

SERIALIZED
(UNPUBLISHED)
Part Two of Two

LIGHTS IN DEFILES

Poetry

by

Homer Kizer

AS IF WIND—

I had to stay too long
with my cuts
when I fell
overripe white pine
six feet & more on the stump;

I was never confident
I could outrun broken crowns
or duck kickbacks
when I cut
with an underpowered saw—

as tall pines start to fall
they ripple as if they're wind
before toppling over their faces,
snapping tops off
landing with shaking heaviness.

I prayed for protection
my first Monday
then bought more power
the following Monday.

MET A MAN TODAY

a skinny fellow I wouldn't have invited home but he came anyway. "Name's Thomas Doubts," he said, flashing a badge issued by some authority. He was gathering evidence about an affair that happened in March. He had a date but he wouldn't tell me. "Do I know the person?" I asked. He said I didn't, that no one could. "Then why am I involved?" That's why he'd come, he said, to find out why I was—and he wrote down everything he said, just as if he were a court stenographer.

We played Euchre till he found the Jack of Bower hiding in the deck—after two marches and around midnight, I bought him a ticket on the Thunder Bolt Express. Haven't seen him since, but I thought I'd write, letting you know he's coming.

BEN—

called to say hello

you were firefighting
but I wanted you to know
sound doctrine divides
even strong brothers—
no one reads, *All are deceived.*

No exceptions listed
not one for you
nor one for me
so the best we can do
is muddle through
living what we believe
knowing that will be enough

POLLS REPORT

93% believe Heaven awaits them
leaving less than a tithe
beyond dark boundaries
that limit
where spirits nurture
hope of escape—

joining faithless poets
on their circular rabbitdrive
I wave flailing arms
to keep you from joining
me outside both traps
before it's time.

gifts—

don't know whether I should even privately
acknowledge, Father, I don't know why
you've called me but you have called—
what spiritual gifts are mine—
I'm not one to minister—
I have few soft words
for those who need comforted—
yes, I understand pain—
I know firsthand about death—
even know a little about addiction
about abuse...I have sympathy but
we all have bad breaks to overcome—
you, Father, are all we need
but trusting you takes faith
& faith takes your intervention
so the responsibility to minister
belongs to you—

I have no gift for organization—
you & I know my mind
files scattered thoughts in random files
recallable
as long as no one disturbs the chaos—
accountants are organized
so you need to call one of them
to lead missionary efforts—

are my gifts in evangelism
or would my voice just add
to the confusion of doctrine
& doctrines that drive wouldbe
converts to unbelief—
who am I to teach men
who have studied your words
from teachers & teachings
that stretch like a film
across the horizon of time—

no, I'm an old deer poacher
whom you have forgiven—
what other gift can I claim
or do I need—
for this I give you thanks
in your Son's name. Amen.

AS I CAST BLIND TO

a spawned steelhead trapped in the pond
of a sawmill overgrown by alders—timber
ribs, a sagging roof, a rusting boiler
remembered sweat of fifty men who spawned
a New Deal & sons who fought Fascism
on foreign fields—I mend line as my fly
twitches damp in the film, my thoughts shy
as titmice: should I war with the Platonism
of friends & neighbors, Laodiceans who'll
purchase by martyrdom the vision they now
believe only they possess? All will bow
to a carpenter's son on a foreign hill—
stripes & stones will be given to fishermen
casting blindness that hinders His children.

camus/camas—

grammar was omitted the year
I did sixth, seventh, eighth grades
making me 12 in high school,
a 16 year old math major at Willamette
where spelling was never my strength—

grade school was frustrating: I'd ask
how to spell a word,
would be told to look it up
but I wouldn't know what letter
it started with. Sound it out,
but I couldn't hear differences
so I would read dictionaries
till I found a word that would work—

not willing to pay the penalty
for an inherited dysfunction (Dad
stuttered bad), I cheated
on spelling tests till right
& wrong were as hard to hear
as "p" from "b"—became a poacher

with a dictionary on my knee
as I wrote about wind & weather
& my willingness to challenge
orthodoxy in fiction & poems—

