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Adventures in dot to dot| [poems]

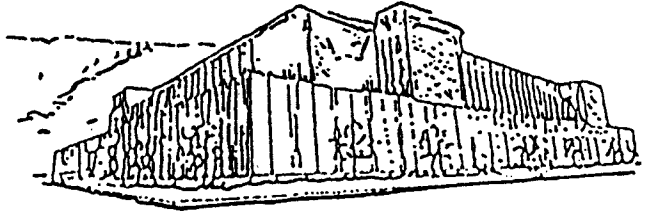
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ADVENTURES IN DOT TO DOT

by

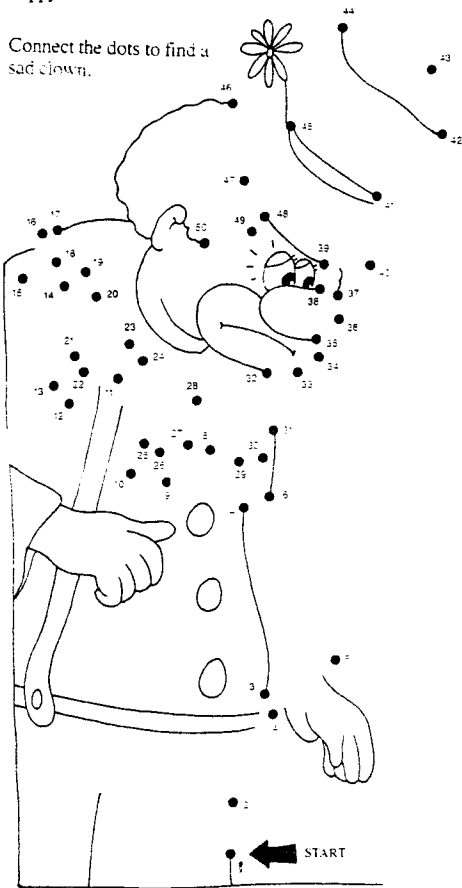
Aaron Q. Long

B.A. University of Findlay, Ohio 1993

Presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
Master of Fine Arts
The University of Montana
1997

But one clown was not
happy.

Connect the dots to find a
sad clown.



Approved by:

Patricia Goedicke

Chairperson

[Signature]

Dean, Graduate School

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Statement: Journal of the Colorado Language Arts Society: "The Rest" (appeared as "The Rest is up to Spring").

The Yalobusha Review: "Tryout."

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For my mother, Virginia A. Long, who
once grounded me from "talking privileges"
for an entire weekend.

Practice

(For Virginia Long)

I

Assume one cannot reach an apple beyond one's reach.
What then?
Wait for the tall man or the wind or the birds
to shake it free?
Maybe one prefers to find a ladder or a stick.
Maybe one prefers
to pick one's own apple. Assume one apple is just
a start.
What then? One has climbed and stretched with stick
in hand,
and one can't reach. Assume, of course, apples
are fruit
one loves. Apple tastes of roast duck, chocolate
syrup, of kiwi
and papaya, the purple flesh of plum. What then?
Assume one needs
only rap at one's chest three times and never want
for apples?

II

A stance
of sorts,
three meters
high, board
bending slightly
the short weight
of a boy,
the slick suit,
chill in July
-- chicken skin --
the balls of feet
digging in
to blue grit
arms out straight
to finger tips,
facing the fulcrum,
water like water
slapping water.
He cannot know
the key to this.
He presses his chin
to his chest.
The key is falling
straight backwards.

III

X plus Z is sometimes
a very expensive vase.
She turns the landscape over
reaches for a dry brick,
starts her art again.
And Y?
What has become of Y?
The scraping sounds are terrible.
She thinks she feels
warm skin against
the backs of her hands.

Shaking in a Jar

From the center

If you play a child,
you have to give her a chance.
"What are you thinking?" I ask.
Her tongue between lips --
the possibilities.
There are O's in opposite corners.
The center is open.

