

Once There Was Grass

ALSO BY GAIL SHER

Prose

- The Intuitive Writer: Listening to Your Own Voice* • 2002
One Continuous Mistake: Four Noble Truths for Writers • 1999
From a Baker's Kitchen • 1984

Poetry

- redwind daylong daylong* • 2004
Birds of Celtic Twilight: A Novel in Verse • 2004
Look at That Dog All Dressed Out in Plum Blossoms • 2002
Moon of the Swaying Buds • 2002
Lines: The Life of a Laysan Albatross • 2000
Fifty Jigsawed Bones • 1999
Saffron Wings • 1998
One bug . . . one mouth . . . snap! • 1997
Marginalia • 1997
La • 1997
Like a Crane at Night • 1996
Kuklos • 1995
Cops • 1988
Broke Aide • 1985
Rouge to Beak Having Me • 1983
(As) on things which (headpiece) touches the Moslem • 1982
*From Another Point of View the
Woman Seems to be Resting* • 1981

Once There Was Grass

Gail Sher



NIGHT CRANE PRESS

2004

Copyright 2004, Gail Sher
All rights reserved.
Night Crane Press, 1500 Park Avenue, Suite 435
Emeryville, California 94608

Cover art: Gail Sher

No part of this publication may be reproduced
or transmitted in any form or by any means
electronic or mechanical, including
photocopy, recording, or any information storage
and retrieval system, without permission in writing
from the copyright owner and the publisher.

ISBN: 0-9726115-3-3

For Brendan

Once there was grass

Once there was grass. Once there was corn country.
Yellow stalks wind-driven and hungry.

I thought locusts destroyed all that.

Chives, gourd-leaves, cucumbers covered the ground.

Tender grass. Soul-surfing grass. The young owl's
whooooooooo.

I had a pet tortoise (to whom I fed lettuce).

*Mama mama. Cry for me. Cry for my daughter and her
daughters.*

The grasshoppers came. Their sound, hair-splitting.

Why? Since music is made. I don't see the point.

Brushing bottoms. Of what underneath?

Lavender's hoary, huh, he said.

Scrawny purple mops. Crude or you might say obscene
the way they flopped, flip-flopped, flip-flopped.

I don't think I'll be early, she'd moaned, hiking her
jersey high above her thighs.

So when the lily . . . I mean full blown white popped
out . . .

The world is self-correcting, said the man in the hat.

He'd crossed one blue-jeaned leg over another. A rank,
lowering of the air followed his shift of position.

The woman about to give birth wanted candles. "Can I
have five?" she'd asked.

So what's internal?

Her horse. (She'd said it tenderly.)

The mouse, the earth, the lake where she began.

Well, the farmer had in mind to potty train the child,
but his wife . . . it was strange.

She was four (the kid). She couldn't talk and she wore
diapers.

The mother'd say, "Hi doll!" but you knew . . . I mean,
who wants to be around a smelly little girl?

"It's uncomfortable for everyone," remarked a distant
relative.

Wiping the ass of her daughter, smearing the shit, who
knows, playing in it.

She had a plug in her heart (the child). To keep her
blood pressure down.

She had a hole in her heart which the lungs rushed to
fill. The plug plugged it (sort of).

Anemia's like that. Blood leaks out. But they couldn't
find it. "Where's the leak?" the doctors said.

"I was holding him on my finger – all of a sudden he
keeled over."

Okay. Okay. (She gaped her mouth.) “Ummmm. Yummmm. Can I have some more of those black ones with the green spots?”

“Oh I know. I’ll read you a story!” She got out her book. It didn’t have words.

“Once upon a time there was a girl named . . . Marble. She had a mommy and daddy. Her mommy said she’d get a little sister. Which made her excited. ‘Can I feed her raisins?’

“You can be her little mommy,” her mommy sweetly told her. So she laughed.

“Was Marble afraid?”

The crocodiles were scary. They lived under a bridge. When she went to catch butterflies, they grinned up at her.

Crickets too. One’s legs tired as another made a big *Chirrp!*

Did she tell anybody? Her mama, for example?

In a dream she’d told a rabbit.

The tune white

The tune white. Its staffs' quintet. She listened to
the crickets.

The flat blare of them. (O foggy night.)

His lizard boots. Her red-oil pen. A Comanche moon
rose high above the plain.

Deracinate. (He'd said it.) Dress, socks, hightops.

Nude of embrace. (A columbine of her.)

Chew. Chewing. Opera comes later.

She pictured Mahavira. He barely ate. Squatted in the
sun.

But her mama had taught her. She knew exactly what
she had on.

I picture green. A lily-green sweater with cotton
buttons and sleeves.

Yeh. She wore it as a girl. Then for golf. (It got stored
in a trunk.)

Soft. Clean. They don't mak'm like that any more.

Her dimples showed in the drape of the collar.
Seventeen all over.

We had cars. I know people.

A mash of air gets started (fast).

The buff. The huge amount of pheasant. (Trotted over
in his truck.)

The bead on his hat-string rolled around a neck, bug-
bitten, raw, covered with little bumps.

Did she care for him? I thought the life-guard took her
fancy.

Leave me night. Let me in once in a while, huh? was all
he'd said.

Her bedroom was a mess (picture pocket books, dolls
photographs).

Which made him . . . fuck. He was glad to finally be
settled.

Bing bing

Bing bing. An ever-so-slight gust against the Gregorian chimes.

Sun splattered across the park.

A plane roared. “It sounds like it’s misjudging,” she’d said to no one in particular.

The rrrrrrrr of its rush as it rummaged through the clouds.

“What’s to be done?” (They’d said it under their breath.)

He stood listlessly gazing at the birds.

Horses’ hoofs. Sweet-smelling breezes. Harlem trunks before their surprise prairie.