I've been able to conceal this
birth defect by not reading
my work (I don't read well
same reason I can't spell) using
distance to hide, as long pants
do the bruise-mark on my shin
unattainable perfection

but nothing will conceal
the misspelled word
cast in bronze,
part of a poem of mine
around a downtown fountain

AUTHORITY—

needed to borrow a cutting torch—
my deacon said, Any time.
I came by at noon
but his men were already eating
so a little reluctantly
he helped me load bottles & hose.
I wanted to thank him
so I stepped into the camp trailer
that served as job site office & lounge.
There weren't enough chairs
for either of us
but to my surprize
he jerked
the chair from under one of his crew.
The fellow picked himself up, stood,
wanted to hit our deacon
but, I guess,
finally figured he wanted his job more.
He grabbed his lunch
stomped out—
I've not seen him since—
while all this deacon said was
He just doesn't understand authority
the way we do.

WISDOM—

1.
preachers professing
heaven as home
will condemn God
when that old liar's
deception unravels
revealing the church
at Philadelphia
through the millennia.

2.
a lie taught
in sincerity
doesn't heal itself
even when uttered
through anointed hands.

3.
life is blood from Noah to Paul
making your tripart nature
psuche, pneuma, & soma
breath, blood & flesh
understandably familiar.

4.
if for three days
Christ harrowed hell
& wasn't dead
as the ram Abraham sacrificed
then no blood covers
your sins or mine.

survivalists—

the Y2K problem seems far away
but some fellas are now beginning
to stockpile food—
they have their rifles
their ammo
their dried bananas
& sacks of wheat;
they'll be prepared
for if the computers don't go down
then there are the globalists
who want forty percent of us
killed off, a first strike
in 2002 or 2004 or 2008
I never can keep it straight

EXPANSION—

was sitting in a pew
when I realized the teacher
trying to explain
eternity
was using words
without signifieds
he thought the concept
too big for human minds
he had no stories
to connect him
to Creator or creation
so I interjected
that time
was part of the creation
but my words weren't stories
so for him
I'm scribbling these lines:
time can be written
as a function of gravity
making the passage of time
the expansion of space
making eternity
the endless extension
of the creation
the universe isn't static
the same now as when spoken
but dynamic
changing & being changed
by each story heard
in dimensions
beyond our limits
beyond our heavens

UNDERSTANDING

*Are there, the new minister asked,
strings attached?*

He wanted to sample the smoked salmon,
but there couldn't be any quid pro quo.

*Yuh betcha there's strings, said
the fisherman, a longtime member
of the flock but always on the margins.
I can't take it.*

Sure yuh can. The fisherman opened
his gift, lifted a strip of hard smoked fish
by its string & tossed it to the minister
as if it were a throw-away phrase.

THE NOVELIST ON TV WANTED

to write about prejudice, set his story
in Georgia, a Japanese
man in a writer's colony—
asked about the state, the novelist (who
lives in Los Angeles) said he'd done his
research...he'd flown over Atlanta
twice.

the LAW—

this Sabbath afternoon
traded for a young pea cock
traded a pair of turkeys
threw in an extra
that lead others astray

not long ago, I
would've considered
this trade too close
to doing business—
what some will think
backsliding
I understand
to be of lesser importance

I put this young bird
in the shop
even built a fire
so he would spend
a comfortable night
before being introduced
to my pea hens
who still holler
for their missing mate

but when he heard flames
he remembered deep fears
& started hollering, *HELP*
as if I'd sinned
against nature

IF NOT THE SABBATH

I would've been hunting
would've missed seeing
coyotes take down a deer
across the river—
they were patient
time didn't seem to matter
two waited ahead
a third slowly shepherded
the yearling
along a neglected fenceline
she could've jumped the barbwire
but she wasn't pushed hard
so she kept following
the property line
till a moment of confusion
cost her breath

so while I ate pancakes
the coyotes feasted
on liver & blood
leaving haunches
to a twirling troupe
of magpies
& to a lone eagle
who had been hunting
the thin steelhead run

BEYOND THE GARDEN

& that first orchard,
six horses, dark
against snow
covered alfalfa,
graze
the raised ditch bank—

beyond the horses, the church,
taillights
& a rosy sunrise—

I broadcast
a handful of wheat
to my geese, their honking
loud
across broken corn stalks
& barley stubble
as if warning
of an invading army
as grandsons
& great-grandsons
of Idaho pioneers
quietly
file past
in their Sunday suits,
Bibles & kids in hand.

