

Collected Poems, May 2005

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Accidental Drowning

The first time, I remember
you were kneeling on the floor of the garage
and I happened to have

an axe in my hand.
I fled the scene, but returned that evening
to find you reading in bed.

By that time the spiders had almost
finished covering every square inch
of window with their smooth talk.

The obituary should have read
father of three lost
in accidental drowning.

Screen Romance

Sure.

Come over to my apartment
and splash blood all over the

bathroom floor. Don't even
bother to wipe up after yourself.

Let's pretend we're unhappily
married for just this one night.

Tomorrow I can bring you back
here to meet your pale companion

but tonight let's make some
memories. After this we can say

“Well. We'll always have Francisco Street.”

Pitcher Plant

Those wishing to grow a pitcher plant should know that, although, in the wild, they appear mostly in the tropics, domesticated varieties may be grown in any climate. In addition to the usual amounts of soil, air and water the pitcher plant thrives on sad music. Genre is unimportant.

Caution is urged as your pitcher plant matures. Even seasoned growers have been overcome, while strolling in their gardens, by the sweetness that emanates from the enormous blooms, and have tumbling headlong into the reservoir at the bottom. Some have actually drowned.

Another Poem About The Moon

Last night the moon was wearing your face
and her long hair was falling to the side
across her forehead, almost covering the
left eye, in that way I have watched yours
fall more times than I can possibly tell you.

I wondered how many other times since
the moon learned the trick of putting on faces
she has tried yours. One summer night
Hsueh-Feng and Yen-Tou were standing on
a hilltop savoring the scent of pine needles

and listening intently to the yearning of the
crickets. Feng turned to his old friend and said,
“Look. The moon is especially lovely tonight.”
Yen Tou replied, “Hush! And don’t stare so.
Can’t you see? She’s as shy as she is beautiful.”

Invitation

My Friends.
Come forth. I invite you all.

You spiders that hang on the ceiling
waiting to fall into my mouth when
I'm asleep, I invite you.

All you lithe open-armed girls with
chittering black beetles where your
tongues should be, I invite you.

The child who creeps into my
room and shouts a name in my ear
as I lie pinned under the dome of
sleep, I invite you.

The long-fingered woman who
stretches her body like smoke
along my spine as I lie sleepless
and exposed, I invite you.

The charred faceless thing that
glared out of borrowed eye-sockets
while I tenderly unbuttoned her
shirt, I invite you.

The talking doll who whispers,
"Look at you there. You've done
nothing," when I pull a ring at
the back of her neck, I invite you.

The invisible ones who make the
stair-treads creak in the dead of
night, I invite you.

The dead of night, I invite you.

At the Deathbed of Modernity

Dying body of a dreaming
child trapped inside the dreaming
body of a dying child.

Monitors hammer out their
sorry tale with mounting
urgency. A white-coated

orderly, moved to tears,
gently strokes the porcelain
forehead. *He is so very*

beautiful, she says. *How can*
one so beautiful die young
while we go on? The stricken

twins hear nothing. They lie
together, lost in that least
satisfactory of all dreams.

Liar's paradox

A drunken wind blew through here last night,
knocking all the street signs flat and leaving

the morning sky as frayed and supple as an old
bed-sheet hanging on the line for the thousandth

time. Now we navigate in the age-old way,
following a trail of chemicals laid down by

unknown precursors. Alone and at large, an
occasional liar lost in the city of occasional liars,

I ask directions of a stranger but first, to be sure
of the answer, enquire if she's a Mantis.

On Idle

In order to avoid
tripping the bear
trap in your chest,
move calmly
and deliberately.

It is of utmost
importance to
appear in the
world accompanied
by a dog.

Keep a careful record
of the exact colors.

Before putting on
your shoes in the
morning, check for
scorpions.

The café counter
girl probably calls
everyone “doll”
even her dog.

The vein snaking
across her jawbone
is “robin’s egg blue”.

Blue Earth County

On the road between Blue Earth and Madelia
the highway sings a one-note samba. We are
driving straight into it now – a clattering
thunderhead built from scrap iron and castoff
mechanism, pulsing with violent electrical excess.

