2000

Tigersprung

Kenneth White

The University of Montana

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TIGERSPRUNG

Poems

by

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Chair

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Date
It is quite clear that the only possession he has ("my skin is all I have to my name" is a common expression) weighs heavily on him. It is still in excess, because having and being do not coincide, and because having is a cause of misunderstanding in all human relationships: I have the skin of an angel but I am a jackal, the skin of a crocodile, but I am a dog; a black skin but I am white; the skin of a woman but I am a man. I never have the skin of what I am. There is no exception to the rule because I am never what I have.

--Mme. Orlan, on Didier Anzieu's concept of "Moi-peau"
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The man leans close to her neck; the music is too much for conversation, but they are experimenting. They are bunsen burners turned up too high; bubbles rise all around and strange green fire. The man speaks into the woman’s ear. She nods and tugs up the corners of her mouth like a movie he’s seen before that he is in. Even now, something gathers around the legs of his chair. One chews at the hem of his pants, grooming its whiskers.

Laughter from the last valley. Village brats fly to him, echoes to their home, strewing pastries and Sega controllers. They have dimples and small eyes. He burps and velveteen tree limbs. He tries to stop. He says Stop! and a little round-faced boy with furry, marigold ears falls from his mouth and holds out his arms to be carried. The man bites down and runs, surefooted and syllabic. Stride for stride with him is the feeling that every incarnation is a track star. His keen starts like a dog whistle and an urchin with marathon lungs starts to pry his jaws apart, urgent to get this thing going.
NO MONOCLE NO WICKED CONSCIENCE

A peeled orange held to the nine o’clock sun. Red cells
spun in a vial, an amber bladder taut with shining gloss
and through the open window, light. Rose madder
shot with spidery purple vessels, inner gold leaf,
Byzantine, those first hermetic visions of the word afire
and sound sealed coracles filled with oil, lit adrift.
In Sanskrit the very word for this, how light begins,
the sound of it. Stripped from between
myself in segments, room divided
against the whirl of the desk globe
intact, blurring Pacific with Ukraine -- when
eighth by eighth myself in farflung quarters bound
for home by clipper ship, steamer, dogsled
paired with spice and black market tusks
in the gullet of a Junk, one last run
unpirated. Matter’s fever for matter.

Hold this jewel and any fascicle of fluids
against each other and atmosphere relaxes,
flooding cells with a concert of radiant madeira and proof
of light’s particular gravity, unmeasurable, waving
ambient concern and other lesser arcadia. In Vitro, the lense
contains me, instructs the light between my eye
and what my eye infects with examination.
Whose slow shutter opens on the shore
to the bay where a galleon holds
its masts in focus for the gulls and the crew
stands smartly on deck? Who stands at full attention?
Twinned flags make in a low cloud a glass
holding back sails, these birds, this Caspian sea --
simple room open over morning orchards.
FROM THE VAMPIRE BALLET

Tutued necrophiliacs grande jete from stage left to right while the assistants sprinkle pressed leaves spray-painted to look like bats from the catwalk, deliciously precarious. On the marley floor, in the light of pink gels diffused, succubi drown in pools of their own excessive fabric, reflected. The scrim’s a dirty sheet cunningly lit. I think the crepe capes were a nice choice although the glitter’s a bit passe and Lucy’s been at the chocolate again I see. Gauzy from the wings, the delighted faces impecuniously mauve through cloth; row by row arranged, vaguely gleaming, their seats loom over the stage, a gallery of lovers I’ll never meet. I’ve quit the set and the director’s daughter, high strung marionette, lovely late matinee. I’m missing my entrance. A pause for effect, the audience thinks, until one wattled gent in a pricey seat huffs upright in a hurry -- the first of many-- but only makes it three steps before his curtain drops. He rose far too quickly. His wife, to her credit caught him partially. Someone calls for a doctor. There are several. The stage hands heave more leaves down onto the stage. People gather their scarves beside gabardined knees and three inch heels. The man straightens his glasses, brushes himself off. Someone snaps their fingers over and over. Our eyes meet, an unexpected draft. I see that inside his head a thousand craniums finally slide down their pikes. He tries to everything. He tries to -- there, there. We’ll take care of it directly.
AT THE WHALE'S EQUATOR

Each moment suffocates the next.
The downturned U of the old
railroad tunnel, open arms, an oilspill.
He aims for the faint wink of a lighthouse
above a landlocked reef, ignores
another's breath in the ink, ignores walls
with rusty hands, patient rake handles.
He aims for the distant eardrum as it rises,
the end of the canal. A new
exterior shakes itself awake
and pulls on its thin silver bathrobe
with the delicate embroidery.
Nonchalant, into a familiar room
with a reading chair he strolls
over a grim rorschach of graffiti. This girl --
he knows her, head like a thistle, her insistent
press skyward. The world
under his feet. Taxi! and it comes,
pulls him again into the amniotic rush.
To find relevance -- there's his trident
and dim headlamp. The sky an oilslicked sea
understood. He is beneath, a miner
alive in the belly, miner that swings
his birdcage with its bird inside.
THE BUTCHER

At night, the shop door locked, he wrestles twilight
to a copper scab, crop hours
rehearsing stitches with a curved needle
and heavy thread. He sews the necks shut
on the pigs' heads and line them back up
on the locker shelf,
but everything he does makes a new wound.

Give him a crisscrossed block,
two good files and a pail
to throw the fat in, then stand back
and remark how sharp
the grins are sliced in mutton.
It only takes a moment
to become the center of his own attention.

Some days he'd kill for the color blue
that wasn't the filmy blue of cold veins.
He worries that all his hair is falling out into the meat
but put a knife in his hand and he relaxes.

Past the smells of the shop and the stares
of the neighbors stacked
shirtsleeved in their windows,
past miles of gray and rust,
the upturned collar of his figure
grows smaller as he hurries west
to seize him in the dark.
BEDOUIN

The dancers couldn’t outleap their leotarded carrion though at any chance they’d have dropped themselves, bulky capes pooled around curved, muscular feet, articulate as a scimitar’s flash, distant vulture beaks. On the balcony behind his ear draped the parts of himself most crazed and sordid across seatbacks like a tawny desert cat. Tumbling chain links against hot glass in its throat couldn’t drown the woman’s long fingernails, their whirred hymn urgent across the fabric of his pantleg.

He drove home at four a.m. again through drought of another year.

He is not as brave as she who wandered into the dunes after the children ate the final hawk and sucked its shins, its talons licked to jewels like earrings against a pillowcase, but to say he stumbled is a lie. He wanted to lie down in all those crumbled carapaces ground to meal by time and the abrasive love of other carapaces, that he might forget his body by giving in to it, shrink to a slit while the shadows increase, wheel lazy on concrete, acrobatic as multiple griefs. Patient, sensual glut, for the moment out of reach.
CONDEMNED TO SPEECH AND DECEIT

Only the scaffold steps will know, and even then
the crowd could coat his hair with spit
or revolt and send him back into the thicket,
its clever roulette of variable deaths.
Should failure wink from the capable gleam
of instruments, he'll ask the merciless outline
of turrets which archer might lend an arrow. He must not
confess. His turgid, redolent, sensual sins
pile up, threaten to bury him or blossom
with the quick spores of injury. Thirty-seven flagstones
describe his cell. Let him convalesce
in sedimented wine glasses or let him vanish
in the snare's brief, portentous O.