Restive hill. Wanting me. Wanting me. What do you want, hill?

“Hey dad!” It was from a child. (He didn’t want any.)

“Bambinos,” she’d thought driving by the garage. Two were playing. A train sped by.

So what? Is that relevant? The lad looked all right in his knickers and blue socks.

Skinny guy. He wrapped the *Chronicles* in brown kraft paper humming to himself and his kid sister.

Paler than pale. But you know, the family was together. They could fold the papers together, stack'm and take off.

I seen'm load'n their van. Pile'n it up.

One handed the other what to fling out the window.

They were always around. Their truck said *Chronicle*, but I always thought it was some Mexican *Chronicle* offshoot.

Beep beep. Beep beep. Tiny sounds, insistent (apologetic).

One car after another dropped its youngster off.

Rrrrrruuuuuuuuummmmmmmmm.

Rrrrrrrruuuuuuuuummmmmmmmm. Then, later,

Rrrrrrrrrrrruuuuuuuuummmmmmmmm.

Rrrrrrrrrruuuuuuuuummmmmmmmm.

Brown air. A carpet of trail.

AAAAAAAAUUUUUUUMMMMMMMmmmmmmm.
AAAAAAAAUUUUUUUMMMMMMM. The long low rev.

The skill of an eastern person is still the voice of the mother.

“According to Vyasa” her book began, “the universe is egg-shaped and divided into seven *lokas*.”

She’d dozed off, busily scrabbling their locations.

She thought she saw a fellow

She thought she saw a fellow. (She'd gone to Alaska.)

There are trees. It's very beautiful.

Common birds live in the woods.

Narrowly. Narrowly. The contact of no sheep.

A painter paints. Hears pelicans, owls, children.

Infinite liquid drones from the throat of one who feeds
on milkweed.

Its advent in the bush. The moss. The groggy leaves.

A mockingbird in a lilac shrub quivering beneath the
casement.

Was the bird guarded?

Its neck was wrung but it hadn't . . . somehow . . . so she
quick, plugged its nostrils. (In her dream, the chicken's
feathers hacked.)

"Diseases do not go near one who massages his feet
before sleep," says Harish Johari.

She'd crossed her legs. Sweat dripped down her
forehead.

Ducks spiral near. Cozy up in the grass.

Long-necked beaks swivel every which way.

A dog bounded across the hill (raced the rising moon).

But it never did. He almost ran into the water.

“How much was that?”

“How much was that?” (The man was annoyed.)

The stigma of ancient ones etched on her tummy.

They slam on their throats. Cry. What!

So honey, to sell yourself.

I know the pixie. Helicon tuba. Sly.

She'd dressed in slacks. Piper they'd called her.

It didn't bother her friend (bent on gett'n his duckling pregnant).

Blind Han, huh. (The name Haniel from the Bible.)

Corn grass told the sighs from babes. Their badness.
(That they aspired to such.)

How much, William? What would your daughter eat if
you didn't correct her?

The one from Shanghai, she'd eat corn (though it'd get
her into trouble).

In her mouth (into happiness).

Well luv, her mates were her mates, though they shared
different values.

Just get an abortion. What's the big deal.

I read faster. I count faster.

The lady made a point of spelling out his whole name.

How 'bout the redhead? (In his youth he was a
swimmer.)

The man ignited wool. Burned it to a fizz.

As a nun she'd been paid little respect. "Hush child.
Why don't you ask your brother?"

One gleaned little about her feelings – swimming late
(as a summer day goes).

She'd filled her pockets with stones. Stepped into the
river.

Though she carefully left a note. Dear One. You've been
perfect.

Mosaic of noise. Of voice, heart, credence.

No daddy. I can't come to your party.

Calla lilies!

Calla lilies! Wine-colored, pearl.

“What color was the sky?”

“Brown. The same brown as today only she wouldn’t believe it.”

“The woman kept saying, ‘I’m from Korea. I’m different.’ But what would that have to do with the sky?”

The tide of it. (It slides down the mud.)

Its own mud. Its very own mud.

Brown, right? Brown is the important color.

Dense yet light-filled.

“Of course you’re starving. Here take these home.”
(She’d gone to Safeway around 11:30 at night.)

A rat ran over the hill. Chink chink chink pattered its little feet.

Meanwhile bells. Derived from what (did you say)?

She wanted to think of some extraordinary gift.

In and out. In and out. The branches had created a
canopied walkway.

Silvery-green gnomes waddled about the gorge.

Cool-legged, quick, they stalked the air.

Huddled in their wad of friendliness.

Her leer (her “team”) draping her arm around a
brother’s narrowing shoulders.

Daisies slumped. (Their thick bush root-beer colored.)

To grow a lotus, someone’d said, just wrap the seed in
mud.

Look how it sprouts from the side of its mother’s belly!

The hollow afterwards. (The places a mother goes.)

Her life, outside my body.

Green air. (The sheer stop.) They’d cut off his arm,
which had gangrened by that time.

A butterfly. A quail. Who’s to sing along?

Is that a deer?

Is that a deer? It looked like a wolf. It could be a puppy.
(She glared at the animal.)

Tiny cabbage butterflies fluffed the hill with life.

The little body romped. It moved like a deer, but it was furry. And fatter! “Deers aren’t chubby,” she’d muttered to herself.

And alone. Usually deer – don’t they? – travel in threes.

Raccoons are dangerous said the article on disease. Never encourage them, and never let your children play near areas where they wander.

Strolling through the wooded glade (glowing sea-brewed light).

“Raccoons are PANDAS!” Near a startlingly white snout, its un-panda-like mask.

The reddish one in her book was tiptoeing in the sun. Its shadow resembled a long skinny branch.

The diction (which he’d contested). The man needed to get a degree.

“Have a nice time, dear.” (She knew they’d eat somewhere.)