Hanging a poster, the Pope has just whacked
his thumb with a hammer. Tomorrow, it is written,
he will lose at Yahtzee.

Is my theme different from yours?

Yesterday, I had difficulties wiping.
I know what is ahead of me.
"Cold turkey" it is called.
Still, I cannot bring myself to eat it.

We talk for three hours
about colons.
Lester prefers dashes.
"They are different," he says.

Her fingers clamped around the pencil,
like her mother taught her,
she marks an oblong O on the top row.
"You've lost," I say. Cheering.

This room

This room grows
small about me.
My family
in the corner,
kisses,
whispers behind
their hands.
There's shampoo
in their hair,
cool jars of
sandwich spread
in their square
purses.

I feel
my feet
with my feet.
So this is my sex.
The frame beneath
me groans.
I hear myself
breathing
through my nose,
and I am
eating sandwiches.

My skin sticks
to my sheets.
Were they closed?
I close my eyes.

Of course
this isn't my mother.
Of course my father
is not the man
who raps at his chest.
My mother wears
rubber gloves.
She turns me
once a day.

Poster

They've given us chains this time --
chains with hooks at the ends --
and this time we are working men.
Our arms and chests are bare.
And some of us have forgotten
the cold, and some of us assume

a ground. What has become
of the pickaxe? What has become
of the clipboard he held on his bare legs?
Put this on your wall, ladies.
Notice the black writing across

the milk-white sky. Read it all up,
ladies. Read what it says. Read
and notice the head cocked back,
the wide stance, the thin fingers
clamped around the heavy black book.

Tryout

It's your first summer in Ohio.

Your older brother stands inside the fence
on the field, shifting in line with the nine year-olds.

You find your way to the empty lot across the street.

You know he will be first.
You don't care about the fly balls
or the damp finger holes of the mitt
you have to share with him.

You find a pick-up game at the lot.

The boys there need another.

The tallest boy is wearing shoes you have begged for.

They ask you to play.

You are taller than the other two
who have not been chosen.

One of the boys points to you.

Another boy argues with him.
They whisper to each other behind their mitts.

The second boy asks, "Are you a boy or a girl?"

Assume this.

Do you:

- A. Punch the tallest one in his face
and ask, "Have you ever been punched
that hard by a girl, asshole?"
- B. Say, "I'm a girl" and get picked last.
- C. Panic, say, "I'm a boy,"
while your face turns warm and bright.
- D. Pause. Think. Say, "I don't know.
Are you a boy or a girl?"
- E. Leave. Find your sister's old bike
and pedal home before they notice
the flowers on the seat.

Breaking up the Foundation of the
Discovery Center Nature Preserve

Friday, we poured slop into wheelbarrows,
walked them up ramps over forms,
raked and screeded the slick,
and sat with it in the sun.

Monday. The jack hammer chatters
at the crooked quarter of foundation,
chipping the rock to stones I lug
to the truck. Slivers needle my face.
I squint -- look like I am looking.

A doe turns an ear in our direction,
twitches her nose. A crow settles
on the smokestack above the factory.
I pry at cracks -- twist
the thick wire screen inside.

Children on trips will stand here
in pairs -- in the building.
The teacher will read from brass plaques,
point past glass to pictures of insects
and trees, stuffed birds and squirrels.

I pocket my gloves.
Edges of rock mar my hands.
Lime dust settles into my pores.
The cement truck pulls up.

Corporation Limits

I left the round raindrops.
I left the tennis balls against
the green cement court.
I see too much.

The fingernail clicks a piano key --
still music.
The cat staring up at the squirrel
in air. Mrs. Martin in her window pain.
The trees, with copper in their veins,
left dead -- no dying.

I pass
posters of a boy they lost --
his face, anyway -- smooth --
two teeth missing.
Is this what they miss?
And if it doesn't look like me,
should I look?

I stop
at a place where children sing
their social studies. I call
what I choose what I choose.
See. The hinge I am fashioning
with bone and rock and spit.
The grinding, the polishing,
the color of skin.