As General he lolled in the slow construction of his sheets,
glossy forehead clear as a shield. No roil of burning wheat
or its looped black signature. Such expectation
last night in his lonely garrison. At the feast
her broad hips were his figment, rolling socket
to socket with the timbrel's rattle, a promise
behind gauze curtains. He leered over a platter
of greasy meats, drained flagons to the bubble,
every breath engorged with the professions
of her waist, the wealth of his table.

When I started these books they had no end and now
I've read them twice. There is a kindness of hours
when it's light. Who died in the barley harvest
left Judith in the night to flex her white forearm, cut
to the spine an army's channeled ligature, then hold up head
and falchion spattered with Holofernes' caustic
blood. I dangle from her fist by my roots
and turn the page. From the door of my internment the maid
gnaws her lip in dull amaze; after all, my beard
was so thick, my thighs like masts and now the hound
of the Assyrians gurgles artesian over his own hands.
The maid blinks, makes ready the bag.
Close your eyes and it's over so quick.
ASCENSION

The farmer stoops to make the tin pail ring
under the Gurnsey's vast, raw udder, under
the sharp, teat beak of the iron weathervane
pinned deafmute to the roof.
Its rooster comb spins to the field
where the long grass will this evening
meet the scythe's impartial curl.
Growing fat and shitting in the horse's grain,
the loudest mouse in a barrel of mice
claws and whistles amid round goodwill
until the farmer's son
picks him out by the tail.
Dumb to seduction
the ship ribbed dairy cow hoists her idiot sail
across the packed dirt and sets to work
flinging her whole small attention
into rubbing the knobbed rind of her skull
against the board swinging at the corner
of the barn, while in the reeking shade
the pig stalls in ooze, quick heaves
from its long, curved jaw, an unoiled wheeze
that before each foot cleaved into a hoof,
each lid closed an eye, began cell deep.
MY GIG ON EARTH

I deliver hay by scent.
Nine Hanoverian appetites mull in midnight broth,
stilted stomachs, intestine miles. How their masticating ways
-crack a morning in half like an apple. A light wind blinds me.
All the pre-carrot paste from the carrot factory
wouldn't do me any good during the new moon
I'm afraid -- dark is dark and the hot wire's electrified.
The current of surprise lasts all day. Endure the arc;
it pays to find the break before the horses do.
This is the life I vowed to leave in the barn loft
-as the school bus snickered away. I staggered
five gallon twins to the trough among
the paddock residents and their other qualities --
cables of urine threading into mud, the famous delegates
of cockleburr and steam. Adolescent coyotes
smoke their homerolled smokes behind the haystack.
Maybe something will catch. Maybe they'll turn
the collie to the hard stuff or the winter pipes
will freeze and I'll have to roast
the yearling with an apple in his teeth
to thaw them; the good of one
beneath the good of many. Nameplates simmer
in rows before the pitchfork antidote.
One impatient foreleg repeats like a trick
countdown, mounds of dirty straw on the hill.
TRESPASS

The man slid through the dark
window to steal our good thing.
My sister knocked the bedstand over
clawing him off of her.
I woke in the forest without knowing
how I stood there, scanning for his back
among the black trunks of trees.

She says she hears breathing
behind every seat, tries each lock,
finds each lock weak.
I drape thread across trails
so I’ll know where to wait,
and mother my violence
with an eyedropper.

This forest is deep.
I’ve checked all the fences.
My sister is sleeping
and plans to wake late.
When the dog stirs, I stir,
and weigh hard decision
against outside sentence. The scale
sings what it slurred before:
there are always consequences.
Nocturne: Gunshot in a Field

The inside of one wrist beats hard against the inside of the other wrist, and his fingers stretch down behind him toward dirt. He kneels in the suggestion of a furrow, tries to remember the pattern of the bathroom tiles. He could have loved the day more if he had known -- after the dregs of his coffee, he also would have eaten the grounds, which he threw away.

He wants to be much smaller, a beggar disguised as a beggar, kneeling unnoticeable under the hedge.

Edgily, at the furthest rim of sight, a flash, abrupt as a cut nerve. From nothing, a seed of fire becomes bouquet, becomes a bright root waking at the back of a closet, holding aside for an instant heavy velour, then giving in to it.
Waiting By The Magazines

He needs bar soap and likes the kind
he can reach in barren aisles
at two a.m. Among frozen concentrates
he prefers cranberry juice cocktail's
convenient shelf. He remembers the deep electric
disconnection like two strong hands
twisting the knob end from a corn cob
hidden deep inside of him. After his hipbone
cracked the plastic dash and all the little green lit gauges
fluttered off and on and off, he went black
to sirens. Milk in cadaverous rows behind the slap
and kiss of glass doors remains motionless
in the fluorescent hum. He needs bread.
The bakery’s closed. It’s been six years since
the ditch grass rushed the windshield. Within
the first six months Laura left twice, and the last time
stayed gone, but beside dried fruit, the sweet, shriveled
raisins he imagines she could come back.
Or he’ll walk. Both visions are heavy so he props
a six-pack on thighs that once stretched
pantseams and fantasizes one good piss
free of a catheter, the sound of fluid
as it travels tubing is smaller than the sounds
she made in his ear as he held her
as they danced in a bar or after,
in the kitchen, when they made love
against the refrigerator.
The starling folded into the dark flower of itself
and dropped from the black sail of starling
telepathies, bound alternately for both horizons
and fell, changed to a snail shell dropped
from a kite's beak, struck the pond, heavier
than the rosette trail of the water skippers, heavier
than your girlish handwriting, predictable,
inexplicable, and still all this imagining
is not enough. I leave it there,
reachable, although there is nothing can fill
this distance, no floral stationery
order, no phone's red message --
I'm bound by turns for any destination
without post. The mail truck wobbles
from the mailbox, but I'll wait until dark
before I crack that gate. Send words
and I'll stack them with the rest, beside the pond,
hold them with a single stone, a monument
against tomorrow's inclement weather,
the deception that only motion seems complete.
One water skipper briefly pauses
in the mirrored cloud of birds
unfurled like a linen sheet blown
from the line, settling
drowsily over the stubble of last season's wheat.
Rechtenwald's salamander, or so says Ray, is subject to a frayed attention span.
Jaime loves all reptiles for their steadfastness, even the pit vipers.
Jaime never gets asked to dance.

And because Ray is descended from the first carburation he rasps free advice in a pocky tenor, breathes grease and pulls baling wire from around the engine block.

Oh, Irene and her damn sugar spine!
Her extremities were never truly colonized.
We're gonna have to pull this engine.