The falcon had a mate (amongst the yellow rape and *banksia* flowers).

“I keep thinking about the scarf. It’ll give him pleasure,” she’d laughed roguishly.

Count twenty birds. From his canoe he’d aimed and shot.

A beaver sunned, belly-up in the rapids.

“Big Nips.” Such are entitled the burgers.

“Water not only visually reflects the environment, it molecularly reflects it,” the writer had said.

What's that word?

What's that word? It woke her up.

"It doesn't do anything for you," the salesperson had said.

"You can always use it as a layering piece," she'd added, cradling her mug.

A white-ribbed tube circled her body, swished to the side, then poofed.

Boing. Boing. Not only her but the whole world was up.

She listened to the chimes. Massaged by wind, their cluster of peals.

Is that ocean or is it traffic? The far-off roar, behind bells, breeze, a distant apartment's vacuum. It bothered her that she couldn't tell.

A bird darted from a bush, ruffled its feathers, then sank, back, beneath the bush.

The beak of her. Crazy. Lavish. The cull. (The pull to excess.)

Rickety clangs blasted a forthcoming storm.

The drift of night, sloppily. A bird out back chirped hollowly.

So care. Can you be so fulfilled that it doesn't matter?

Think of yarn, some hot cheap color. A scarf is made. It dangles to the ground. The person drapes it around her neck twice, thrice, maybe even four times. But then her cigarette drops. Oozes out a hole. Though it doesn't unravel, she gets tired of the hole.

She'd wanted it to be glorious.

So she kept it. Even after she didn't like it any more.

For which she didn't respect herself. "I've got too much junk!"

"Son of a bitch!" cried the woman behind a curtain.

"Can I wear this chemise?" she'd twirled, mimicking a serve.

"What do you think? Can I wear this on the court?"

Her parents (being Buddhists) really had no religion. It was so watered down. Noth'n to hold onto.

“Of course you will develop it,” said the theologian
(not the local superior).

Those who are absorbed. Often they are terribly polite.

Take a lapse. An absorbed person’s deepest
relationship might be with that.

“I can’t wear taupe,” she says with utter certainty. For
me, well, there are so many taupes.

The day's dry leaves

The day's dry leaves. (So it fashioned her.)

Drowsy. Hushed. Twilight a relief.

Masculine soil. (Moonrise to the right.)

But the woman had lost her eyesight (and the memory
of her eyesight).

Drops of rain meandered from the sky. Cushioning the
phone, she looked out over the city.

The young man's jacket slung over his briefcase,
monogrammed in gold (soft, Italian calf).

A shell home in the mountain. A black-throated
warbler. A snow goose. An oriole. Trace it back.

"The bean stalk boils the beans," she'd said, but he
didn't get it.

I admit I am ashamed. But they were, well, not thin. He
liked them Marilyn Monroe-ish.

A yellow note (a square of Swedish paper) poked from a
vial of stems.

Your father was a player?

My father was a wholesaler. His thing was quantity not
jacked-up price.

A sarong. A queen. Her ga-ga sort of laugh.

“Yes,” rang the chimes (the wind’s tongues).

I wish ivy. I wish crumpets. I wish hollyhocks, magno-
lias, peas.

I wish the consummate ocean of turtles.

Panache with a queue. (Is that what you’re saying?)

It wasn’t the turn-on that she’d expected.

A scorpion eats silk. Does it spin a cocoon? Does it
exhaust itself and sleep?

Insects don’t miscarry. Right. Is that right?

The lily of her becoming.

She’d appliquéd one. Characters were roots (yellow
and black).

Was it affiliated with anything? Did she draw, for
example?

In the sense that it's deliberate. Not like the slow woman.

One had a thick hand-crotcheted flower. One had scree woven in amazing knots.

Muscle. Bone. (Surly and ribbed.)

Seed-lines that feel alive – scattered fragments and pebbles and slobber and God knows what – (like the man said).

Yes. That's real. Something solid and hassle-free.

Coo coo coo

Coo coo coo. Coo coo coo. Shards of the day broken
with the bells.

Her cheeks. The pale skin cracked.

Swat! Your face. (Skin meated away.)

Frail throats in the evening light.

Slapping the air. Grabbing with my fist.

“Good morning,” said the woman. “Finally summer,
huh?”

Old skin. Wrinkles in the folds. Why would you wear an
earring?

“I collect salt.” (She’d said it as if she were serious.)

Daytimes she did nursing. Ran around the extreme
care unit.

Did everyone’s job (who wrote her up).

*At lunch and dinner – man, Sunday night – you
couldn’t get near the place!*

“God damn!” she’d shout, before leaving for the
quarry.

“I’m hot.” The woman fiddled with her sweater.
“Yesterday I went to the mall. To cool off, mainly.”

She kept twisting its two sleeves, whose ends continuously unwound.

She’d raised her arms (reclipping her barrette). “I find I’m simply passive. Like . . . oh, I don’t know. Is this normal?”

Staring at her shoes, eyes relaxed around the ties.

So like are you saying that in the manger . . .

It wasn’t of consequence. Just a birth like any other.

The slow woman paused, “Is that asparagus fern?”
(Plants moved *for* her she’d mentally noted.)

“I hear the baby swoon. I feel it ride my belly.” She’d pet the part, then straddle her arm over it, gently.

The bleeding of her spouse. (The manger was a dugout.)

A husband nests. Bedlam inside.

A filly was born on the threshold of its father.

We wish you a merry Christmas, which – the air was rife with it.

We made a hollow in a stone. Covered it with wreaths.
Crèche-like creatures slurping from the mud-holes.

Ablaze with their tongue. (Little bead of hope.)

So far, nothing. She talks but he forgets.

Father, it's me. My wish is to serve.

Gentle hill

Gentle hill. Leisurely off the mountain.

The name of the archer resonates in the sound.