A young rooster crows,
another & another,
each reminding me
of a morning long ago
& of one to come
when this young flock
will be butchered—

as I broadcast
another handful of wheat
a few misthrown kernels
land on the ditch bank:
some will sprout
in the spring
& bring forth a crop
outside of fences
outside of boundaries.

AGNES 1989

After thunder cracks
the slate gray sky,
booms rumble over
toppled power
lines, black
out Chena Ridge
4th of July
where children light
popping firecrackers
as you listen to
cheechakos complain
about ANCSA, braid,
unbraid your hair,
say nothing
when you know
so much. I ask
why, you
say your sons
play baseball
All-Stars all three.

What does independence
mean to you, living
alone, a single
parent raising boys
to hunt, fish,
register for the draft—
I have only daughters
who'll be like you,
cheering sons
pitching
grenades
before human
thunder blackens
the world to come
if downed trees
delay the Messiah.

connections—

Dad expressed amazement
at white hens laying brown eggs
& brown hens laying white eggs—

don't know if his farm boy wonder
was genuine; mine was...

I never got the chance to ask
after I began keeping a mixed flock
of White Rocks & Brown Leghorns.

What I remember is Sunday drives
on the back roads of Indiana...
whenever we passed a round barn
Dad would tell Mom that was where
So&So went crazy—

every so often Mom would ask why
& Dad would always say,
*He couldn't find a corner
to piss in.*

section three

Intimacy—

in whispers barely heard
she said fertility leaves
as it came, remembered
cramps & irregularity
I wouldn't know...

an echo—

every morning
pea hens holler
for the cock
that spread wings
& flew uphill
last summer

high on the mountain
beside an old pile
of coyote dung
I found a feather
turquoise blue

the old cock had been there

thought I heard him
a month or so ago
but what I heard
might've been an echo

guess I'll know
if he doesn't show
for scrap potatoes
when snow drives
deer low

the maskmaker—

in the ring of raindrops
spreading over the road
I see a face
shining mica & clay
a mask like those you display
at Alaskaland. You say
they're not you
squeeze my hand, then
like old love
fade away.

ARE YOU A FICTION

someone like me
who can't live up to a dream?

I transferred a lifetime of wanting
to you, wrote a draft no bank will
cash, a dream
like a willow
rooted along the Tanana—

weaving past shifting bars,
chugging through rain-swollen chutes,
I unravel braided channels
and listen to the river,
my hand on the tiller.

Swirling gray whirlpools,
slick runs and cutbanks,
the river changes
everyday . . . you hiss
like a lynx kitten, say
I shouldn't love a nun,
but purr at my stroke;
I'll sail with you to the Clearwater,
build that home you've never had
and watch willows grow
tawny when mush-ice flows.

STEPPING ACROSS

the fulcrum of Law
I teetertotter
in a crescent of wilderness

cleared of overburden
I have plugged
the stream with gravel

run the flow through my sluice
I don't need a wheel
to separate dust from sand
I need only you
to steady my hand as
I pick
nuggets caught in the riffles

gold poached from protected land
I have no permit
haven't filed an impact statement

for the wilderness
I claim borders
the river across Purgatory.