I crouch on a milkcrate. You hang on to this and we'll get it out just fine. Don't let the cables foul.
Ray rigs some pulley system that almost works until the come-along jams. He tries to fix it but the release lever gives and the cable rips right through my grip and past my ear. Signs a stripe so clear and antiseptic across my hands that I have no questions. I know what happened. All skin is sacrifice to friction. This I understand. Not like that other pain.
WHY I SPIT IN THE WATER TROUGH

How they sense it evades me. 
Each morning the same favorite joke: cavalcade 
of bladders in synchronicity, great butterstick teeth 
aimed my way. I pretend to fumble with buckets of grain 
and doolatches until I’m certain they get the picture 
which is that I’m in charge -- sure, I muck stalls 
and shoulder bales around, an alfalfa stacker 
from way back, but daren’t spitefully bepiss 
straw gathered by the pitchfork whipped 
toward the wheelbarrow carted by the hand that feeds 
you or so the saying goes. I feign a trip 
at the lead mare’s door to cement the pact 
and stare her down. I’ve learned this tactic’s impact 
superior to a headbutt -- still, once in a while, 
equine sarcasm sorely underestimated as it is, their timing 
in scope approaches professional; when I’m navelgazing, 
one blazed long face drops over the dutch door as bait 
for me to notice and with a question turn 
toward the blow, forceful from a nostril bright green 
atomies, a nasal procedure horses have the patent on, 
with the desired effect of rousing any latent 
rage. Meanwhile deceptive in the ambient 
light, morning diffused, the beast composed, beatific 
as I draw a flannel sleeve across my 
spattered forehead and left cheek, dangles 
her leaf-veined face, trying to sucker 
me into a repeat performance but even my knobbed 
skull learns real good upon occasion. 
Before the other barrel unloads I turn my back -- 
take the thick brunt on my neck before her triumphant song 
and victory lap, trailing supporters, around the paddock.
Easing down from the sharp air of January he once broke the surface of some hot springs with his body, just as that morning he had used a hatchet to break the surface of the ice in the water trough so the horse could drink.

He grew warmer as his task progressed. Walnuts dropped from an overpass break with a delicious crack. He was on his third tablet of paper before he addressed the topic of collarbones. Engines and rubber bands followed close. He couldn’t decide whether sound broke or bent so he told himself that tablelegs could take precedence and edged ahead to the camel’s back and pencil leads. Then the wrecking ball of an early morning phone call reminded him that what breaks is also subject to its own hierarchy and he had started on the beach, apportioning one break to every grain and fractured rock.

So he stayed up late with a black marking pen and weighed what fit, then made thick, black Xes through all the rest.

What made the cut was closest to the coffin, in the front row his face breaking open until his composure rose finally, ornamental as a red-rimmed carp, its mouth a repeated oval.

His shoulders bent, quivered as if sinew strung him from jawbone to toes. Then the string broke and the bow broke also.
III.
PHOSPHORESCENT

The androgyne for hours molds itself in wax. Look at it, it's everything -- even the flyshells on the sill even the sun. The threads of your housecoat are sad even the smoke from your nostrils is crying. Here under the earth this could be copper or coal -- the point is dust. Diagnosis: Goldlung. Even the weevil even the oatcrossed tongue. Mud on mud, the man closed in peat, last hibernation before the scientists come. Even as bald as a barrow wight contemplating its bony thumb. Even asleep the follicles of your scalp are hidden even the gala of your blood is dumb. Even the face in the bark, the bark of your prisoner lung, pilloried silk, spills its hidden arc. Even carded, even spun. Even the candle of your neck is supple, even your swamp is haunted. Even by beetles, castling dung. That's not god or wheat kneeling down in a wheel or a ghost with a lullaby, even at ten, even at dusk. Not the husk prepared and not the corn, not a single yellow crumb. Draw the shutter, the oven's ready; the curtain's come undone. Even together, even apart, that's just some old body closing shop. Even for now, even for good, giving its good light up.
THE TRUE STORY OF THE TOES

The left great toe a lathe-turned pear, a maestro at his podium. The right a muscled troll
glistening at the smithy under the bridge, thick with goat flesh, with
whole milk
squeezed from the hide bag coathooked beside the door. The left
toe, Arthur,

was not strong enough to hold a pirouette but was wonderfully
articulate, pointing out
the first pale mornings of April from his sandal, pausing in the
delicate comma
of his hair, then capering -- wee, wee, wee, wee.

The stout right Malcolm calloused by years of forcing the offense
left, broke boars
against his dull leaf, at night watched the window’s gold flag press
Arthur’s barbican,
ripple with the lamp. Malcolm ciphered ciphered ciphered on his
drafting board.

Sometimes I would spend entire days in the company of my great
left Arthur.
He had a library to the ceiling and could hum Rakhmaninov
convincingly. Arthur dazzled me
with his choreography -- oh, my virtuoso. I tried to see the left
great toe in me.

Malcolm sooted my right boot and caused the seams stress.
Clickety-clack, clickety-clack, clickety-hungry right toe. Sometimes
Malcom mixed wine with his milk and let it curdle
into a near pudding that stained the carbon papers spread like
Autumn across his lap.

Arthur intimated that his sock drawer had been rifled and green
thread sewn
through the haphazard tapestry. His sitting room smelled of burned
turf.
He could hear the tink-tap from Malcolm’s midnight oven glowing
workshop.
One morning woke and staring out from the comforter cover was Arthur. Arthur! Arthur! Narrow waisted Arthur looked a consumptive matador in his graceful worry, but the red cape was Malcolm’s when I tugged back the duvet. Emphatic beet! Malcolm? Malcolm? Malcolm beamed rawly through all his failure; he had outdone the early lawnmower. This had seemed a routine stubbing, but a blackened coliseum and devastated aqueducts accompanied Malcolm’s hematic glower. His carriage delayed when the plan went off-- a forgotten glove -- Arthur knew a close one when he felt it. The tiny armies of Epsom salts affixed bayonets, marched into the sea. Over tender months, beside Arthur’s pure tenor, stubborn Malcolm’s shower silence changed to subtle basso noticed first by porcelain and then by soap; he fed their fallow taste for tremor.

Malcolm grew back a rippled tortoise for his forehead. Arthur wore his gifted, crooked brooch while stirring fishhead stew with brie. The cello was too genteel so Malcolm learned the fiddle, composed a reel about stolen cows and breakfasting on gristle. Arthur used the clippers and let the cotton ball slide; at last we all shared an uneasy slipper. Still asleep in wool blend socks -- merino and lycra -- the toes had both agreed the mornings were cold enough to compromise. I started toward a window to listen to the leaves but thought of tea coating the inner cup like the memory of a banished limp, of my body snug in accord with my body. At this my kneeling nerve bundles tittered behind the altar of their hands. My robe fell open. Hesitantly, an unnamed nipple piped up.
THE GREAT JEALOUSY OF STONE

Igneous, I rose, welted
the view on the valley
of the river, febrile
intermezzo before sump
congealed in gutter strata, before
some aggregation of nerve
called out, conceived
what nerve controlled.
Wailed a pink cleat,
animate loam
reeking of soft molecules,
empty hallways,
bone's flawed bituminous --
by all known standards
hardly molten.
Parried my confederacy
with duration, each seismic
twitch and won, monopolized
sensation, claimed
the fields now tilled
beside the river named.
Without mouth or skin or one
withe to tremble.
Sealed from furnace my heaven
those first days of motion.
Let the soil reveal
how bitten heat
deserts, leaving just
crater, cool hearth,
hurried note.
TIGERSPRUNG

"The tiger walked humanly enough on its two hind legs; it wore the suit of a dandy in the most refined elegance, and this suit was so perfectly tailored that it was difficult to distinguish the body of the animal underneath..."

Jean Ferry, "Le Tigre Mondain"

This was coffee with Avery. I’m a monkey, Mondain said and waved his monkey gloves. As he stirred clumped sugar a hair drifted, clung to the rim of his cup. Avery believed everything.