At the wedding, the pastor has lost his little
shouting match. No matter how far they turn
down the music, even when they turn it all the
way off, every song rises up to contradict.

Sunlight falls across the water into the eyes of
dark-eyed boys who stand aside. It sings a song
called “Glass Bottomed Boat”. Electric field
lines leap into the sky from the tips of trees.

They sing a song that everyone knows so well
they have forgotten all but a few lines. Humming
sweetly to herself, she clipped a pair of wings to
her back and set off alone into the storm.

The Last Supper

Everyone is embarrassed.
We are trying to look away
so as to avoid drawing

attention to the clumps of
snot in his beard. Each
and every one of us has a

beautiful jewel, an amethyst,
embedded in their forehead.
The way his left eye seems

to turn out like a car skidding
on black ice. Did you know
that by drinking just one cup

of vinegar a day you can
extend your life for decades,
perhaps indefinitely? The parts

of the body may be divided
into seven categories: the
clean, the unclean, the sour,

the hopeful, the torn, the
burnt and the crystalline.
Shut it out at all costs.

Now I am working with the
principle of the klystron. My
machine will cure all known

forms of cancer except those
ordained by god in payment
for mortal sins of the flesh.

A puny fence that collapses
upon itself at the first sign of
trouble, collapses and collapses

until nothing whatsoever is
hidden from view. Everyone is
embarrassed for a thousand years.

This Life After Grace

(with apologies to Grace Paley)

He was worn so thin after climbing all that way
that it was nothing to slip under the door and
out onto the roof. Once there he discovered a
curious thing. When she lifted her hand from

his shoulder that morning and turned to go,
she had taken away his last remaining attachment
to the earth. He had no gravity left and so he just
floated there above the streets of Brooklyn.

He waved goodbye to his mother. The evening
breeze had tired of its game of keeping that piece
of newspaper in the air all afternoon and placed
it gently on the sidewalk. It's such a simple
thing after all to lay aside this life.

Sunken life

My half-brother lives a
sunken life. His house is the
sea-green ribcage of a wrecked
ship. Most days, he wears a

diving suit and spends hour
upon hour drifting with the
current, tethered only by a
thin line stretching away

towards some unknown
surface. At night, far off, he
can see great, slow fish, each
one lit up like a whole city.

Once a fish swam close and
he could see that its eyes
were on fire. Once his
breathing tube got tangled

in some seaweed. He put
something complicated in
my hand and said here, hold
this but don't ever touch it.

A while or maybe 50 years
later I decided to have a look.
We were standing in a round
puddle of yellow light there

on the threshold and he said,
this is the skull of a starling.
If you put it up to your ear
and listen very carefully

you can hear an evening
sky and violet air rushing
through the door to be born
on the other side of the world.

Her Hands

Her hands curve backwards,
when she holds a knife and fork
like quotations marks. Quote –

We are cutting this chicken
salad into bite-sized chunks –
Unquote. When she places

a hand just below her throat
the moment before she laughs,
it says, I am going to laugh

now, but with great care.
The way my mother used
to fold a clean linen napkin.

My Role in the Spanish Civil War

They served tapas on tiny plates that
were difficult to see and shifted
around aimlessly on the tiled counter.
The bartender smiled his approval

at each of our choices and then,
when I wasn't looking, wrote his
phone number in Catalan
in the apricot sauce surrounding

my wife's dessert. We felt fortunate
to be seated at all. The wall outside
was pitted with bullet-holes where larger
parties with dimmer prospects were lined up

and shot to save them the trouble
of waiting. In the small cemetery,
headstones were painted Sky Blue and Burnt Umber.
One of the epitaphs read, "Smith, party of 6."

Yellow

It blew so hard last night
that, when I woke this morning,
I was afraid something might
be missing. Putting my hands
to my face I realized,

sure enough, my left eyebrow
was gone. Closer inspection
revealed that I had also
lost any conception of
the color yellow. Look

at these leaves strewn about
everywhere, like the hands
of saints, and I can't think
of a single worthwhile
thing to say about them.

Running Down

Running down the mountain
you tripped.

Running down the mountain
I stooped to pick you up.

Your "No!" dry eyed,
held me at arm's length.

Running down the mountain
come sit beside me awhile.

Running down the mountain
I have nothing to give you.