Each bow a lancet. A broken woman from all reports.

Let me buy you string, one fellow'd asked her.

A kite (the woman) who had a son. Who then, later (the son was five) got married.

Thin. (Sickly.) Thin. (Tired.) But she paid attention.
When the teacher spoke, she heard.

The woman laughed. (She'd waited for her mother to die.)

You've seen firewood turn to tinder. But ash doesn't
turn back into firewood.

Delivering her child (leaning against a doorway).

She wound the placenta around its face.

It was a lean year. The baby wouldn't have survived.

"May she reincarnate in a prosperous womb," was all
she'd said.

Slow and ought.

That that was something she did. That she would have to do given her history of blood relatives.

“Don’t make such a fuss. It’ll all work out,” averred the husband’s mother.

In her mind raising children was expensive.

So she sought redemption.

- 3:00 A.M. recite poetry, chant classical texts
read one volume of the *Lotus Sutra* seated in the lotus position
- 5:00 A.M. snack (thick rice gruel with walnuts and crystallized sugar)
- 7:00 A.M. complete morning studies
stroll in garden
breakfast (fermented bean curd, wheat gluten, crusty rice soaked in fermented bean curd sauce)
- 3:00 P.M. resume study

Bardo voice. The mother heard the rhythm.

From a forest knoll, numerous somnolent shadows.

Past grassy fields and a wild sheep path.

That belly. That basket. I know it when I see it, she'd said.

Raspy, depleted. (The young girl's call.)

Did she draw the cow for you?

Bastion of voice. Within her. Within the Calvary of her.

She wished to be a priest but where to tuck her literary career?

The man was a genius. He thought the best of other people.

Him and his friend (someone scathingly called them “boys”). He’d said, “Well, youth is valued in our society,”

A riff. A gig. He wouldn’t talk.

He was thirsty, man. He fuck’n wanted a drink of water.

And afterwards too. I felt he was stunned.

Those last six years, lyin’ on a bed in a suit.

I kinda wished he’d died. Imagine every day gett’n up, dress’n.

Probably he was sweating. I would be, day after day.

A woman down the street. He had. And sons. Were they musical?

The blues in Chicago was born about that time.

After the war. People from the delta . . .

The woman brought him toothbrushes since Buddhists don’t brush their teeth with animal bristles.

YEAR OF THE HORSE

Year of the Horse

“Year of the Horse, the most auspicious of the twelve astrological signs . . .” her book had begun. That was her year.

“Circling Mount Kailash just once in a Horse year is equal to thirteen *koras* performed at any other time.” (A *kora* is a devotional circuit around the sacred mountain’s base, the author explained.)

She’d been in a store randomly fishing through a basket of bracelets. Each had a charm depicting a different Chinese symbol. “Which am I,” she’d wondered, but hers was missing.

Beyond her hand blanched trees waved. Dark clouds swabbed the sky.



“Welcome home, my love. Glad you like the tulips.”

A callow moon absorbed and toned a glowing bowl of flowers.

Tomato petals. Deep-bottomed cups. “Exotic,” she’d thought, twirling the vessel.

Supple. Tall. Willowy like a geisha. (Slim with maybe one bold feature.)



Sweet air. Cool and crisp as evening settled in.

Orange-beaked ducks waddled about the lake.

Or muddy pond, elevated by their slender necks. And backs. And dawn-pink feathers.

Teeny birds twittered, pecked at the gravel nervously. *Peep peep. Peep peep.* (Lush cries from baby throats.)

But the ducks. One entered reeds. The other, looking around every which way (as if it were considering many other options) invariably followed. So that in the water, on the shore, on the wide expanse of grass, they stayed together.



“*Moo moo moo,*” croaked one duck. “*Moo moo, moo*” replied the other. The medley had awakened her.

A gardener (his crazy leaf blower) was combing through the grass.

One leaf flopped over the brim of her tulip's vase.
Could it need water? All the others were firm.

"Tomorrow they'll start to fade," she'd thought. She could already detect, in the flesh of one petal . . .

A second flower, whose edges sagged, had subtly visible stretch-marks.



Night. Black and silent.

The way your body slides into it, testing, gliding – is it going to be disturbed?

The slightest sound . . . The feeling of inner . . . weighing . . .

The vast formation of westward-flying birds.

Giraffe-like stalks

Giraffe-like stalks. Her *hoya*'s wailing gropes.

Is that frost on the lilies? A gardener dragged a dead half-tree off to the refuse yesterday.

"They're a wonderful company," the salesperson had said. "Trekking on Mt. Everest test each and every product."

Cheep cheep cheep. A bird's sweet voice from out the rubble.



Wind like war. It slashed flowers.

Where is summer (month of the year's longest day)?

A limb of leaves swept the mud. Though the sky needed its virulent breath.

Even crickets avoided exposing their wings.



March! Nights bright. Bedraggled pigeons flooded the gorge.

A squirrel, a bit nebulous – stopping and starting – young, tan (not bushy).

A fat cat crawled the hill. Its arc of light through the daffodils and sweet peonies.

Tigerish, antsy. Eyes focused but at the same time scanning.



His cat was fat. Sprightly but plump.

Pedigreed Semite. (I'd wondered if he had a pet.)

Suzanne Farrell was warned (You're a little pudgy.)
But by his emissaries. Not him.

In both biographies . . . I mean it just says that after work they went to the donut shop.



Dowager breeze (salacious, mused).

“Will last for months!” said the tag. Its notch formed a heart, clasped around a lower stalk.

At first she'd figured violets (stirred by the montage).

“Maybe *exacum*'s a kind of violet,” she'd thought.



“I'm anorexic. I just pretend to eat.” That's what the man should have said to his waitress.

The family had been seated. They were used to his ordering nothing.