Chinese Fire Drill

I did what you said,
Mister --
stopped and ran
like you told me
and stopped.

The fish, they say,
are swimming in circles;
corn is melting
in the factory.

Pinch my cheekbones, Mister.
You know how we love
that, you and me --
a timecard clicking
in the bicycle spokes.

Is that my iron?
Are my arms burning?
My fingers are too thick
for the buttons.
Desperate noises
come from the receiver.

Could you tie my shoe?
Tie my shoe, and feel
my swollen knees.
That glass eye
could wish to be
so smooth.

Press your ear
to my stomach, Mister.
It sounds
like something.
It sounds like
needles shaking
in a glass jar.

Boys Who Fiddle

Storm Front

"Flowers vomit beauty at midnight"
beside the smooth, white spindles of a picket fence.
Miss Sweet catches the end -- the only defense
the skinny, green stems can muster -- this flower

against the circumstance of night air and moonlight.
Forget flowers. At dusk, the boys in grey slacks
and sweater vests plot, behind their hands, attacks
on the chain of elephants they are up against.

This, my friends, is what we call the "Jardin de
Denouement" -- the first collision of swerves --
the apex of a career, if you will, which serves
as an explanation for everything but this.

Therefore, Miss Sweet leans her purple bicycle against
the frayed trunk of a white birch. She allows the twine
to slide against her smooth palm, finds
the dented ladle hanging on its peg. Therefore,

what can be said for boys who fiddle
with angry elephants on the fringe
of the shortest day of the year? God, friends,
is no philosopher! Although I do not know what

bolts through his head, there are drafts on thin pages
under the arms of creased, fast people
everywhere. God, I'm told, prefers sun hats, ripple
tanks, and clear spheres of bluish lightning bolts

Cold War

Tanks and clear spheres of bluish lightning bolts
rolling down the boulevard shake the parlor windows.

Rutherford stops, turns an ear to the vibrating
glass, and resumes his piano lesson.

Miss Daffodil fidgets with her knapsack
on the powder-blue bench. She stoops to fix

her bootlaces and smooths her hair behind her ears.
The soldiers load their cannons, set the sights

on the chain of elephants. They are against
the colored animals. Private Dandelion

clutches his chest, paints the shiny bombs rust-orange.
General Fudgecake polishes the box of medals.

Miss Daffodil clears her throat, removes the tight, white
gloves, and spits at a quarter on the track.

Rutherford stops, cracks his knuckles, taps his foot,
and resumes. The general's dogs run free, shit

beside the smooth white spindles of a picket fence.
They say the general butters his banana

bread with a butcher's knife. The storm gathers
to a purple front over the valley.

Small, black silhouettes of dots brace against
the white horizon. Trees collect the mist.

Green Boy

What can be said for boys who fiddle? Would the slightest
applause strain his gentle nerves? Would wild animals
parade down Pine Street? Who decides the color for
caution, anyway? Given the circumstances of light
and shadow, when can he show his emerald face
to the crowd of fancy people with their small
hands and delicate cheekbones? When can he stick his
red tongue into the wind? How can the symbols he knows
ever taste of butter snapping in a pan and feel
like the cool skin of a peach against his ear?
Who will stay to pick up the empty plastic cups?
Who will clank the cold pipe against the iron bridge?

Bomb

The boy clutches
his shiny chest.
Rust-orange paint turns
thick as batter
in the silver
milk can. He
forgets the end of
his performance

and bows to soft,
sporadic cheering.
Would thundering applause
strain his gentle nerves?
His fingers smell
of turpentine.
His cheeks are pink
as erasers.

Words for people

I am going for the world's record
in patty cake. My mother feeds me
rich shakes through a straw
and lubricates my palms. Twenty-seven
hours into it, I understand.
The cramps in my wrists, the cramps and
my swollen fingers, my cracking lips
have something to do with it.