THANKSGIVING IN IDAHO

Snow on the sage, the stubble beyond white
as the squatting clouds across the valley,
the ridge there somewhere, like the three
strands of barbwire outlining the plowing
& planting, or the fox that, at twilight,
chased a vixen past where eight head of beef,
no, nine, now graze, their frosty breath
stapled to the leaning posts, split juniper

weathered gray. I was on the phone to a woman
in Ohio when I first saw the fox—she invited
me for Christmas, said she was horny but she'd
wait till I was there. Now, I watch two hands
and a border collie haze the cattle towards
a steel loading chute and a waiting truck.

THE LADDER

a sorting at midlife—
ailing joints hamper abounding youth—
a conscious wrestling—
accomplishments of nothing lasting—
a sudden grasp of eternal truth—
grappling as a sumo wrestler with life—
a circling of a new phase—
anxious about being pushed out of the ring—
a single loon crying at twilight—
animal instincts know that long days mean mating—
but I'm not ruled by instinct—
alone with my conscience, I lust yet deny lust for love.

THE TOURIST

"Are these orchids?" She asks
her friend, breaking two flowers stalks,
then a third.

"Are these orchids?" She asks
fishermen casting to silvers arriving
on the flood tide.

"Are these orchids?" She asks
members of her Kodiak tour,
then her guide.

"I believe they are," she says
laying the flowers on my picnic table
before she rides away.

WORLD'S SHORTEST RIVER*

This
wrestling with
one's
conscience is damning;
for you
and I should shoot up
D
River as silvers
returning to spawn
in Devil's Lake.
Wish I could
forget lasting death,
give
up lust for love. We don't need
more
riffles or a longer bed.

(*Less than 300 feet long, D River, Lincoln County, Oregon, was
officially the world's shortest river.)

SO YOUNG

A swan from Montana, you flew
North in September, passing
Ducks winging south in
Rigid V's. Overhead,
Excited chatter
Arches across the moon,
forging bonds
of love on
rising white wings—

young foxes, snowy
owls, lone wolves hunt
under flaring northern lights
while we lie
on frost-nipped tundra and
watch V's merge.

WHITE PETALS OF ROCK

Jasmine, Frigid Shooting Stars,
Indian Rice, Pixie Eyes,
Lanquid Lady, Shy Maiden,
Long-leaved Sundew, Touch-me-not—
all, blossoms like you, Canada's
sweetheart, who braved record cold

and bloomed out of season—
ladies' tresses spiral with
windflowers and silverweed,
artic forget-me-nots and
yarrow in stories I write,
seabeach yarns set from Point

Hope to Vancouver Island,
often obscure, deliberately
marbled like yukon beardtongue,
endemic to alpine mountain
roads chiseled in ice

by the white sun—
you read them, and
earned my respect.

ALONG THE OREGON TRAIL

Two sandhills, over fields of standing wheat
Ripe but beaten by yesterdays' storms, flap
In unison while I, alone in building heat,
Stand in wagon ruts—Pioneers, without road or map,
Hauled all they owned to Oregon where memories

jilted by divorce have driven me,
uncertain, eastward past rimrock,
sage flats & dryland fields already
tilled, awaiting new life locked

for a season in silos
or seed lots. The cranes,
rising above high-tension

lines, are lifelong mates;
ordinary men like me
vote for Presidents but
envy simple sandhills.

MARCH 5TH, 1995

Calls & cards weren't enough
After years alone. You wanted more—
Romance would do for now, you said.
Ocean moonlight, soft sand & hands held,
Lighted candles, drips forming puddles—
You weren't desperate, you said, no,
Not desperate. But you wanted a
 husband, respectability; you wanted in
 after looking through stained windows—
 parents & hymnals, bowed heads, amens...
 perhaps your shared crescent of wilderness,
 yesterday's whaleboned manacles, has

become today's center where juggling
injury against job, you delete nothing,
running errands, cleaning, sifting
those stained glass shards, separating
hope & faith, love & mercy from the
dust & splinters of mortar & beams—
at 46, life refuses to pass
you by, Love.

JANUS

She had something to say,
her husband brought herpes home
from a theatre workshop—
she turned away, knees
drawn, arms hiding her face.