“A cup of soup,” he’d instructed the girl. But when it arrived, he’d let it sit. Which she took to mean that he found it distasteful.

Waitress: “Let me take it back! We’ll get you something else.”

Anorexic: “No. No. It’s not the soup. It’s my wife. She made me eat a huge breakfast and now I’m not hungry.”



Bones and wings. (Vile, smart.)

Think of a chicken. Feet too, though they go into the soup.

With dumplings and parsley, a savory brew on a chilly night.

Transversal. Incumbent. Slurping up the river.



Queer light. (Shimmery.) To what season does it adhere?

The opulent park faced a supermarket.

“Do you have your Safeway card,” inquired the check-out girl as she’d finished beeping a mound of food. Her woozy customer waved a piece of plastic.

“How much was that,” he asked, staring at some wieners.

“I don’t know,” responded the girl. (Individual items weren’t marked.) “I wouldn’t be able to find it on the computer right away. Do you want to charge them back?”

The man took a stab at processing his card. “How much was *that*?” he tried again, peering now at buns.

“I can’t tell you,” the girl repeated. She was beginning to get agitated. “Would you like to charge something back?” She glanced at the line. She seemed uncertain how to handle the situation.



Baggy wind. “The day would make sense,” she’d thought, “if it were twenty degrees warmer.”

Little red flowers (cracked at the neck). Plants were taking their time.

The floral head. In summer it sprouts. What would a cheesy winter accomplish?

Mother of all creatures. His rice. Frog's.



So the skinny man who reads, works out, disinherits
himself (his wife is his mouth).

Dark-colored stones have the most iron and the highest
magnetic intensity, she'd read.

One develops a pit bull's grip.

Unmassaged by God, anorexics *are* pit bulls.



Is the mother of The Gap son?

A jungle-gym of tar.

Her tenacity . . .

To rinse his mind (like the man said).

So you're ten

“So you’re ten. You don’t go to school. You got no mother, no father, noth’n the fuck to do all day. What d’ya think you think? What goes through your fuck’n brain?”

“I mean like you could get a rifle. Kill a bird. What the fuck for eight fuck’n years!”

“Mostly you’re mad. No one wants you around.” He put his face in his hands.



“There’s that cat,” she’d thought, inching her car into her assigned space. Large green eyes in a black proprietorial body stared her down as she’d locked the door, opened the trunk, then wandered away from the animal. (It was seated on the hood of the car in the next slot.)

She’d seen it before. On other cars. On the floor. It was not a stray.

“Maybe it wants a nice warm engine,” began her speculations. “It’ll probably switch to my hood as soon as I’m out of sight.”

The moon, a brilliant sliver, rose behind its reedy shape.



Stubby leaves. Six, seven, sodden and dangling. She'd pressed a finger to the soil. Hard as a rock.

It was her housekeeper's job to water it. Should she mention it? The woman didn't speak English very well.

"Do you like plants?" she'd initially inquired. "Oh yes! Will take good care," the sweet young lady had smiled.

She had, but she missed times.



"Bluegrass. Or 'Newgrass.' They don't know what the fuck they're doin'. It's not clean." (He paused.)

She herself had one tape with one song that she played over and over and over.

Once while she was driving she'd suddenly heard the bass. Thump thump. Thump thump. Back and forth between two keys. "Oh my god!" she'd muttered.

She'd driven along listening even more closely.



A whale breathes. (Its vibration in the rocks.)

She'd shut her eyes. The mountain shook with flames.

She'd been staring out the window. "Aren't you a little early?" (She'd mentally waved hello.)

A Monarch flapped a path across the trees.

The day was glorious

The day was glorious. Rabbits, cats, birds in every cranny.

A gardener passed. On his head (he carried) a ground-cloth full of dirt.

“That’s good,” she’d thought, amused with the reversal.

A second gardener passed. Then a third with the same load.

Watching them wend their way around the building, broad backs, uniforms, nebulous faces and eyes.



Peach! Not pink! And ever-so-soft yellow striae.

She’d stared transfixed at the fragrant horseshoe blossoms.

Sun flickered from the leaves. New yellow-green and hoary alligator-green.

“They look like today,” she’d thought as a butterfly paddled north.



“You’re all done,” the doctor’d said. Her dizzy brain

could hardly take it in. The surgery had gone smoothly and much less painfully than she'd expected.

Late light on the lake. White heads bobbing. Ducks mobbed the inlet.

Caw caw caw. CAW CAW CAW. Another jay was swinging on a brittle pine-tree branch.

“A storm is brewing.” A few drops had grazed her window. “What’s it going to do?” she’d wondered, glad she had thought to bring a coat.



Who are they? They whistle, hum little arias.

She was riding uphill. Her bike took a dive.

The bike had a beak. Bearded to infinity. (Geckos from the woods' bebop.)

My bed of white under layers of fallen snow.



So you're saying it was a crisis. Or could have been only she'd avoided it.

She watched his muscles strain, lugging it over the hump.

Ball of the clock (the urchin an inference).

“It’s me,” she’d thought, recalling her teacher who’d (on hearing of a discrepancy), immediately got up, crossed the room and pulled out his calendar to check.



Paper petals. Even as she looked, they’d spread their wings.

The peach was actually tangerine. (On its crisp ruffled rim.)

A third unopened bud resembled, from above, the about-to-snap mouth of a – she’d almost said “frog” but without teeth, its triangular sheath – “It’s more like an alligator,” she’d muttered.

From indoors, its shrieks.

Whooooo whooooo whooooo

Whooooo whooooo whooooo. Lowering sun, blinding in the dusk.

Young voices (and cats) from beyond the shrouded hill.

Cackling and raw, its blue thorns sober. Hay-colored grass cycling claws, nails, footprints.

Silence. (The meadow's dry excitement.)



Kid: "Hey!" An antelope wandered by the nursery.