I take most of it back. I feed the chickens
gum drops and shards of brown glass
from a stainless steel bucket. I remove
my hands. The cuts multiply. The red candy
sticks to the flaps of skin. Chased for a good
seven minutes, I hear a farmer from his ridiculous
porch say something about "boot soles," something
about "fear."

In my bedroom, the crowd cheers
by remaining perfectly quiet.
Seven hours to go. Someone has broken
a delicate knick-knack from my shelf;
someone actually yawned. My mother leaves
to draw her bath. The mayor has called two times.
Three hours to go; I've forgotten

the ribbons tied in her hair --
the pigeon-toed girl.
They wait for the cameras to arrive,
They wait for the richest of sounds.
There are words for people.

Dead Worms

The children out the window are beating worms
on the sidewalk with plastic bats.
The air smells like air before it rains.
It has just finished raining.

Mike Burns:
elbow pointing straight up as he eats an apple,
his neck longer than any other neck in the cafeteria.
He stomps around the wet cement,
the basketball court bleeding pink with worm,
the skins smashed flat like letters
from some foreign language.

They say he was hit two different times.
The first time because he was three,
and three-year-olds sometimes get hit by cars.
The second time because of the first;
a boy can get hit so hard.

I remember his name because he kissed me.
Jeff Pennington paid him a nickel to kiss me
on the cheek, under the slide. I remember
because I cried in front of the girls
and boys, in front of Mike Burns.

Red Boy

(For Ozzy)

The red boy,
with his sad freckles,
rubs his thumb against
the toothbrush on a string
around his neck. He pulls
his knees to his chest
and rests his orange
head against the glowing
blue window.
The man pats his apron,
twists his mustache,
and paints the purple water
full of ordinary, household things.

"That's a great question"

The tuna turn their crisp circles
at the bottom of the tank.
The diver -- meat at the end
of a stick -- scours the glass.
The otter rests his hind legs
past his ears and nuzzles
beneath his tail.

"Stay with the group.
Move along."

Sharks are easy --
all those teeth --
bumping the windows.
He presses his palm against
the tank of glowing things,
drifting, swallowing one another.
And the map beeps out of control.
The fish have learned to live
in green bottles and rusty
old sneakers. The anchovies
drop their steely jaws.

"We'll meet back here at two."

The red boy wets
his toothbrush
in the drinking fountain.
The man stirs his keys
in his front pocket.
The girl in the yellow dress
points and giggles behind
her fingers at the orange
blotch of paint on his elbow.

Miss Sweet Sings Love Songs

Thought

Why does it come to me on the toilet?
My left thigh against the cold tub,
my hands shaking off malt liquor and wine.
The only paper in reach smells
of something that smells of flowers.
No pen.

I could carve it into the cupboard door above me.
That would involve moving --
reaching down around my ankles
for my knife
and standing.

Why didn't she call?
When did I first stop chewing my food completely?
("Mastication" it is called.)

I could grab the book of matches
and burn this into myself
like a string.
Where? What would I burn?
How long?

Days when I cupped my hands behind my knees,
veins and tendons in my neck like cords to my jaw,
head like a light bulb just before it goes dark,
after the switch has been clicked off,
before the filament gets the message,
or stops getting the message.

My father used to stomp on my left foot
to make me quit complaining
how my right elbow
hurt.

I could think it over and over,
think it until it is part of me.
What language should I think it in?
What languages do I know?

The Rest

(For Lary Kleeman)

That square, stainless steel
pans crusted with burned lasagna
and corned beef hash on a square,
stainless steel table, wait for me.

That shopping carts are tipped over
in the street.

That the wind threatens to blow
my cap into the river
as I pedal through street light
on the bridge.

That men blow on cups of black coffee.

That my pores open, lungs fill
with steam from the silver machine.

That children learn to tie their shoes.

That the radio makes the same sounds.
D.J.s give away sandwiches
and announce birthdays.

That someone just quit smoking.

That the bells in the tower ring
when I step outside, into the day,
find my bike, and pedal home.