What have I ever taught you
except that we two are alike
and do our grieving in private.

The top of his game

He opened the fridge and
stooped to extract a beer,
smoothly uncapping it,

transferred the bottle to
his right hand, left arm
akimbo, cocked his hip

and threw back his head
to drink. The bottle throbs
in his fist as it delivers.

A tiny star collapses
into ash. At this moment,
at the top of his game

who would dare deny
that he's beautiful?
Through the kitchen window

a winter morning shows
its web of black branches
against a pearl sky.

Slow Burn

Perhaps a careless carpenter dropped a cigarette and it rolled into some dark crevice. Perhaps it was a fault in the wiring.

At first no one noticed but the mice. Sometimes a mouse would return to the nest with fur singed and whiskers crinkled up beyond repair bearing a horrific story of unbearable heat and light. Some went missing entirely. After a while, they developed a saying to account for these disappearances. They would say of a missing friend or relative, "The Orange Cat got him."

Eventually, even the human occupants began to notice something. Birds, alighting on the roof, were seen to hop from one foot to the other in pain crying out in short sharp bursts before taking flight and thereafter shunning the house entirely. Without birds, the roof drooped, forlorn in all kinds of weather. In certain rooms the smell of burning was unmistakable, the walls hot to the touch. At night, when all else was quiet, a faint crackling sound like a distant tree falling under the axe could be heard from inside the walls.

Short Poems 10/24 – 10/27

These robes are eight years old
and the sleeves are worn thin
from repeated straightening.
Have I learned anything at all?



My whole body is thirsty for this cold.
Even though I actually have ten thousand
mouths, I can't possibly drink enough.



On a sheet of paper that stretches
to the horizon and beyond in all
directions, birdsongs scribble, hatch
and blot in an ink that fades
into thin air the instant it's written.



Far off islands float
high above the horizon,
reluctant to settle into their
everyday places.



Sitting upright for hours
in a room filled with the scent
of fresh-baked chocolate chip cookies
makes my thigh bones soft
and greasy with desire.



Chipped, white paint
on the wall in front of me
is an eskimo slogging, knee-deep
through the snow towards... what?
A fleeing caribou? His house of
frozen peat? A dark ship locked in pack ice?
If I sit here long enough, I'll figure it out.

Collected Poems

If the traffic hadn't been so awful
on the way to work this morning,
if my bike hadn't gotten a flat part way,
if my usual walking path to the office
hadn't been blocked by construction
equipment, forcing a detour, then
I wouldn't be here now feeling this
new rain kissing my fresh-shaved
head like a fall of grey angels.

A Day Like Today,

when this room is too small
to contain anything,

when the sky lies low
over the horizon like the
eye of a startled sleeper,

when everyone's wearing
their wooden mask,
or their golden mask,

a day like today
calls for staying within
a yard or two of the ground.

It will not abide grand
plans or destinations.

Not even so much
as a pinch salt could
hold together today.

Something of Heaven Touching the Earth

Because it's Sunday morning
she's standing alone in Saint James
Square shaking a tambourine
and singing, *something of heaven*

touching the earth. On the sidewalk
near the Quetzalcoatl
monument a single shoe lies
discarded, like a message from

the ghost-realm, while a woman
in a mink coat and Sunday hat
drives up and down in a car
the size of a china teacup.

Something, at least, is leaning
in. Shed fragments of the sun's
weathered skin tumble
through the flawless, pallid air.

Imperial Tea Court

Little showers of liquid
granite rain down from the beaks
of caged canaries hanging
in the rafters. At another
table someone says that,
judging from his great grandfather's
Civil War letters, the gap

between the living and the dead
has widened in recent years,
but by now my tea is so
dark and bitter that I may
as well be drinking a cup
of dirt or an attic filled
with yellowed photographs.

North Adams

Lanky ghosts lift head and shoulders
above the unruffled surface

of their bruise-black pond and lock eyes
for a moment, in recognition.

A column of flickering leaves
mimes a flight of butterflies.

All of a sudden everything
is saying goodbye, pulling away.

Mist blooms under the morning sun
like a blizzard of poppies.



Arriving at the plant one day
in '85 my father-in-law
was summoned to his superior's
suite and presented with a
commemorative pen-knife.