A kangaroo, a bear, chubby and wise.

Cowboy: "Sell me their skins. I want to wear a furry jacket.

"Will they match her dress?" he wonders, thinking of the one he'd just had wrapped with last week's salary.



Pregnant sky. (The cowboy holds them to the light.)

Cheep cheep cheep. Chiiiiirrrrrr chiiiiirrrrrr.

Coooooooooooooooooooo.

Succulent peeps. Is this night? Is this the day of the dark moon?

A dove flitted from the underbrush.



“Do you mind if I open this window,” a woman’d asked.
A powdery smell of flowers wafted in as she spoke.

“Is that music or the washer?” Her stylist stopped,
aware, suddenly, of the opinion of the recording that
her question had presumed.

“It’s the washer,” someone replied. “We need a new
one, obviously.”

“And a dryer. And a desk. We need a place for the
computer more than anything.”



“Hey, motherfucker! What’s goin’ on?” (These are my
best times.) A flock of black, chicken-skinned buzzards,
feathers frozen against their sides, sat menacingly on
an outcropping.

*His brothers played ball. His father fished. He hit well.
People noticed his swing.*

“ ’Cause they’re real. No fumes of exhaust,” he’d
continued.

*So that’s it. He played ball. (He was serious, man.)
I admire that.*

“Like what d’ya think? Am I missing somethin’? I keep think’n’ I’m missing somethin’.”



Yellow haze. Its shadow on the grass. Seed balls lopping crusty branches.

Swash. A dog bounded across her path.

An owl. Old now. Its nightly song, drab.

Crickets chirped but not their full mid-summer chorus.

Her bones lagged

Her bones lagged. Was it the moon?

Frosty clouds with their lapis light. Scurrying, scurrying (like wraiths) in the hills.

Branches spread loosely. Ravished the early sun.

They reminded her of her. In her southern-facing window. Stretching. Relaxing. Her empty body's ribs.



“Was that a robin?”

She listened to the rain. Blossoms sang. A chorus of trill.

Gardeners had mulched a golden bed of flowers. Rich dark sod beneath bright buds.

Caw. Caw. Caw. A jay's long breath. “That other bird probably was a sparrow.”



“Within the black brushstrokes of a Chinese character – the straight lines of *woman* and *horse* combine to equal *mother* – which, if the word is in your consciousness, all you would see in the pinks and browns and grays of a painting, for example, would be that pictogram,” her book was saying.

“Toishanese, Cantonese, Mandarin, though pronounced differently, are composed of common non-phonetic pictographic characters. The structure of their rules, however, adheres to Mandarin grammar. Children raised in the ‘lesser’ dialects simply make do, combining formal phraseology with the rhythms of their own speech.

“While ordinary language seeks more precise and differentiated meanings, spiritual languages try to free it from verbal imprisonment.”

Or sloth, she’d added. Bones and blood are its residence.



Coo coo coo. The day fell hard.

It drooped down, suspended from seemingly nothing.

The clear trail of sound, evenly paced, softened by an umbrella of trees.

Leafless boughs. Their eerie kow-tow.



A sliver moon humped the bay – awkward, alone – as if it had been kicked (booted) out into space. “Hey, where am I? What just happened?”

“The hill is worried,” she’d thought, squinting at its quilt of bumps.

“The earth can’t stop,” she’d thought. (It’d gorged witlessly.)

“Can it purge?” She’d noticed rivulets.



“Three to four feet of snow are expected tomorrow.” (The voice sounded sorrowful.) “Just last week the crocuses were out. Evenings were long and saturated with a pleasant glow.”

She’d tried to picture sweet yellow crocuses. “Maybe they’re used to it,” she mused.

The sound of wind through yawning (shifting) crevices aroused her from her stupor.

Night fell. Her hydrangea’s skinny limbs staking their random claim.



Frozen sky. Broken light. Flecks shocked black (with a pale shudder).

Ethereal blobs baked there. Where? Are those trees? Sharp chirps. (Shouts from bird throats.)

Smoke puffed the crackled sky. Sinuous, gnarly, a pulse exuding sweetness.

A strand (as in yarn). It oozes from the hummocks' tips, dribbles, then splits.



The crush. The feisty (in-your-face) vein of her hydrangea's leaves. (Like if leaves could take steroids . . .)

The poet amassed her verses. Reamassed them daily. When she'd killed herself, the world thought they were "meant" to be the way they were that day. Her husband'd said no, of course not.

He'd rearranged them in a way that made more sense given his exclusive proximity to her. But people accused him of being controlling. Manipulating the evidence that maybe he'd "caused" her suicide.

So he went silent. Didn't want his account to be just another "version."

What color is the sky?

“What color is the sky,” she’d mused, casting her eyes east. “It’s not purple.”

Brushed with plum, the horizon shed a diaphanous veil. Only to leave . . . she couldn’t pin it down.

Earlier, as she’d pulled out of her garage, she’d spied that cat, looking very custodial, parking itself on the cement. Its soft eyes had fallen on her slowly, slowly taken her in, and just as slowly released her to the not-quite-so-black air. “Who’s that cat?” she’d wondered again.

The cat. The sky. She’d ejected her cassette. The digital screen flashed, “See Ya’!”



“Please use the language correctly” she’d hissed, though she was aware that Miss Manners – well, “When someone says, ‘Hi. How are you?’, you don’t . . . you take it as a vernacular expression meaning ‘Good day.’”

Yet it wasn’t the protocol. It was the dilution of the language that so pained her.

“If writing is the creation of a subset of reality, it is *voice* that sets the parameters of the subset.” A friend had made this statement.

But what if the voice, the very beautiful voice to whose reality one clung because of its grace, described a lesser world . . . the disjunct . . . *that* (a poetics in itself, voice [sound] being a subtle form of movement) . . . ?



