grip the stick. 30
seconds, think everything in flames.

For 30 years you've buried the crew.
Some nights swear everyone
in disguise. Everywhere you look,
no-one you know looks back.

When The Door Closes

Cool air lies in my head, the soft pelt
of a possum.