The boss said, "Take this back
to your office and dismember
yourself. Start with the toes."
It was slow going and he was
nowhere near done when the shift-bell

sounded at the end of the day.
He punched out, said good night
to the guard for the last time,
drove home, ate a little
and then went to lie down

for the last time, save one.
Afterwards, during an awful
winter that went on for years,
the knife passed from hand to hand.
Everyone took turns wounding

themselves so extravagantly that,
even now, long after the seasons
seem to have found their footing

Collected Poems

again, people wear naked scars
right out in the open for all to see.

Here, this one has carved his face
into an ancient mask. There
is a woman who left herself
just a single, gnarled finger.



Once this was the west itself,
the great repository of

dreams. Each dream has its house here,
each house, its dreamers. Goodnight.

Goodbye. Now I lay me down
to sleep. We are always taking

leave of each other and yet
everyone carries their seasons

with them as they go and
no one ever goes very far.

The City

Parceled out into oblong boxes,
each and every one of us
buckled into our private carapace

of unvarnished disappointment,
we take a seat or stand and
surrender to the mechanism.

We are all going to the same place.
When the doors part, we'll mount
the stairs to find a city emptied

of desire. Beings of light hang
motionless in the shivering air.
Buildings rise like shafts of quartz.

From this point forward there are
broad streets but no paths. The
sky flares out like a field blue fire.

Emily and Tobit

Emily, my high school girlfriend, met Tobit in the park one day.

He sauntered up to where she was sunning, and interposed himself between her and her slim book in a way that cats have done since there were books. He butted his handsome head against her small brown hand in the way that cats have done since there were cats and hands. They fell to talking.

Soon they realized that they both knew me. Emily laughed and said, “Oh that Zachary Smith. He used to come over to my house and we’d make out for hours until our lips were completely chapped from kissing. We did away with my virginity one night in his dorm room when my parents thought I was studying with friends. When did you last see him?”

Tobit replied, “The last time I saw Zachary, I was feeling really awful but he scratched my head just like you’re doing now and called me ‘stupid cat’ and sang lame songs until I felt better.”

Emily said, “Oh. That’s not how it was for me at all. When I had leukemia our last year in high school he never once came to see me even though I asked for him near the end.”

Warned Off

Below the waterline.
A hundred puckered hands. Trapped.

A century of trappings –
of shuffling trappers. Falling

through 100 times a fountain
of delirious ice. Wounded.

Warned off by soft surfaces
above her jawline. Trapped.

Haiku

ears mouth nose eyes froze
hot coffee please, and a tart
with fresh raspberries



sex in the next room
every square inch of my skin
suddenly awake



hotel lobby fountain
water sings its ancient song
in captivity



cavernous old house
crouching grimly by the lake
remembers winter



winter sunset lights
the clouds under our wings, brief
sea of dying fire



stand on a hilltop
laughing, shouting straight into
the wind's open mouth



flocks of birds skim past
my window like smoke, driven
before a north wind

Corona

That her voice
is a tumbling fountain
of glass.

That her table manners
are atrocious.

That she dances until
even the dumb
chairs are too dizzy
to sit.

These are
excuses we make
to account for the bare
truth that the body

is an instrument
no one knows
how to play. That

each time I open
my mouth,
a mountain wants
to fall out of it.

That it's no wonder
we make a mess of things.

Corona del Mar

In the novella of his life he's lounging
against a bench in Corona del Mar
wearing a face that might still launch

a regatta or two. All the women who pass
or stop briefly to press his hand are his
ex-lovers. His headache too is an ex-lover.

That's the problem with southern California.
The sun is so bright and the air so thin
that you may as well be living in the

Himalayas or the Andes. The gulls have
a hard time staying aloft and, over the years,
they've become like slips of cellophane.

The sunlight flares right through their bodies
as they float overhead, showing up a tracery
of veins and bones as light and soft as ash.

Still Life

A fusillade of molecules.
The incessant carping of

every painted Chrysanthemum.
Time lurches from ditch to

rut to pothole, born down
by the gravity of thought.