This much I know:

look

across the dim
room under
a table
the woman in
the velvet dress
has found
the knee of
the tall man
with her hand

Miss Sweet Sings Love Songs

I am ready
for tugs on braids,
for black licorice
and the stink of the still bay:
reflection so bright
I turn away
and whisper to myself.
I am ready for the day --

no, the early afternoon
thick with hickory smoke,
and I walk on my hands.
Orange needles poke
at my palms, gravel dents my skin.
I am ready for the heavy yoke,
yoke, the dull elbow,
what's left of this joke --

no, this unfriendly riddle
like mist around me.
And I scramble for the pieces,
scramble to complete the weave:
a pair of shoes, a fiddle,
and a ragged tapestry.
I am ready to cast and cast
and spill my bag of trees --

no, toothpicks, toothpicks
to build a tower to death --
no, a shrine to little dyings,
to quivers in a breath
and sores so small we hardly feel
or know we feel, or feel we know
when we are truly ready.
I am ready.

Poem
without the letter I

let's say a mother
watches her daughter
one boot one sandal
underpants a turtleneck
gallop over the yard
the daughter
on the damp grass
only the left sandal
and the snow boot
the yellow underpants
and turtleneck
the grass let's say
mashes where she gallops
the daughter
two wrong shoes
a boot a sandal
early May
the mother
on the porch
watches
sees her daughter
mash new grass
where she dances
where she gallops
the three year old
the faded turtleneck
underpants
the clean May
let us say we
have found content
the boot the gallop
the strap of the sandal
the mother's grey eyes
the blades
of mashed grass

As if by accident

I

The boy with dark
eyes and one foot
the size of a watermelon
drags it over the black,
lacquered floorboards
to the table where she sits
ripping corners
from her napkin.
He looks into her good eye.
His small foot taps time to
the song he wishes
he could get
out of his head.

Because of the milk
turning thick and yellow,
because the snow falls
like static straight
to the roofs of the cars,
he leans in, strokes
the hair from where
her left ear used
to be and whispers
into the hole.

II

There are robots made to resemble cows
just standing around like dots on green hills.
There are plastic pocket rulers with different
sized inches on sale at the dollar store.
I have seen them there, on the middle shelf,
next to a bin of left-handed scissors, yellow
bottles of garlic salt and tubes of cream.
There are people who think all of the time.

III

Juan Pedro Leotard sits on the bunk
with his fingers interlocked, resting
against his lap, his socks drying

over the edge of the toilet. He counts
the pink flecks in the linoleum. "In French,
37 phonemes are usually recognized; in German, 46."

He traces with his finger the outline
of the blue tulip tattooed on his forearm.

The Weather Girl

She says, "leave,"
and I tear a finger off
and sneak it between the sofa cushions.
I call her from my room.
I say, "Must have dropped it."
"Been having problems," I say.
And the weather girl gives
her strawberry hair
one hundred brush strokes,
the camera hums,
and the biscuits turn
the color of her cheeks
in the sunlit kitchen.
"Looks like rain," she says.

Today, I started walking every morning --
the execution of which requires
none of the gadgets about me.
She raps at my door and runs naked
to the neighbors' porch.
I turn up the music.
The trees along the boulevard
are on fire. The holder focuses
his hissing stream on a burning
attached to the burn.
The weather girl rubs her palms
and points the trigger
to the emerald curtain behind her.

Poem
without the letter U

Miss Sweet
inside the tent
she raised
sings at canvas
sheds her work pants
behold the clown
of clown
the soft palms
the silver action
of spoons
the long reflection
off a brass kettle
left where it is
from her thin
mattress
Miss Sweet
strokes her beard
thinks her songs
and dogs cry out
under overhangs
in the dark
fresh lime
settles
into dirt
fireweed clings
to the last
of stalks
cohos pass
over herring
real herring
slow shady herring.