I wanted to hold her, say it
was okay, but I didn't know if
I wanted the risk. Words
weren't there—
my breath was muddy on my tongue
as my thoughts hid within thoughts
like the virus itself.

A now single neighbor, who like me
was rearing her daughter alone—

I'm not anathema, she said.

How could I tell her about two
faces scanning opposite directions,
about what I would like to do
but would always fear...

facing the future, I saw nothing
black & white; accommodations
could be made, problems overcome

but behind me was a reason why
Dad said, *Keep your pants zipped*.

Smelling pie that my daughter baked,
I asked if she wanted a piece, wild
blueberries & rhubarb, sugar sweet.

She shook her head no.

But I had a piece with coffee,
before I said, *We didn't get to forty
in the beauty of our youth*.

[found poem]

please understand—

Sue's parents were fighting last night—
she came over here
when she couldn't stand it anymore. We had
a hamburger, watched some TV, and baked cookies
(what's left of them is in the cake box).
About 10:30, she decided she better go home.
Cold, real windy, and with my lights not working
on my Honda, I figured it was too dangerous
to take her home on the bike
so I took her home in the Scout.
I knew I was taking an awful big chance,
but I didn't know what else to do.

Love,
Ken

1040

I'd hoped never to write
this letter of separation.
We tried gluing us
together, but
we've grown so far apart
only the past is between us,
two strangers
linked by tax return,
a ten-forty form missing
the love we shared
in our twenties & thirties.

A WRITER I'VE KNOWN SINCE HE WAS

a graduate student from Minnesota
stopped by today to mark a month
sober—
he teaches,
has a year-by-year contract
& now takes life day-by-day.

What should've been joyous
wasn't—his wife left,
signed a six month lease
on her own apartment.

He wants her back,
he thinks,
for the sake of their son,
but she wants to sing
for the Metropolitan.

I listen
while watching outside
the feeder where
house finches vie
for who will be first—

if I wouldn't have been watching
I would've missed seeing
the neighbor's cat
snatch a female off her perch.

"She's up," he said, "against
stiff competition."

I need to offer encouragement
but vows unlike iron bars
are bent by thoughts
of freedom

so when he rises to go
I ask, "Will you return
to Mankato if she wins?"

JULY 10, 1989

Twenty-four years ago at the Friends
Church in Sherwood,
I vowed, "Until death
do us part."
I didn't think
about how far or near death
was; my thoughts were of life
and of her, pretty in white lace.
Vows were words
make like her veil,
binding
but brushed aside
for a kiss.

THE MAILBOX

sits galvanized among dusty roses
between the coal bunker & Fairbank's
rail depot...I pluck a fragile
blossom, profess love, hold it tight
and watch petals fall like winter
letters from Oregon, limp among leaves.

Since years of mangled promises stopped
by the accident I can't undo,
she answers I love you with, *Thank you,*
thank you, thank you. She agreed
to return when, listening to mood-

altering tapes, convalescing became
unbearable, but now that her settlement
is certain, she lives alone in Oregon,
and I wait till the flag drops, dash
for the pole, but find only green birch
blossoms hiding limp among leaves.

PAPERMAKER

Smoke from wildfires caught by rain
trickles from cheeks as tears water
rhubarb waist-high—a million acres
burn, black spruce & fireweed
but holding hands in July twilight
you remember tomatoes large as cantaloupes
at Mountain Home, laugh about your baby
crawling among the vines. Only eighteen
you wanted a farm & a husband to love
while he dated a high school girl
who asked why the North Pole didn't fall down—

That summer you spent on Venice streets
you would've thought me immature:
I wasn't against Vietnam
nor the multinationals,
I was a pulp mill shop steward
more concerned about safety than pollution.
Now you make paper while I write of war.

Twelve hundred lightning strikes,
twelve new fires yesterday—
burnt wood, I say, doesn't make good pulp—
& rising fog hides the wet kiss stolen
between the peas & rhubarb.