A plaintive bleat of a village goat staked in a clearing. Mondain loved L.A. In Myna tones he phoned Miranda, who didn’t know his voice and hung up repeatedly. When she stopped answering, myna-perfect he mimicked ringing. That morning a toucan mask for his job at the fashion magazine. Wheat germ smoothies with spirulina and whey protein. These and toucan colors were much in vogue, Fridays at the fashion magazine. The magazine staff clapped and clapped. In his office, a painting of tall grass, an oscillating fan, a photo of Miranda. Sheila from graphics asked out his cufflinks for a Cuba Libre after work. He would accompany them to keep it complicated. Was excited until five o’clock, at five o’clock he exited. To prepare he taped his whiskers back behind a Moray mask wide enough to hide the twitch. Moray was opalescent gleam, was coral reef. Mondain’s whiskers itched. Mondain almost gave himself away by jumping over a bus. Sheila’s haunch and strut inspired that in him, a reckless leap and hurried explanation. He never planned it; he planned against it. When it happened
he always made it. Moray was scintillant but not too meek, which did not go unnoticed by patrons at The Watering Hole, sidled up to teak, among them amber-irised Miranda, barstool prised between her knees, gaze-locked with a Gnu in boots, his audacious, flaunted golden tooth, which he would lose. Mondain’s moment froze. Sheila’s elbow came unglued.

Miranda’s hair a stung, cruel orange, and conscienceless as angry bees smoked down rows of com. Her hair was early August to a T. Mondain passed by. Miranda took him in dismissively as too well coiffed an eel and on the make. What a disguise! She looked at him and didn’t leave! He shot his cuffs, made section B his coral reef. The cocktail server rolled her eyes, smiled, revealed rows of well-capped teeth.

Carved, the bar was thick, had swivel seats. Mondain felt his drink was watered down, in fact so weak that he had several, suggested Sheila had been stalking him from a blind beside the office coffee.

Behind his smile, Gnu’s home run had cleared the park, his stock was on the rise. He sauntered closer; those freckled cheeks, those feral eyes! He’d be her first date in weeks, poor thing. Miranda fluttered slowly her cocktail napkin and drew him in.

Miranda swished, Mondain stirred and stirred. Sheila called the Libre plenty mixed. He had tried so hard until she left; it must be something on the gene that made Miranda’s stare so fixed. He watched her flutter work.
Gnu swore he saw her number on it — he was in for sure. Gaskets on his engine rattled, he had revved his charm full throttle when the electric chandelier spit a spark like Miranda’s spittle of derision that found its mark in Gnu’s *Naked on The Beach*, now in range,

affected him like gasoline; his nostrils flared and temper! Miranda’s gravel laugh deployed and behind the delicate mail of his mask Mondain’s ear fur stirred; when last he’d heard that thistle rustle an apartment building burned.

Sheila tried to leave, he caught a claw in her boucle and blamed it on the table, called the waiter for a rasp to smooth the rough away when his larynx sprung its clasp.

Heat lightning woke in a tinder jungle; his vocal slip was flint. Sheila stepped back from the table and Miranda’s pupils thinned, Gnu turned his back, started walking, murmured, *Bitch!*

It was overnight they say, that all stripes Mondain had remaining turned to white. Miranda’s cut cable hum still etched into his ear, there among scattered swizzle sticks and the lingering mist of beer. Her first move simultaneously took the mirror,

her target and a dart midair. By her second spring the bar was clear. Mondain’s fervent wish: a fishtank hat to float his boulevard to a distant block, enough protective bubble wrap for a tailored suit and Gaultier’s own bungee cummerbund, elastic kevlar, rubbleproof.

From the weak remainder of his diaphragm, rich conniptions rattled a last bottle to the floor, where scotch and glass and voice pooled, saturated the corner carpet where he hurled his cane. He followed where his rumble ran.
The sun gone down on Burma. Tales around a poacher’s fire.
The sun gone down on Bangladesh. A blue-shelled beetle stilled in trash.
The sun gone down on Los Angeles. Roar or nothing. Roar or nothing.
It appeared the lamb had just up and run off.
The lion sniffled and whumped and overdid the bluff
but nobody cared, they thought God
would handle it like he handled the Egyptians
but when no locusts, lesions, adult-onset acne
or even any annoying nervous tics manifested
the people got pretty frisky, started sleeping
with each other’s fathers, secretaries and casseroles,
shooting pomeranians and leaving mouldy cheddar
on their neighbors’ windowsills, not to mention
some monkey business regarding a golden cow.
Well let me tell you
when God came back from ___________
to find circumstances were not as he commanded, he was not
pleased.
You could say God was pissed. He turned all kinds of things to salt
and set them on fire. He scattered the people with a divine loogy
and flipped them the bird -- the same unbridled verve
that had the Old Testament retired. Some fellow
crawling away from the wreckage didn’t realize his knees
left weird little splotches on the rocks. And the sand, whew!
Well the sand was in his eyes and throat
and he wondered what he had ever seen in those secretaries.
Just before his lungs filled with dust and that funny rattle
this poor sap started thinking what everyone
for the past very long time must have thought
there at the end when . . . Whoa, hold on.
It’s tough to say, I wasn’t there and that’s not even
the real ending. Sometimes I make things up. This is how it
continues:
. . . thinking that he really liked riding his motorcycle
through the curves around the lake road, 1200cc’s of shiny chrome
and he couldn’t wait to hit the next straight stretch
and open her up. Open her up he did and I can only speculate
how at first he must have been pretty thrilled
after putting along at 35MPH all afternoon
but then I hope it seemed like the feeling a waiter gets,
or we have no warning, as he carries a tray of wineglasses
each threequarters filled. That feeling just outside the kitchen door
before he goes in where the mopwater’s spilled, that moment right before
he hits the floor. So the memory of last night’s
asparagus.
For some reason this outweighs the usual fantasy
about starring in C.H.I.P.S. and how he wouldn’t have made
the same career choices as Erik Estrada, he would have been
more careful. The asparagus was very green.
He was interrupted then by a commotion from the restaurant kitchen,
a dull thump and breaking glass. Two, maybe three seconds
before the patrons’ knowing smirks across the tables
at each other, as if they all shared some grace that kept them
from harm, grace and understanding, grace and relief
clear as a telegraph. Then on the dike where the road unwound
and his bent wrist urged the bike forward, his own flower
sudden as a flare gun The old world swerved, shuddered.
He recovered enough to brake and look back. Why am I telling this? I’m
not
going to sucker you with some sob story about a little girl
and bad timing, I’m sure people get killed by motorcycles
all the time. But when I heard I just thought, Shit! How many
moments wait to blindside all of us? It wasn’t me
on the motorcycle or me on the road or even me
standing on the trestle logs with the rest of the family, red-and-white
bobbers
below them like signal fires on the water and even if it had been
I couldn’t have done a thing to stop it
I could only have slugged the guy afterward and thought that it hurt him
through his new, persistent numbness. Later I’d have had that memory
of my own dumb smallness stacked with all the others. I’m not alone,
right?
Haven’t we all at sometime wanted to hurt . . . ? C’mon, I’m trying
to open up, here. You know, I share my feelings with you
and you share your feelings with — Wait.
I didn’t make that up but that’s not how the story ends. This is the real
conclusion: You’re the guy with the scabby knees, crawling away
from the fiasco, under the assumption you’ll live
to make more messes. You’re the one . . . No.
That’s not true. Let’s begin again. Okay
I was there, we all were there but it happened to be me on the hill, yes
I’m the guy with the hamburger knees, doing my best to get up and run
from all the cheap stunts I’d done and worse
the most horrible things so easily avoided
but instead I drank from that well again and again.
I stole the gold to make the cow, seduced my brother's wife and all the neighbor boys' girlfriends and made the men smell my fingers before I kicked them in the stomach. Oh yeah, we were drunk and it was all in fun. Now I wriggle toward that beach where those farflung traumas accumulate, wedge in the funnel gummed by deceit and all the prurient pleasure I took in it. If it wasn't a move to set my nerves 'ashimmer it was wasted. Observe the aerial shot taken from the choppers as they converge. I'm a brave beetle in the mechanical wind and slash my staff at the waves, but if anything they draw closer, gray as a mopbucket. Above me questions populate the intricate horizon, buckle their bucklers and mount. As one they lower their hard visors. For a moment there is a small silence, you know that silence when the brindle bulldog is too strong for its chain and just before the final instant of strain, that instant before the first link breaks? I hear it and try to laugh. You know the rest, how the horns sound and the slopes turn black. How as the initial arrows strike the water all I can do is wait for the first rank of questions to consummate attack: Can this be real? Has my whole life been carnage? Is it too late to change? Can I take it back?
REST, ICE, COMPRESSION AND ELEVATION