After Thought

The tips of my ears are burning
the tips of my ears and the tip
of my nose and the blue-black
sky is full of every star you can
think of the moon is stuck behind
the mountain and my beard is stiff
and my tears are solid to my cheeks
and boys play at joysticks video pinball
space invaders orange marmalade
the woman kissed me the woman
with eyes like still mud-puddle water
said "you're nice as paper cups"
"kind as a tree with a swing in it"
and she kissed me

The daughter tucks
her long brown hair behind her ear
the men touch each other on their backs
say "Happy New Year" and "I love you"
and "Happy New Year" and the north wind
will burn your skin right off it's so cold
and the red church has lit its light again.

Sitting on a Man

On the Mooring Mast

He thinks egg
salad.
He thinks
the woman's hands
in the still
studio apartment.
He thinks the sun
and air.
He forgets
the Chrysler
building,
the pavement.
He counts aloud:
overalls, Sunday,
gloves.
On what
he has built,
the riveter
steadies his gun.
At the whistle,
he finds
a cracker box,
balances himself
with both hands,
looks down.

The Hyperbothesis

"To no one, in particular."

"Unconsciously Screaming"

This juggler fucked me in the biggest way,
This lying sonofabitch juggler. Know
This, Michael Moschen, I can read your hands,

Like wings of hummingbirds, or spokes of wheels
That circle slowly backwards as they roll.
They've started showing checkers on T.V.,

Real checker tournaments on Tuesday nights,
With death-row inmates out of Joliet
Who play a third-grade girl for their parole.

A woman cooking hashbrowns cranes her neck
To see if young Karina earned a king
Or double-jumped the rapist's last two men.

"This kid is pretty good," her husband says --
commercial break, and order now and we'll
throw in a vat of schnitzel, snow boots and . . .

They say that fingernails do not digest.
(They'll poke holes in your stomach and kill you.)
But Orpheus is sneaking them at night,

And Zeus, who never takes his pills, insists
On cramming all the dominoes he can
Into his t-shirt pocket, and when he

Bends down to tie his shoe, they all pour out.
At night, sometimes he sucks his thumb and cries
Until we cradle him and sing in French.

These gods are sorry losers, nurse. They think
That they invented competition. So
When they request it, never play their games.

And if you do -- now listen closely -- never
Let them win! Cheat. Or quit. But never give
Them nectar, nurse, or make them olive crowns.

Karina has just saved the world again, "Hurray!"

"First Song"

Nevermind Earth; sleep you,
you burning attached to this burn.
Search all the way to the womb--
can't remember good, bad ideas.
Self, self -- which?
Winter's bonfires, ridiculous in summer.

"On the sidewalk"

One patayta, two patayta, three patayta, four,
Cinnamon and sugar, buttered bread and borscht.
Four banana, five banana, six banana, seven,
Botswana has The Bomb, and Hitler is in Heaven.
Mississippi, Mississippi, Mississippi, Miss,
Children screaming "Chicklet," a peso for a stick.
Combat boot, combat boot, combat boot, step,
Soldiers in the street, red-winged blackbird in its nest.

"For in the deepest sense, we are
all writing the same poem":
in a skillet, melt a half cup butter
and turn the heat on low.
Then add the only moving thing,
a bird, and simmer songs
of nightingales, and mermaid's throats,
and gusts of rugged wings.

Hand over that voice box, young man,
and wipe that sidewalk clean,
before I break your mandible
for indecent loitering.

Son, look at me when I talk to you,
Remove that silly helmet,
Stick out that chest, and shine
Those tennis shoes.

The complement of set S, you see,
is the set of all points, which -- you see --
do not belong to S. You see?
So what's the hyperbothesis?

A cocktail made with bourbon, ice and lime?
A note you pass in choir class?
Or does it make a faucet leak?

No one can juggle twelve of anything.
Eleven is by far enough.

"This is my present to the world"

Reclining in the dentist's chair, Monique
decides that mentalism gets its roots
from men. "From now on," she says, "I refuse
to be a she to them." (Please rinse and spit.)

One feels one's stockings inching down one's legs.
One thinks the lesson one read from the Koran:
"Make medicine from suffering. Don't wish
for perfect health." (Open wider please, wider still.)