“Chipper sky,” she thought as she’d glimpsed through the pines some buoyant clouds. She’d been reading.

“Sound is the root of all other sensory potentials,” the author had begun. “The reverberation of our words, the ideas they represent, form the mind’s patterns.

“Four levels of sound are recognized in *Vedic* and *Puranic* literature,” he’d continued. “They are called *Vaikhari*, *Madhyama*, *Paśyanti* and *Para*. *Vaikhari* dwells in the throat and is our gross, articulated sound. *Madhyama* dwells in the heart and is the idea behind the sound. *Paśyanti* (seeing) dwells in the solar plexus. It is sound’s archetypal content. *Para* (transcendent) is the essence of all sound and dwells in the root *chakra*.

“While the powers of sound reside in progressively lower *chakras*, this is not because they are progressively lower powers, but because they control progressively deeper and more difficult parts of our nature,” the author had stressed.



Fog licked the hill, leaving moist, green grass.
Evergreen, she'd decided, winding around a bend.

Earlier, mist – a steeping brew – opaque and hard like
an object.

She'd stared at the blue beneath the still-white ceiling.
Billowy puffs morphed sculpture after sculpture.

The sun rose. Blossoms fanned the air.



“Look at that cloud!” she muttered to herself, noticing
a ghoulish mass. The post-dawn sky had pushed pink
out. A poltergeist, amoeba-like, swaddled the air, rub-
bing the rouge from the dregs of the moon's shadow.

Wind blew, but the hairy trees were stagnant.

Ice plants too. Their paisley flowers still. She recalled
the nasturtiums trailing the road.

No stars. No clouds. Even the horizon had stayed
uninvolved.

A little color for your desk, my darling

“A little color for your desk, my darling.” A yellow card flanked yellow flowers. She stroked their stems, then turned the pot to view the buds from various angles.

Pale. Tense. (Their straining, oddly, touched her.)

She listened to the drops that grazed her darkening window.

Bunches of daisies (strong orange centers) mirrored the incipient moon.



“So, Christ. Calvary. What flowers were there?” (The horizon looked glossy.)

“God damn. What are they think’n’? They’re not really nailing him!”

“Did you notice his feet?”

“The bones I did. Long fibrous sinews, dangling, leaky, stiff.”

“Stiff?”

“Well, not yet, but I could sense it coming. In a few days, without water.”



Dreamboat clouds. Sun rose on the valley. Lupine and tall, pink, sweet-smelling sweet-peas.

“I picked some to bring you, but they shriveled in my hands,” a woman quietly said.

She wore a pendant. Lavender-colored, small. A rhinestone was another decoration.

“I guess they need their vine,” she’d proffered. Cluster of green (or bouquet of leaves). Lethargy lodged in her flesh.



“So I’d send out these head shots with no makeup and my chipped tooth.” She’d wanted to avoid filmmaking’s fatuousness (its “wash of words between visual spectacles”).

At the orgy of flummery (perks, fuss, money-wasting) she’d refused, for example, to bring her own hair or makeup person with her to a set.

“There I am, with my book and my banana, in a giant motor home,” she’d reported to an interviewer. “So I ask for a smaller one.”

Thus she gazed. Over fir (sheltering mountain hemlock).



Black and white. Silhouettes glaring. “They look like steers!” She stared out the window.

A squirrel dashed across the redwood rail then hopped into a bush. Through the mist she’d thought it was a rat.

Radiant sun on the turquoise water. (Distant fields newly spiked with stalks.)

With a bolt of light the image collapsed.

The sun rose

The sun rose. Extensive beds of dusty-colored flowers. Blue especially. Many patches of wildly different blues.

Floating in platters of steaming greens, large brown potatoes, sliced carrots, and peas.

A cairn's prayer flags high up on a summit. Ferocious wind (snow needles) blasting a frozen face.

It loomed like a phantom of some ancient rite having nothing to do with her.



“But everything to do with Philip.” (Awakening, her thought.)

“Them guys’re *Buddhists*,” the cook had explained to the others at Marblemount.

She pictured him at Sauk – “Whalen’s mountain” – a small dark hump in the mid-afternoon haze.

Gravel and scree and more and more rocks came tumbling off the ridge.



Rain! Drops swiped then dribbled down her windshield.

“But it’s quiet,” she’d thought. “As in aftermath.”

“It’s not about the streets being wet.”

“That Christ lived. Like that.”



Earlier a foehn through the fluffy pine. (Its branches hung with a certain perky luster.)

“Feral birds,” the man had said, referring to a flock that had hovered over the city. While they’d favored Telegraph Hill, that day they’d swarmed the Presidio. Rash caws, picaresque, husky. (He’d been meditating.)

“I picture butterflies. Hoards (beneath a canopy). Hairy wild wings.”

“I picture cats. And green snakes with skinny tongues.”

“I see a crocodile crouched at the river’s neck. Jungle silence (inside the breath).”



The sky and its fruits. Her *hoya*’s leg was strident, whereas a second (older) branch hobbled along with shriveled leaves.

Each year she'd worried, "Will it last through the winter?" Each summer it sprouted waxy grape-colored blossoms.

"Sprawled out huge. That's how Philip concentrated."
(The thought roiled through her body.)

A storehouse (a gap). A vast (empty) shell.



Jonquils! (Yellow) Prissy flowers at the garden's cusp.

Dirt as receptor. (Student of the sky.)

Parrots' croak (entwined in the scratchy drip drop drip of the afternoon's after-storm).

A boa-constrictor having eaten an elephant. *That* impression.



Cats milled. The place looked wild.

Talons arched. A hawk beside the door.

We plodded along. The only sound, the soft crush of leaves and distant wind blowing eerily through the peaks.

Drip drop drip. The sound and then the soft of her stomach round and full against the sheets.