Peace marches & placards, arrest & divorce:
Nixon wasn't, you say, as important as children
left behind—I voted for Nixon in '68,
again in '72,
then quit the mill to farm
shunning pesticides, herbicides. I once spent
ten days in county jail, a game violation—
I should've taken welfare rather than that deer
said the judge I voted for in '72.

The musician you found in Venice smoked joints
& jammed while you supported him & his friends
& I protested taxes. It took years to square
with IRS, the same years you spent in a shelter
battered & burned.

Harder now, the rain drives us to shelter
& the road past the garden, muddy
as during breakup, circles around
like the trail of a chased rabbit
to the parking lot where second cars are kept.

We'll climb Murphy Dome tomorrow
look across to Minto,
maybe we'll pick blueberries,
maybe we'll catch butterflies,
maybe we'll do nothing at all—
there's time enough this summer
for grasses to sprout again;
moose will rub charred willows
& I will fight a wildfire
burning out of control.

YOU SAY ALASKANS ARE FRIENDLY

giggle like a schoolgirl & hide
the pain of being alone: 21 years
a long time married
then not married as if
years never happened.
I say I know
& I do know the hollow hurt
of appearing before the Lord empty
not without offering
but without family
to hear sermons about FAMILY—
 beside you and beside me
 weeds grow
 on once-plowed fields
 where muddy footprints
 crumble in the wind.

BENDING WEST

Across a barn-bridge near Erie
tapped maples fill yoked buckets
while old Yorick tickles Annalee.
Wish I were there, me her text,

open like a tent over her apron,
starched white, still stiff. She
reads while she waits, her long
hair, brown as walnut juice, loosely

frames high cheeks & eyes blue as
the Northern sky, tinkling cold
& cloudless, delighting Japanese
tourists, their long lenses aimed

nightly at pale green & pink bars
spiraling flares arching up twisting
bending west like heaven-bound lovers.
Sweet sap flows even here this morning.

Shivering, she laughs at Uncle Toby
riding his hobby horse while I sing
as men before me have around lonely
fires, sparks rising like howling

notes of mating wolves. Wind & moon
stumble over the Alaska Range—
a star falls like a silver spoon
down a wishing-well & I change...

Alas, poor Yorick.

MEANDERED ACROSS

a birch hillside,
blushing green,
today, jumped
a rabbit, then
another—a pair
already gray
and white.

Watching them,
I wanted you
to see how
easily they
shrugged off

the rain.
We, bogged
down in breakup,
are unable
or unwilling

to shrug off
winter; our
runs remain
blocked by
snares set

by wrinkled
faces, checked
by monthly
statements.
They'll butcher

us if they
can, make us
into a lean stew
then complain
about the

late spring.

SIXES

A posed picture
with her sister,
she stands in front
of that noble fir,
cones upright as candles.
The fir, dug by her dad when
I took him hunting on Stott Mountain
the year I killed that buck, yes, the
5-point whose rack hung above my flintlock
those years at Logsdon, was mowed level
by her brother. Shredded bark & needles, it grew
to hold draped lights that first Christmas we spent
in Alaska; survived her Aunt Delores backing into it,
bent bumper & chrome. Noble fir limbs grow in hexes
as if three weren't enough: her dad, dead, a heart
attack after triple bypass surgery; her brother, dead,
a Vietnam Vet who OD'd on Valium when unable to silence voices
only he heard; her Aunt Delores, dead, after three husbands &
years of tippy barstools & more years of lipstick on crooked—
That fir grew taller than the apples, taller than power poles,
grew as tall as the walnuts planted during the first World War—
her sister's daughter eloped with a rock musician, & her
daughters, our daughters, live with me, & we...toppled
by yesterday's wind, that fir was, by lantern light, bucked &
split. Firewood now,
washed by today's rain,
lies stacked against
winter storms,
sure to come.