I am the we, and they: the everything.
I am pyramids and Luxembourg,
potato soup and Swan Lake. I exist,
create, and do not choose to reproduce.

Excuse me, miss, I am still reading this.
Excuse me, sir, you left it sitting here.

The store is low on food, "NO MILK TODAY."
But street performers need their calcium.
Tomorrow, I will juggle birthday cakes,
that is, if I can find some milk and eggs.
The flour and vanilla I still have,
but cows have quit producing milk, the hens
have formed a union, and "Gorillas shot
the mare." The puffin in his feathered cap
has organized a peace retreat on some
abandoned island in the Arctic Sea.
"Dime con quien andas, y te dire' quien eres."
Though no one will attend, the rumor is
the checker season will proceed as planned.

"Take pity on the small ones"

Just outside of Brainsville,
Under blankets, two
Girls are playing board games,
Goofing the rules.
Lara reads from the dictionary:
Elope -- "to run off secretly and marry."

This is the word of the Lord,
His word that has
Endured the play --

Persians and Greeks, turns
Of nature, and
The world's victors subdued.
And then he made a
Trumpet of his ass
Over the noise they make --
Even thumps of fists,
Screams that sound like thinking.

And Christophe, He

And Christophe, he
come back a year now
to his sister.
And now he skip
his skinny rope all day
and night.
And he pin twigs and flowers
in his hair and keep
us up with the whistling.

So Mary sit rocking
in the empty, yellow house.
And Christophe, he sing
"Peter, Peter, Peter"
on the path out front.
Some nights he tuck in ditches,
and he stroke the cattails
and pet the patches of soft clover.

And Mary hang the dotted
sheets out the attic window.
And Christophe, he drop the iron
key into the river when he wash
his amber hands. So Mary lean
her fair face against the screen
and sing "Glory to God in he highest."
And Christophe, he shine sunset
to the windows with his mirror.

Sitting on a Man

Wrapped in red and white
for the river, she raises
the cup of cloudy nectar
and spits in four directions
for the wind and the rocks
and the yams. And the women hang

their skirts from street signs
and beat their naked legs
and beat, with the heavy
wooden tools, the windshield
and the mirrors and the rich
leather of the red convertible.
And he sits wringing his hair

in fists. And there's a green skirt
flapping from the post office flagpole
and sheer, silk skirts floating
like leaves from high-rise windows.

And Dr. Archbold reclines
in his dentist chair, thumbing
through a magazine. And Father
Moxley smooths the thick, brown
paper with his palm, crosses
his legs, dots the tip
of his tongue with his pen.

Hypothesis

From her wheezing ten-speed, she forgets paper,
left-turn signals, and
flour. She forgets, too, those pine-scented fresheners.

Does every backyard fire have to make the paper?
Left there, where blue ranks
among primary colors, could you have?

Because the pencil was dull, because paper
left in a steam-filled
bedroom tends to become soggy, he used chalk

to scrawl the message on the green wallpaper,
left another long note
in the shag carpet with his index finger.

The cardinal's wings flap like brown grocery paper
left behind the chair.
How long can she keep riding with no hands?

A man has been hired to drop confetti paper.
Leftists will taper
in, past the iron gate. Soldiers will rape her

in typical soldier fashion. The paper
left in the presses
will read "Get Ready" and "Ha Ha" and "sorry."

But One Clown

And I feel _____ about it

I

Jillian drums her clarinet
against the cushion of
the overstuffed chair
and chants along with
the noise from the speaker.
"Yoo hoo walla walla,"
calls the man
from the ledge,
and glass doors
swing open
when the girl
in her Easter dress dances
on the carpet before them.
"This is Yi," the voice plucks
to the sound of clanking cattle.
"Yi is like you, is like,"
clank clank, moo clank, click.

II

I shall speak of the incident to the children --
indian style on rugs, wrapped in flannel blankets.
I shall feed them their spoons of red syrup.
Today's words: expressive, obsessive, dibble and kind.
Today's answer: three-hundred-sixty-five.