The rages that small animals have had Felicia, being small, being animal, wearing mascara on occasions that required them. Massaging the orbature of her face, the fascia along her masseter, Felicia a palpable tension detected there, steady as the tremor of new incisors about to erupt, nullifying the November Ashram issue of whether or not her navy leotard would find appropriate fit on hips that commonly spun wicked -- chronic sciatica from the gymnastic mishap considered -- cyclones of desire beneath the cummerbunds of men both real and imagined, including swamis, a subject only of calories, style and cummerbund. material, the quality thereof and also the imagined men, who, like gurus and leotard fabric, could prove uncannily tensile under stress or run on a whim, often just where the sciatic nerve stripes attention to the derriere, racing from sacrum to heel so that the incisors of surrounding men, real ones, glisten in the presence of Felicia’s waterproof - mascaraed eyes, intercepting the act of measuring her rear, to which they respond with smiles, elastic as the fascia in the erector spinae of Felicia’s Hatha Yoga instructor, whom she calls Baba, whose divine fascia lounges in the Piow not only in the studio but on the bus if there is room. For Baba a leotard never really is an option considered, peeled like his real name Carroll, whose chronic sciatica improved greatly after decades of stretching, long since having left that neoprene cummerbund lumbar supporter with the forklift job and his ex-wife, who still holds the Mary Kay mascara sales record in the Pacific region. The shrew is a voracious eater, whose incisors
do the work of many looms. If at a spinning wheel -- sharks are production
plants for incisors,
rows and rows of them -- and that wheel happens to be at sea, the chances
of developing sciatica
from hunching over the spindle while the deck rolls, is high. When it rains,
cheap mascara
will run down the face like inky -- let’s just say it implies sadness, which
limits the fascia’s
flexibility by producing hormones that increase tension, until like Elvis
Presley’s cummerbund,
the sea spinner at the wheel and spindle will be a bound rhino in an
industrial leotard

and unable to execute even a simple backbend, hip thrust, with or without
the svelte leotard
of the professional. Time and again black is a slimming color that seems to
shrink the very fascia
that cozens us as one bundle like bark around a cottonwood, a favorite
target for beaver incisors,
beavers that gnaw questionless and build in the course of things. Baba’s
back is fine. Is sciatica
a problem for beavers? It seems more likely the affliction of that
strangulating cummerbund
of C-spine subluxation would affect them, but philosophies that for humans
serve as a mask or a

balm -- I dare say as both sword and shield, are far from the driven,
glinting, mascara
rimmed eyes of beavers, unassailed by the question of whether to gnaw or
not, summon incisors
divine from the gum. Paisley has made at least two title runs as the
cummerbund
print of choice, but was each time overturned by the slim, pharonic black of
the catsuit leotard
underneath everything at one time, but covered, yea, smothered Felicia’s
pliant fascia,
the dissention flaring there, a lengthy smolder untouched by Yogic
influence, invisible as sciatica
to the outside world, defended by kevlar fascia from the specialized fire hoses of the mascara testers, flashing dress-shoe incisors, distorted under nylon leotards and slitted cummerbunds, behind which, incendiary searchlights cross and recross beams over the professed innocence of a calm sciatic.
TREPIDATION

about being in motion, about
the secret color factory, the slightest taint of black and the smallest
incidents bear up under considerably more pressure that they’re built for.
Motionlessness is key -- one tack pinions the whole crewelwork,
the last seam of the table, the vanishing point so skewed
perspective’s a thing denied in the frame. Mylar soft sculptures
hung from the art building’s top floor, passersby reflected
in fluttering mirrors and the warning Lest you man the irons too, pass by.
Painting class, whereupon a chessboard is set clever
on tabletop cluttered with the knight’s face,
warped windsock bent through the window and genius
blithely diving into whipped color, a froth, a far off room
pigmented godly in drab world. Neglected
small detail. Very nice but a terrible table rendered there in oil
couldn’t even be sat at. There’s no way to sit at that table.
If the distance from here to there weren’t prohibitive, admit -- hardly
traversable, the whole distance in one date -- training for it
requires more energy than willingness
to commit, currently, to a sustained effort
that could adversely affect us. This, by the way, is off
limits. There are Chinas of things can go missing.
And those Other machineries, with Still Life on Table and
Still Life on Table with Breakfast Service, rest in the studio,
on folded fabric, silver polish after hours.
Hold up to life’s still window light, translate these
woven fibers into something real, not some engineered fruit
in a basket on the impeccable palanquin table,
made of the fluctuations of unassuming beige. Finally
incarnations of beige you can feel! She has photos
of the top of a cheetah’s head as it lay panting
beneath the jeep door -- the inexplicable arrival of a color
no one’s ever seen before that burns undeniably beyond neutral
and I feel it. She said she could -- what did you bring me?
More ecru or eggshell dusty door, color mutes -- a wet
seal gray, which evaporates and settles far away
as ash finds its ways into the woods, leached
for years of spring color -- bricks, matchbox cities
inviolable cisterns, low insurance rates, economic booms and the first
jittery signals of insurrection, last fits of wandering
among another's flock in the adjacent field
--dull Merinos, multicolored archipelago in this uncertain
relationship, pulling up roots, the impulse to soft-shoe a little
in lullaby patterns, my feet have drifted, will drift and we return
vigilant to the small details.
The tall woman in black with cheekbones that struck Joe like hatchets on his own cheekbones suggested an orange construction worker's shirt with the sleeves cut off that she called a wifebeater and hurried into her room to find it before the people started arriving and drinking her liquor. When Joe followed her in she was sifting through mounds of clothes like multicolored graves that buried the bed and brushed the pink curtains on the room's only window. She said he might help if he didn't mind, and Joe, who hadn't really been drinking, thought that wasn't such a strange request. He looked over and under everything, but the closest he came to anything concerning construction was a dented hardhat hidden under an empty hamper by a worn toolbelt, and Joe, who was above all else courteous, didn't ask any questions.

Finally the woman dismantled her dresser installation like an installation surgeon, her long hands parting and categorizing, stopping clothing leakage with direct pressure. She said the wifebeater had been absorbed like a litter of rabbit fetuses. Joe said he didn't get it. When the point where a cigarette would have been nice had almost evolved into the point where Joe could go naked or wear a wheelbarrow for all she cared, the woman made a sound like yum. Joe, who was above many things a curious fellow, and also hungry, peered over her shoulder into what resembled a cave. Coiled like a smooth answer to an unasked question in its den lay a glistening brown polyester shirt the size of a sock. A slim blonde woman in bell bottoms and long-heeled shoes who had a room upstairs swished in to see what was taking so long when she saw the shirt and stood waiting with her weight over her right hip, nails clicking like the shuttles on a loom as she smiled.