15 Birds

5. pelicans stage a flyby
in formation. 4. hunting gulls
wheel high above the eye

of the bay. 3. blackbirds
on consecutive fence posts
salute the sun. 2. sparrows

like windblown sparks. 1. vulture
rides a thermal in the red light
of evening then slips over

the hill out of sight. 0.
empty track of the vulture
boundless mind of the sea.

Frostbite

(for Marsha)

Physics defines *coefficient of expansion*
as the ratio of change in length or volume
of a body to the original length or volume
for a unit change in temperature. That's why I'm here
wearing the mummified hands of an Egyptian prince.
The river slides like a fat-bodied green snake and there
in its mouth, she floats on her back, body turning
like a compass needle with the tide. A tiny pyramid
of ice cubes rises from her belly. Nothing
whatsoever is melting. Photons leap joyfully
from the nape of your neck then tumble, stricken
to the sidewalk and inch along, huddled together
for warmth. The only way to avoid losing
our fingers and toes to frostbite is to walk
straight into the trap. Ignore the shabbiness of my
attempts at concealment and kiss me as though the fate
of some northern country depended on the outcome.

Architecture

Of all the countless ways
to die my aunt chose erosion.
The last time I saw her
the soft parts had washed away

leaving a spine of bedrock
and the sharp ridges of nose
and eye socket. A long
river of white stone spills out

across wooded country
and open country. Her
brother, the architect
discovered too late that

it was embarrassing
to have his designs made flesh
standing right up there in
the midst of things. Nowadays

when I walk past a building
I tell it softly that it has
nothing to be ashamed of
that it has lovely bones.

The King of the Dogs Meets the Queen of the Wolves

Once, when dogs and wolves were still on speaking terms, the King of the dogs met the Queen of the wolves in the depths of the forest. The Queen of the wolves looked the King of the dogs up and down and snarled, *You look ridiculous! Your legs have gone spindly from lounging around all day and your belly is bloated from eating that garbage the humans feed you in place of food. How can you live like that?* The King, who was a proud creature and the undisputed ruler of his kind, experienced a moment of doubt. It is a little-known fact, as yet unverified by science, that the soul is a small planetary system held together by gravity. Sometimes, when I'm driving alone at night, I listen to evangelical radio or right wing talk to test the gravity of my own sun – about the size of a pistachio nut – against the powerful pull of all that certainty. It's a dizzy sensation, not unlike riding a Tilt-a-Whirl. Afterwards, I change the channel to avoid embarrassing questions from my wife. The King of the dogs looked at the Queen of the wolves and she was as beautiful as the Red Moon herself walking the Earth nestled in a glorious winter coat. He felt an unpleasant shifting in his planets but said nothing as the hunters, following close on his heels, closed in.

The Secret River

Newly arrived, on a pallid evening after weeks of rain
wandering this outpost on the border of an irretrievable
country with an oily shadow dancing along behind.
Heavy-headed poppies smolder in a scraggly patch
between the sidewalk and the chain link fence.

A man in a roofless room sits stock still. Here and there
it comes bubbling up through the cracks in the pavement.
Even when we can't see it we know the slow, secret river
moving under our feet. An unmade bed under a cloud
of jacaranda flowers patiently awaits the bride and groom.

The Man of Sorrows

the Man of Sorrows hangs there
squinting off across empty
space to where Our Lady
Hodegetria, her face

scoured clean like the western
desert, holds up the night sky
for a mirror between them
there's a name, it's on the tip

of your tongue, the breath leaves
the body in one long scroll
like a slip of gold leaf, you
can never remember that name.

At Night,

the round doors of the sky
open out and you're left staring

straight up into the great gap-toothed
grin of it all. The wind moves little
bits of stuff around from pocket

to pocket, just to have something
to do with its hands. Those voices
that come sobbing and giggling

through the open window and
over the transom – what else
could they possibly be but ghosts?

Maria and Robert

Wake up now
and recall that the world has the capacity
to startle us right out of our skins.

Rounding the corner in some creaky, old hotel
to come face-to-face with a full-length mirror. That sea-shell
in your pocket could be from any one of a hundred beaches.