III

Zero degrees. Zero degrees
and her muffler tucked neatly
in the sleeve of her overcoat.
Jillian pretends to smoke
the cigar she sneaked from the study.

The children at the bus stop
turn their heads and tickle
one another, and she digs
her rubber boot into the drift
of greying snow.

IV

The woman grunts when she laughs,
and gags and stomps her leg
where her foot used to be. "Tell me
this," she is saying and wrings
her fist above the bright bouquet
of microphones.

Eluvial

Very likely,
the boy is dead. Very likely.
At the Wall of Monte Dificil,
the man forgets to shift his weight,
forgets the silver coin in his palm.
The seam of light spreads
down the long rock.

The woman elbows through the bodies
to the boy, who has yellow hair.
The girl smooths the hem
of her wool skirt with her rough hands
and pretends to look.

This is the tallest wall
the man (whose name is very likely Joaquin)
has ever seen.

When has he ever
held still this long?

The girl thinks: o.k., o.k.
The woman makes noises,
rocks the boy, strokes the yellow hair.

The boy seems much too old for that.
The man cannot even
scratch.

He is completely gone.

The girl's shadow is sharp
spilling against the jagged sandstone.

Everyone is looking up.

Alright, but not just yet

Ten polished shoes,
and we check
our wrist where our watch
used to be. Let men
who study science
write their views:
"All the tulip's got going
for itself is it's easy
to draw."

We hold it to light.
We fight for the eye holes.
As a child, we held cats
by their feet, dropped
the collection plate,
teased Tom Sweeney
in the shower. I hope
we said thank you,
I hope we did

a good job. It is dusk
too early. The leaves
have turned their silver
bottoms upward. "If we
are the devil, sit
perfectly still."
We practice our fists --
anticipate the clank
clank of wagons.

Adventures in dot to dot

Mr Clown holds the jar of yellow
artichoke hearts at arm's length.
He runs his thumb across
the label.

"Oh, what have I done
with my spectacles?" he says.

Sympathy Amanda O'Brian,
the three year old,
feeds money to the machine
and rocks atop the padded stool,
one, by one, by one.

Steering the perfect shopping cart
with his immense hips, Mr. Clown
selects only the finest cheeses
and tobaccos -- smears of white
on everything in his cart.

Sympathy Amanda has finally
learned the buttons. Amelia Suitcase,
in her window booth, is beaming. She says,
"darling" and "okay" and "trouble is"

Mr. Clown has bought his lot,
pulled his folding money from
inside his old, red shoe. He walks
in his stockings across the wet cement.

Therefore, young Sympathy marks
every square with a seven in it,
and Amelia Suitcase strokes
her silver hair and orders
her third plate of cheese fries.

In a warm corner of gravel
under the iron bridge, Mr. Clown
sinks his arms into his silly
pockets.

On the road above him,
the man in sagging overalls
stops and breathes and rests
the heavy, green buckets.

Neighbors

I tell them, "Leave the boy alone."
I tell them, "Return the boxes at once."
I tell them, "For God's sake,
loosen the chains and go."

The assistant manager motions
to the hoodlums in their argyle uniforms
and wipes the sugar sprinkles from her cheeks.
They dump him in a patch of mint.
"Try jumping now," one says.

The neighbors lug a green couch
into the horse trailer. They say
"sientate." They say "trabaja." The girl
drags a lamp behind them. Sparks
shoot from the sidewalk.

My room is cold.
Ants have piled cigarette butts
on the sunny corner of the porch.
The shabby cat stretches her claws.

He sings to me, the boy I made
from fingernails and hair.
He stays in the box beneath my desk
with a wadded scarf in his mouth
and spits his teeth at me.
The girl piles smooth rocks outside my door.
She says, "This means love."

I wake up in my neighbor's tree,
my head resting on a blanket,
my knees tucked inside my sweater.
I call out for a ladder
or a piece of paper and a cigarette --
whichever is easier.

I ask them please,
would they please stop throwing butternuts at me.