Joe made a sound like hum and the tall woman in black -- very deftly for having such long limbs -- plucked the shirt from its cell, a textile treasure, and let the rest fall around her in a celebratory avalanche. Joe shrugged it on with a shiver and the quiet whispering rasp of green corn husks on the backs of his arms. Joe felt a crackle of blue static and wondered if this was an electric shirt and hoped that if it was it wouldn't give him cancer like electric blankets were supposed to. Evidently it was some kind of shirt
because Bell Bottoms stood straight and stopped clicking her nails and the woman in black's dark eyes glistened over their shelves, and because she couldn't think of a reason why not touched his back where the polyester grew onto him, a living thing adhering to his spine. Joe, who didn't say anything because he wasn't sure, imagined that under her hands, on the inside of the shirt he felt the small caresses of a multitude of synthetic cilia nestling into him as if they were cold.

IV.

The women guided him with their hands into their living room where everywhere the ceremony of innocence was in the process of drowning itself. The siren shirt called people with its sweet, insidious voice and all around there was no mast in sight. Joe thought that was fine by him because if he were on a ship at all it would probably wreck although he might not feel it and coral is pretty. Straight men touched the shirt while clapping Joe on the back, and Queens, brightly colored birds, squeezed dancing past him through the doorway into the kitchen for more drinks and brushed against its sides in their introductions and reintroductions. Women grasped his shoulders high up where the shirt covered them, laughing and clinging close to the rich brown of it like human fabric, stretching their arms under Joe's arms and around him, their fingers on his chest and waist. Joe thought the shirt was tickling him.

V.

Near the end of the long night and close to morning when most of the people -- except for a man who said he rode a fast train down the wrong track and a couple smoking one cigarette while sitting on the couch cushions, which had been turned over because someone had spilled beer -- had gone, Joe toppled into the broom closet and knocked over the upright -- A — 1 _ x i — — i-!x_ — — i-!x_ _ 11 —  — i-!x_ — — i-!x_ j j u u j u c , e v e n a p iiim je u  w iu i m e  u iu c - w m tc freckles of spilled industrial abrasive, was undiminished. He felt as large as a planet. He felt large enough to have his own gravity, his own atmosphere. He felt like a large brown polyester planet before the green growth starts and the genesis of something greater begins to stir.
STEALTHY HYPOXIC

He believed in nickel, the oxides
and the mercurichromes, God as sediment,
the blessed tectonic seizure, the ghostly cave
paintings in southern France, Adam Cadmium.
Planetary conjunctions, fossilized chicken
tracks and the advantage of atlatl in primitive
stick throwing contests. Yes, he believed in revolutions, stock
crashes, wars, cyclones, in ratattoule
well prepared. Blondish, a sunburned blunderbuss
toted by anthropology coeds, a teaching assistant
and an associate prof, he was famous among a half-dozen
countryclub mothers for his doublebarrelled
smile from the guest seat at their family tables, was showcased
to fathers, their kites, free passes to the opera. He knew golf swing,
snooker,
World Series stats, the Freemason handshake and English gardening --
had been on Safari, taught the guide lacrosse, could order
warm beer in Swazi and in the end consumed them all, swallowed
them alive. It was bar talk got him into it. That and the Aussie
spelunker's crinkled confidence, the seven pilsners, the red-
headed station 6 crewmember's right breast daring him
to go through with it. Of course he could spelunk, that's one
of the twenty-seven essential things he did best
but now no radio or inner ibex persona evolved to handle
precipitous cavern life like the lampeyed surprise of Coelacanth.
That goddamned dilettante Australian trapped
or dead. Oxygen tank! Oxygen tank! Currently perceived soma:
integument sack filled out of course with the bone and vessel and muscle
expected, and the great nonvascular gristle of our common plight.
Such tumultuous, unpredictable bricabrac of derring-do, sightless spring
from crag to crag. Pinned there with him, so deep that even the air
had weight enough for seams to brim the nethersilo's subterranean
grain system, bleak with lungfill, ample with the silent spaces of less
fluent caves -- his brio --the very poorest trade he'd make for a place.
Consider two-a-days in the season of burning bluegrass, hot choke
from the Palouse, running suicides in 80 degrees
to ingrain the folly. When he curled on a crackback and took a kidney shot,
pissed blood that night and met the morning practice rosin-handed
to keep his place -- let him do it again, he thinks, that was
a kind of failure, more painful but better lit. Less populate?
Nighttime fields before harvest, you could hear the whisper as wheat shafts leaned back. If trapped on your car hood with a girl and a blanket, a badger can shred a baseball bat. You can drown in a granary.

He’ll live there alone for years. Too spacious? Too temperate? Then early February, predawn wooded hills, the desolate belfry where ice bats congregate after coating the highway with their hurled coos and sleeted, thoughtless spatter from a wastrel sky. He would stay until spring, stay if she came back. He’d stay, succumb to the echo returned from the curve of gibbous cauldron, the ferrous ore swollen, mined and hammered from the pediments. It’s hardly different, a cave, it’s really not that different at all: he could be a wharfinger irascibly hoeing lobster mulch, or an ancient engineer correcting a flawed architrave -- it’s all bilge out the scupper; TD dropped, mustelid-gnawed bat, bedding Esmeralda’s mother after riding lessons, Esmeralda quitting riding lessons, it’s all the same, all forgotten, he’s spending his last O2 without admitting he’s always breathed this way, in darkness, and nothing changed except himself.
IV.
THE JOURNEY LASTS FOR LEAGUES

I.

On patriotic days he hangs those droopy things. On patriotic days. On harlot days he wears. On harlot days, call them the guards of palatial worst, the groundskeepers talk quietly among themselves.

There is such . . . Moreover, there is such to be had for the asking.

Turn over the tables Jules turn over the tables and choose

Jules, who can’t remember what he longs for or longs for what he can’t remember. The bridge of his cool foot slides across the sheet into the hot arch of the other. Just like every day,

the cacophony, he keeps it buttoned. Snatches a reason out of air a noble profile out of air.

Throw off the covers Jules throw off the covers and rise

Jules, who swipes the sleep from his eyes, who executes a double Windsor then puts back again the silly tie. The tie serves the minutehand. Serve both the meaning and the minute, Julian.

Strudels, frappe and lots of, heigh-ho, lots and lots of jellybeans, whose jelly jells in color, jellies dyed, scripted L’s. Heigh-ho the dish brims with jellybeans

on the cafe counter.

43
And the cafe occasion in all its vivid fabrics, skin
and falsies forgets each increment
of Julian — Julian is particles blown
across tundra, particles of not just
Julian, not just Julian’s date,
who is late, but also of the blue macaw
and the mites that live on the blue macaw, the mites
also dissipate across the tundra
with us all. Atomies conduct themselves.
Julian joins the polar cap. Here are the methods:
The exhalation method The sheepshank method The thrombosis method
The new waiter method The long ash method The Cossack method
The multiple affair method The wrinkled suit method The venereal method
The copper wire method The tetanus method The misrepresentation method

Eventually there is also the lunch menu with which to order lunch.
Which includes the special method, the ordering of the special.
Coffee, then gobs and gobs of jellybelly jelly beans.
After coffee, there are gobs and gobs of occasions to stand in
and flake off.