The desk clerk in faded jacket
and comical hat whistles through yellow teeth
while an enormous grey parrot fidgets on his perch

squawking out bus schedules and the names of ancient cafes.
Maria and Robert are marrying today
and marrying tomorrow and the next day and

the day after that and so on. Wave upon wave
of sea-green carpet crashes on the altar
dousing the waiting priests' bare, sandy feet.

The World's Shortest Romance Novel

He was standing at the kitchen sink washing an afterthought
when he heard her key turning in the lock.

Racing across the desert

standing up on the back of a motorcycle Cady
felt his arm gently wrap
about her shoulders.

That afternoon, when they showered
and her makeup washed away Nash saw her eyes
had the dusty look of a desert motel.

On a bench near the train station
he leaned in for a kiss just as she let her eyes lock
with those of a passing stranger.

Carmel leaned against the door frame and smiled.
You watched from your perch in the upper branches
of a tree in the temple courtyard.

The cup shattered against the wall behind his head.
On the drive home she sang until
she forgot the words

and then drove on without them.
He watched as words skittered
sideways and melted away like droplets on a hot skillet.

By way of an explanation

I did it because I was
the son of a drowned man.
I did it because the car

was going 50 MPH
on a quiet side-street.
Because the waxy silence
of long summer afternoons
is a monstrous thing.

Actually, I did it because I'm dying.

I'd like to know what you'd do
if you went to the doctor
and after the whole battery
of tests had been run, she sat
you in a comfortable chair

peered at you with her thin
priestly eyes and said. It's worse
than I thought. I'd say you
have about 25 years
to live, if you're lucky.

August 26th

It's still summer, dammit, but the birds
those fatalists, are flitting from branch
to branch, snapping up seeds

and behaving like guests who've realized
the party's over and there's a much better thing
going on somewhere across town.

Oh glorious decay!
The body exposed
the golden wind.

Lumbering beasts with teeth as long as your arm
devouring the fossilized carcass of an ex
shopping mall, and I'm sitting alone
on the back porch with a head full of birds.

The stars turning on their spindle
like a dusty phonograph record. Land
falling away, ever so gently, towards the south.

Tanka

Today, the tide's run
way out past the ragged edge
of this pale blue sky
but she's still there, propped up in
the same spot as yesterday.



That old man's harangue
seems unlikely to let up
any time soon. Who'd
have thought a box of ashes
would have such a lot to say.



You say the walls here
have ears, and so they do, but
we're too tiny and
live far too quickly for them
to take an interest in us.

The Rule of 3

Regulations set down in the time of the Heian emperors
and adhered to ever since, clearly state

that a garden path must contain at least 3 steps.

Step 1. This is a garden like no other. Always lead
with the left foot. Step 2. The right hand falls to one side
palm out, as though casting away a burden
or scattering seeds. Step 3. Turning southward.

Any offer worth accepting should be tendered 3 times.

Will you? Won't you please? Would you walk
with me in the garden tonight.

We can stand together on the moon
bridge and count the stars in Orion's belt.

Clean

Rinse the face and hands
in gasoline, dust your skin

with a mixture of ash
and powdered bone.

These are the protocols.
The light inside

the 5-Points Laundromat
where absolution can

be purchased for around
\$3 in quarters

is tired and grimy
old-vellum yellow.

Another pilgrim
is fumbling at the door

shoving his hands
through the mail slot

and rattling the latch.
He's gasping as though

every in-drawn breath
is his first, as though

he's constantly waking
from a deep sleep.

Fireworks

Things that fulminate
and threaten to fly
straight into your face.

An entire world-system
the size of a garden
shed that flashes into life

and fades away in
the time it takes to drain
a tumbler of whisky

and water. A glittering
medallion stitched together
from the bodies of bees.

Under cover of darkness
the moon is sneaking off
again following that

black-eyed girl in a white
cotton shift who's gone out
walking with her pet snake.

Natural History

Megatherium rears up on massive haunches
and peers through the glass
glass-bead eyes glittering with glum resignation.
In a nearby display a woman in a dirndl
is serving sauerbraten and home-made
root-beer. That which eludes memory

may be preserved. Our ancestors walked here
all the way from Siberia, or took the bus
from St. Louis. Barefoot, they could run down
the swift mule deer and kill them
with bare hands, although they preferred
to use slow-acting poison. They could

easily add long columns of figures
in their heads even while stinking drunk
and in flagrante delicto. Those things
that are corrosive to memory can only be
preserved. Each one built a tiny palace

of pale stone. I too am a heathen king who
embalms himself, then stays up nights
devising a fitting exhibit for his remains.
That which extinguishes memory must

be preserved. Our great liberator
was as thorough as he was industrious.
Every morning he took a moment to nail
a plaque to the wall above his bed
which read, "The great liberator slept here."