AFOGNAK LAKE

plo-ush

Her friend stands, arms cradling
wood cut before dark as she reaches

PLO-ush

for my rifle. Backs to the embers
of our fire, they probe the blackness

PLO-USH

between spruce trunks (I hold my breath
as I did when first hoping to kiss her)

PLO-USH!

with a three-cell dim from use as we
listen to the bear pounce on spawning

plo-USH

silvers in the lake's shallows. Wobbling
(my gun's too heavy), she thinks

I don't know about them—

plo-ush

I swirl the last swallow of coffee in my cup,
savor it. I should make another pot, and
would if I didn't have to dip water from the lake.

for Sarah L.

THE PROMISE

A spring wound too tight, I am
the steel that drives aging
gears, matched & mated—
tutor, mentor,
student, lover, we are one,
at an intersection.

I saw you wait
that moment. Tell me
what were you going to say?
No, don't show me...a kiss,
yes and yes again.

Had an EKG yesterday:
a little irregularity showed up,
a flutter when I thought of you.

I may have been
born with the defect,
said I might live
to be a hundred with it,
the age of Abraham
when you bore the promised son.

MELTINGS

Thin loneliness bared by the melting
winter clings to cuffs and colors cheeks
and casts us together like snow on a spruce
bough bent low, with life in you twisting

towards the southern sun. Below, fox
tracks on a rabbit run—I hear a baby
hurt, squeals, terror & the kill. Now
only a chainsaw whines in the distance.

Like a bench judge, you justify this
decision we both hate, say it won't come
between us, but
wind will sway boughs

storms will shake
us and timber cruisers
will flag new
sales. We won't remember
afternoon meltings
or this falling
together.

RUTH WAS

read, prayers said,
but dusk has wed dawn;
stars don't show over
barley growing near Delta.

Seven weeks ago the harvest
began at Jerusalem...
what has Alaska made of you
who once was like Ruth—

you returned to your mother,
no longer willing to wait
for the northern harvest
reaped when Trumpets

herald the new year,
the coming of a new age
with the Law written
on the hearts of men

like me who didn't plan
for failure
nor for success.

MARRIAGE

when I first heard crescent of wilderness
I'd just read about Formline
design breaking down
in the margins
where traditions wed
two becoming one
something new
created from history
where stories are things
that keep alive blankets that killed—

I started over again in a wilderness
where wolf howls reach
to northern lights
arching, flaring
as I parted curtains
of another crescent & planted
seed without disturbing sleeping weeds

prozac—

a gray gull
on a gray stone
in a gray river
marks where she caught
a gray fish
on a gray lure
on another gray day

FAITH—

the earth lives in animal groans
healing itself in darkness
& we as mites on its pelt
wander to & fro
ever busy sucking its blood

but for no reason known
a few of us are called
sojourners
are given an uplink
that will cause muscles to twitch
if we have the faith to ask

WHEN I READ ORWELL

1984 was years in the future,
but that year brought days of crying
alone in a sanitized room
blaming me
for not being there.

Her visitor said I betrayed her—
I know who he was & when
he was there,
even what he said
for I read her nurses' notes

so she made a deal
to deal
thought nobody knew
till guilt broke a vow
lasting forever.

Now, she's alone
with her settlement—

I haven't lost interest in living
But—

didn't want to admit failure
didn't want to grow fat
as a palace eunch
castrated by an old promise
to remain faithful

but I have
and I will,
not for her sake
but for mine.

A LETTER TO OREGON

Years of mangled promises
were stopped
by accident. I can't undo

the damage. She agreed to return
till her insurance settlement was certain—
her daughters don't bother her anymore.

They want to send something for Mother's Day,
a colored picture
from a coloring book. I say, Okay.

They're seventeen & eighteen, but she stopped
being a mother a long time ago.
Tender green leaves soften ghostly white trunks—

I stand among birches, each fragile as the North
and as tough—

I worry why I can't turn loose of her.
Divorce has become natural
as oil spills
and asphalt highways.

A LETTER

yesterday concerned about Exxon's Spill—
Robin heard how the industry betrayed us—
I answered this morning.

Took an hour to gather enough birch bark
to write, with a ballpoint, "Without
industrialization, human intercourse
dies as trace
 gold lost
 when black sand
spills.