II.

It’s a wind operation, says the pig gelder.
It’s a little more complicated than that, says the pig.
We’re here to attest to the fact that we have
a world in common
which is a heck of a lot simpler than the heavens were
before this happened.
Shut up, says the pig, and put those away.

Language will start sprouting strange heads
from the jaws of a pig.

The giant’s wife measures a bushel of wheat in each hand.
Each night the giant hums away humming a large song,
returns midmornings sweaty from plunder.
The giant’s song lasts for leagues.
The pig gelder has a song with the giant’s wife.

_Bedspring Bedspring Bedspring Bedspring_  
_Bedspring Bedspring Bedspring Bedspring_  
_Bedspring Bedspring Bedspring Bedspring_  
_Bedspring Bedspring Bedspring Bedspring_  
_Bedspring Bedspring Bedspring Bedspring_  
_Bedspring Bedspring Bedspring Bedspring_  
_Bedspring Bedspring Bedspring Bedspring_  
_Bedspring Bedspring Bedspring_  
_Bedspring Bedspring_  
_Swoon._

Thus humming under his breath the pig gelder  
sets out each morning  
for a bright new day of gelding.

III.

Put down the lighter Jules put it down  
on the table where it belongs Jules  
or in your pocket. Dispose of the lighter  
it is rubbish although brightly colored  
and useful for cigarettes, the lighting of them.  
You’ll wear your thumb down Julian.

Triple-skinny shot of everything to-stay.  
She’s late she’s late she’s late today in the way  
she’s mostly late for most things. Today she’s later.  
Another croissant Jules he’d be happy to bring you  
so be sure to flag him down. Flag him down, Jules,  
the waiter, who knows a thing or two.

The late workday passengers, their faces framed  
above the advertisement for pineapples  
on the side of a bus. The second round  
of paper cups wobble round their sticky rings  
on nylon briefcases at the intersection.  
A woman in a team ballcap  
sips her latte and looks through  
as the engine swells to the traffic light.  
Now Jules, why don’t she wave?
IV.

Remember, intones the pig gelder, it is so important to consider the condition of the pig’s future

Enough! This from the pigs, all together

In order to produce a truly level-headed pig requires the services of a pig gelder

Enough! cry the pigs

The contributions of a level headed pig cannot be reiterated enough.

We’ve had it! Squeal the pigs, whose level-headedness has not kicked in.

V.

The giant’s satchel spills a wealth of battered apples or his satchel belches a yearling heifer onto the cobbled floor. Always, from farmhouses razed the giant comes back, from coops gone to feathered kindling. Comes back from rubbled fences -- one pictures him with his wool hood fallen from his mullet, the faint steam of exertion rising -- over leagues and leagues of countryside the reverberation of his hum shaking martens from their limbs. He plants his stripling ash with every stride, florid with the efforts of his haystack methods, their refinement:

The accident method       The windmill method       The four winds method
The concentration method   The frolic method         The combustion method
The bump and                The grind method          The one hand method
The frost heave method      The nearly dawn method    The OOOO the hay

hangs all in orchard trees like brittle tinsel.
VI.

How do you like your tea? Jules to the aproned man.
Something put a riddle in Julian.
Pardon me? I don’t -- the aproned man began
Something put a riddle in Julian.
Julian rode over his falls. My tea is best with honey
and any kind of tea is fine by me, really, but the hive
is important, and the condition of --
Confound! Confound! The time,
do you have it? Granular or too syrupy
and regardless the quality of the leaves or the means
of steeping -- is it quick? I mean fast, your watch?
I’m a waiter said the man, I don’t drink tea,
and brings more coffee, refills the jellybeans.
Julian’s riddle thermometer, the mercury molecule jive.
Tea language means nothing here, so stir it, sir
and reconsider why you’re sitting here. The here wherein
you’re sitting reconsider. Here, sir, unlike your former
heres, the heres that you’re accustomed to,
right doesn’t always apply to the customer.
I’m a waiter sir, and you’re not in the here
that you think you are, so be patient.

VII.

Meanwhile the pig gelder all ‘aquiver
scours pens with glee.
With all the gelding and singing, gelding and singing
he wrestles the pigs with ease,
and his good right gelding arm follows
the methods traditional to his foregelders:
in the method of doves the forearm flexes.
Then the method of the barge rope wearing through
and the barge taking leave. What tendon play!
Follow with the method of the butter quickening
in the churn and the song of the churn
as rendered by the churning maid, born deaf.
The whetstone attenuates the instrument
in the method of the soldier returning
through the meadow surfaced all
with buttercups -- the lot of these
the gelder applies to the pigs.
He wrestles the pigs with glee --
the pigs freckle his chin,
after all it hurts them far, far
more than it hurts him,
and how precipitous it was
where he had been!

VIII.

Here we are in the giant’s lair
-- the goings on of early morning --
polished silverware, good china, kitchen
bustle, the sills all cleaned in the feather
whisk method and the hearth ashes
mounded in the midden method. Still

the great goings on she makes, the giant’s wife
when only groundskeepers and the breakfast maid
should be awake. Her goings on and her breakfast airs,
her goings on, her tousled hair, her hangnails
unclipped via the misplaced clipper method.

Here we are in the giant’s lair
ignoring her cheeks’ patina, blindness
being a version of the survival method.

Here we are keeping the hedgerows trimmed
in the dewy morning -- recognized universally
as the preoccupation method.

Here we are heating the baking stone
in the doughy kitchen, known in this region
simply as the bread method.
Here we are heaving ham-knots to the hounds
the lame one led back of the stables
to engage in the culling method.

Here we are industriously keeping the grounds
with our heels to the windows
in the manner of the prudence method.

Here we are when the colorless vial
she empties into the giant’s vessel
in her idea of the decision method.

Here we are looking under our arms
in the furtive method when the ground
trembles and here we’ll stay.

IX.

The gelder aches with collarless dream
and milk of a broken stem
and how precipitous it was where he had been!
And the road’s a bit dusty but he don’t care.
And his back’s a bit tired but he don’t care.
And he’d do it just the same at the county fair.
And he’d dance around the palace in his underwear.
And he’d do it twice as well if the giant was there
‘cause he’s quick as a snake in the linen drawer
and if someone wants to holler he’ll do it all the more
and geld them where they stand one, two, three, four
and back again back again quick as a wink
as a wink of his scintillant gelding knife
back into its crescent sheath

-- intricately stitched and
blackened with the stains, the stains, the stains,

O, the raspberry stains of pig gelding.

And he’d never had even a scratch.

No, he’s never had ‘nary a scratch or doubt,
so the gelder whistles 'round a barley grass, as he skips toward the
holding pen,
skips boldly toward the holding pen
   with a heigh, heigh-ho,
      skips merrily on
to the holding, bolding, holding pen.

How the gelder’s lungs swell when he sees the bull!
No he’s never had ‘nary a scratch.
How his lungs work like bellows at the gelding forge!

The briar bends back from his shin.
From horn to horn leaps the brindled sun.
The thistle curtsies from the hem of his shin.
The gelder’s in the grip of an irresistible method
   -- the bull all brindled in the sun,
      the rose draped low at his hem.

And the sun leaps back and forth
   as master of powerful method
And the suns leaps back and forth
   with casual mastery of method
And the sun leaps back and forth
   in effortless, arrogant method
      from horn to horn.