In a Chinese Garden

Zachary began,

*A painted boat drifts idle
On tea colored water
Actually, it's impossible
To write even
A single line of poetry
To do just one thing*

Deirdre responded,

*Lucky for you
The dragons all hide from the rain
Tuck themselves
Under bridges, behind trees
You can hear them conspire in rushing water*

Marsha offered some words, saying,

*The color of winter clementines
And white chocolate
Head to fin they spin
Slowly swimming
In a bed of mud*

Corona summed up,

*Dear Deirdre too
Dear Marsha too*

The Red City

Across the aisle, her knee is jiggling
to a tune not even she can hear
while our train rattles on
like a never-ending train-wreck.

Even if I fish my notebook
out of its pocket again
and uncap my pen, how
can I hope to slide a word

in edgewise? Way up overhead
the Red City is singing
at the top of its lungs, as usual.
When I was young the future

was all red, like a sign and
boundary of the impossible.
At most I could imagine
the knife's half-smile and

afterwards, a long, slow spinning.
Nowadays. the future is everywhere
I turn. That one, in the faded
windbreaker, his stainless-steel cap

of slicked back hair, skin of
fingers and face yellowed with
tobacco smoke. Her knee.
That abandoned brick building.

The Gates

I pass through.

Zippering up my orange sweatshirt, I pass through.

At long last, I pass through.

Trailing a long chain of missteps clamped around my left ankle
I pass through.

Eating a spoonful of carrot-ginger soup, I pass through.

Intentionally lost, hectored by crows

Fallen, fallen, I pass through.

For the nth time.

Also, unzipping my orange sweatshirt, I pass through.

Bending double like the knee of a grasshopper, I pass through.

An old house with peeling paint let itself out by a side door.

Rising like a flock of 5,000 paper birds, I pass through.

Someone is standing to one side feigning indifference
and taking copious notes.

Just this once, I pass through,

in spite of the fact that the gate was just painted on the sky.

Arriving here in this pool of orange light

Feeling the unexpected roughness of the toll-taker's fingers
against my palm.

Epic Poetry

Emptied of its original inhabitants
an enormous room slowly congeals
until crossing from one side
to the other is like walking from Troy

to Ithaca under water. The Invisible Man
his wrappings long abandoned sits
on his invisible folding chair
in the middle of the room drumming
his fingers soundlessly on an invisible

card table. Hundreds of invisible men
each at his own station, sit in serried
ranks waiting for someone
to come and turn out the lights.

My Job

It should be no news
to you that I'm unsuited
to this line of work

but what would you have me do?

I've called the Zoo. There's
an endless wait-list for the post
of monkey-chaplain

and finger-puppet undertaker
jobs are increasingly hard
to come by these days.

The vocational schools
offer a series of refresher
courses in the handling
of various stinging insects, but

while I'm tempted, I'm not
sure they're for me.

I've had enough embarrassing
questions from employment
counselors and self-help quizzes

to last a lifetime - *Do you
consider yourself lyric
or coloratura?*

*Which of your eyes is most like
those of our Lord and Savior?*

And so on. I'm resigned
to my fate but once in a while
i browse the want ads.

Here's an intriguing one,

*Curator wanted
for the Museum of*

Collected Poems

*Disappointing Toys.
No previous experience
necessary. Some travel.*

Mayday Mayday

The manifesto of the month calls
for *a new form in a new era*. Meanwhile
Spring has sprung, and the white cat's

whiling away the time, sunning himself
on the front stoop and torturing a gecko.
The bay is full of dilapidated boats again

stone facades cracked and crumbling in the sun.
With each passing day, it becomes increasingly
obvious. The trees have already spread their litter

of cigarette butts, fast-food wrappers and
styrofoam cups, and every single afternoon
there's an underwater swimming contest.