How the gelder’s at the mercy of his brindled lung!
His knife a suave shimmer in his hand.
How mercy is gelded by the sunny horn!
His knife curls from hand to hand.

Headlong with the method of promotion
   the pig gelder promotes himself
      on the gelding scale.
X.

The morning’s cut tulips have been opened fully a long time. The waiter smartly opens a muslin umbrella over Julian’s table to turn the light.

Diffuse, blonde light over Julian’s streetside table and over the tulips in their tulip vase.

*Hello little broken*  
*anklebone, as surely as my shoe rubs,*  
*as surely as the phone. Hello swift amphetamine -- I’m not the pretty little seagreen couch you thought I’d be.*

Jules is a tough talker and has been an hour. Half twelve creeps round, he will immediately her number along with her new tube of toothpaste deliver onto the sidestreet.

The waiter’s apron holds a row of pens. Julian contends that she will never again eat the heel of bread if the loaf is shared with Julian -- henceforth it will be him that eats the heels of future breads although the heels that he detests she revels in. On his plate butter runs from the edgewise incision through the crescent bun down onto the bisque when.

Lo! What ho! The sidewalk throng is happy to part for the keel of a viking ship. The keel is a man of five full fathoms dangling his stone breaker’s hands, oaring his shoulders toward colder lands. With old world shudder he kneels at Julian’s table. Promptly Jules stands to meet him, eyes well short of navel. Jules blurs
She's late, and darts. How easily the giant

gathers him in! The arms of his eyeglasses

are polished femurs, his breath, clover

that ruffles the linens and the giant begins:

I set my satchel down that out might pour riches. My bootlaces subject
to my wife's nimble fingers -- she stayed so I brushed her hair. The spring
flooding clear over the red clay of the quarry is nothing.
The wind frantic over wheat in harvest and the gold wheat
resisting, field by field as far as even I can see
is nothing. No, nothing nor those same fields by night
undulant with fire, nor the farmers' grief, nor the rich core
rot of a cedar log nor the lighting that felled it.
When I brushed her hair all of this became as nothing.
My drink I took from her hands and the comb fell.

XI.

The giant's wife cries beside the holding pen
and what remains.
She throws his knife in the fabled direction
of the tundra by means
of the boomerang method,
(and what remains?)
it's caught in the beak
of the blue macaw, who dissipates
(and what remains?)
with its mites, the pitted blade
and us
in the fabled direction.
XII.

Time to hang your flag Jules it's time
to hang

Jules, (Where has your riddle gone?)

your flag, Jules -- you only get once
upon a time, for the proper flag
on which you must decide,

Jules, (There's a milkcarton with your riddle on it)

what's worth asking for and what's
worth embroidering. And where you are
Jules, if anywhere. And what,

Jules, (Wove yourself a Julian out of green syringa,)

method you might use. If you use a method
twice, Jules, it's not the same,
method if any If any method can
be said,

Jules, (burned yourself a Julian up of old syringa)

to be twice, or even
right, Jules, or rather same,
Jules, in any day by any name.

And what's he doing here, Jules?
And what method does he hold you by?
And why's his grip so cool Jules?
And where's the apron-man with his row of pens?

And what's he saying now, Jules? (There was a blue ballpoint pen)
And who's he talking to? (a ritzy fountain pen)
And what flag shall you hang today, Jules? (a yellow highlighter)
And what flag shall you hang today? (another two blue ballpoint pens)
At what point, Jules, did the days seem less like days and more like versions of the empty method? And Julian, what's that like? Remember the smoky glass of the candy dish?

At what point, Julian, did you stop noticing the days? When the days all crackled outside the embassy of days? That version we know, Jules, -- we know the nuances of the pretending method.

Remember the plenty of the candy dish?

XIII.

Sunny kingdoms closed like daffodils in the evening. In the land of the living, groundskeepers took their pay and left without eating. As a tropical wind over a throat contraption in the method of speech the giant's voice caused great distress among flagpoles, freed all the flags collected from both the hidden direction and Julian. Our hoarded hedge clippings sent willy-nilly with the flags and sculpted hedges, willy-nilly past our dignitaries, willy-nilly over heavily treated boundaries toward the tundra in the method of the williwaw, the giant's most perfect method. In the imperfect method of the messenger the blue macaw dropped a version of its beak.

In the land of the living, groundskeepers were replaced by algorithms, and progressions of calculating swine.

As an arctic wind over a throat contraption in the method of vociferous speech the giant scoured the kingdoms for passage back to his wife, alone in the unkempt garden.
Alive in the method of the living, a method
now denied to the giant, who only found wandering
a youth, knifeless across the wilderness, in search
of a forgotten method and the blue macaw,
who came and went freely

XIV.

And Julian saw much of the land in this way,
buttoned to the vantage of the giant.

And near the giant’s fire at night Julian
saw his shoes never showed any wear.

When the last of the empty method was forgotten,
when the memory of the jellybean plenty
was hooked finally from his forehead
by a hooked beak, and carried away,
when for the first time muffled voices crept
from his shirtsleeves and dissipated like threads,
Julian lay down to rest
beside the giant’s fire. And the method of the meaning
cleared for that moment Julian’s palate
and clearly Julian was hungry as a rib, the giant
held out to Julian a heel of bread.
Julian devoured the heel to a snippet
that he placed on the ground, to show
that although he was too late, he remembered.

And the giant began to hum in the method of distance.
He hummed the song for brushing the long red hair
of his wife. He hummed the dirge for the haystack
methods, methods outgrown. He hummed
poison, a noble profile out of air.
The giant hummed Julian to a tuning fork.
Julian’s nerves stuttered in his spine.
Julian put his hand on the giant’s boot
and heard the reverberation of a monastery bell
from leagues away. He heard the clapper
shimmy in the bell. He heard the copper bell
reverberate.
A green-winged gnat flew into the giant's nose.
What the giant meant trailed off
as an unnamed method, as stirring
breath in a still ravine. The gnat brought
the blood of villages. The gnat brought
the blood of the blue macaw
who came and went freely
carrying in its beak
the inconsequent sceptres of many kingdoms.

Over the dry creekbed of his throat
contraption, in the lost method of speech
as the copper bell stilled, the giant began
as a croak, continued as law:

All the days of my childhood were the air in a cave. Then I was kissed,
stood as a man
with a hillock on his head and wept. O, I was kissed. Flocks competed for
her shoulders
and rainsqualls rode her hem. I was kissed. She with a carved rafter in her
hand --
I had followed her more closely than . . . I had clung to her like starlight
and mightily
-- have you any idea what it is to wake as darkness and stand in a body?
My cup from her hands. I heard the comb break on the cobblestones
as I lay down again. When did this begin? As I say,
I was kissed and here I am.

And there also was Julian.
EPILOGUE
**Both the Sentence and the Sorrow**

No bye-the-bye, no God
speed, no reason, no good hunting,

no warning: there's the door, trap
repeated, implosion anted up.

Nested in my cap, fancied whim,
bait encased entirely by skin,

tremulous as the risen vein from hip
to groin, this ignominious slip

demarcated, paginated, leaf
by leaf a followed fool.

Plumb bobbed, warlocked in the oubliette,
bookstocked, well contained. My taproot,

attenuated best mistake, my plinth,
my skip's last bright note, hamstrung,

feckless and hidden in the bedclothes,
my vested elf, whipstitched

notion of this carnal self, fluttered,
mawkish, hawkish, clever fingered

at the lock, sealed in ribcage,
involuntary, in vain.