“Was that a rodent?” (It wasn’t a dog.)

An animal. Dead. Innards splayed, seethingly,
primitively.

It had lain on an onramp. (You made a sharp left.)
Before you turned, you couldn’t see clearly. Afterwards,
well . . .

I imagine both parties were stunned.

She drove east

She drove east sweating.

A gnarly stump of summit expressed itself from the fog.

Whipping fog. (Bizarre rock apparitions.)

Root wads clawed the air.



Drops against the pane. On her porch from the eaves,
on the drive from the trees, on the hill from the clouds
chuck full to bursting. She could see the night's black-
ness through the corner of her eye.

Her neighbor's voice percolated from above.

Several televisions, radio, vacuum – “How come
they're always home,” she muttered,

“My day is upstairs.” The woman sweeps. Then
“checks-in” with her man.



“President's Day! And the country is going to war.”
She'd felt it in the traffic, light for a Monday morning.

“Traffic was light today,” a friend had said the previous
Saturday. “I haven't read the paper but I'm suspecting
everyone's glued to their t.v.”

She hadn't responded.

On Monday, however, she'd paid particular attention.



A beacon. Silver-yellow slithered through the glass.

“Good morning! The storm is over.”

Which she'd adored.

It had started just as she'd fallen asleep. A slow gradual pound, lightening to a patter. Then drops. Then lull.

In the middle of the night she'd awakened – a few slight creaks from the upstairs floorboards. “He must be going to work,” she'd mused, having not previously considered that the Russian husband of the railing wife might be some sort of manual laborer.



She'd listened. Floorboards traced the afternoon sun.

All around, solid white (the ghostly limbs of scrawny trees).

Purple wildflowers carpeted the hill (its aqua stream cascading, bubbling, frothing).

Staccato birds. Butterflies. Rioting in the filigree.



Dim light, the shadow of a woman's body.

Her thigh, rudderless, like a moored boat.

*A mosquito hawk (intent yet benign). Improbable like
the man said.*

*As a shimmering lady with luminescent skin held out
her hand (beckoned me to come to her), a fragrant leaf
wafted its way earthward.*



“Awaken the mind without fixing it anywhere.” Hui-Neng had been piling firewood in the market when he’d randomly heard that phrase.

So for ten years he had to hide out in the mountains. (He’d been confirmed as the Sixth Patriarch and all the monks were jealous.)

Then he wrote the *Platform Sutra* which Gary Snyder called Zen’s first clear philosophical statement.

“Everybody that does Zen has a close relationship with that text,” he’d said.



“So for Gary – a hawk perched on a treeless pinnacle of stone that for Jeffers = ‘Fierce consciousness joined with final disinterestedness’ – was too divisive. I mean human beings are also natural. Vulnerable as wolves.”

“The thing is they are wolves. The imprint is still there.”

Sun flanked the pine

Sun flanked the pine. Soft sun. Lazy.

“The heat is breaking records.” (Her neighbor had passed by.) “I forget it’s still January.”

A bird flew off, brashly, dramaturgically.

Like a stone in her stomach, drab, puny, yellow.



Dusk. The hill a maze of vaguely shaped stumps,
tree-trunks, branches.

Thin Philip! In a dusty book. Probably taken in Japan
when he’d taught English at the Y.

It had Philip’s flavor, but not his succulence.

She glanced up. A bird was pooping on the glass.



*A blonde in jeans, pony tail swishing, had been walking
beside her Asian boyfriend. (They’d parked. Were haul-
ing a ton of packages.)*

*“I don’t like my fiancé’s taste,” she’d apologized to
others in the elevator.*

“A man rode all the way down with me. First I waited for him to get in, then for him to finish sorting his mail. I could tell he wanted to go right back up. So I waited.”

Until an apprentice has been hurt by his tools, the craft has not fully entered his body.



A joker. *That’s* what it was! The face in her dream, black and white. (Its intelligent, focused eyes.)

But all was bland. Or not bland. Wan.

There is really no need to huff and puff when dancing. When the music enters one’s heart, heavy breathing, which is a kind of resistance to the music, stops.

Having read this, she’d dreamed about the face.

An owl cooed through the low, cool air.



The sun is trying, she mused as she’d gazed at the wobbly grasses. Mud from the storm slopped over the drive.

She’d awakened with the light. *Tweet tweet tweet.* Such a sweet sound, she’d thought, mesmerized by almost-spring’s vibrancy.

She'd curled under her covers. They're voices of little bodies! For weeks now there'd been nothing but jays.

They're brash, she'd thought. They steal. They're mean. But their caw . . . to her . . . who loved fog, crows, crashing waves.

She'd rounded a bend

She'd rounded a bend. Blue. Baby blue mostly, but almond, slate, cobalt, cerulean, against a landscape of hill, forest, sea. Their greens and oddly-shaped trees (one a perfect triangle) sedate yet jolly.

“It could hail,” someone said. “The weatherman predicted it for today.”

The rising sun had formed a mountain. Above a horizon of mountains, topping a horizon of trees. A helicopter, hovering low over the traffic, looked like a fish swimming in blossoms. Its light beeped.



The beauty of rain. Its after-life. The ground glistened with a roasted hue.

And the pine's green, lively and humble as it sprouted new needles.

Between storms. One gardener with his rake. He'd stack the leaves then (pushing them through the wrought-iron fence) mulch the hillside.

Which, eroded, seemed unpromising as a container of soil.



“Zinnias. They’re a perfectly respectable flower. But because they were in my yard (and the feeling wasn’t right in my family . . .)”

An orchid on the path, so easy to pick.

The trail (rimming the drainage) climbed a tight series of switchbacks and ended, finally, at a view of two lakes, one indigo, one green with the milk of oozing glaciers.

Tall brown hare, prairie dogs, wolves always present but cautiously distant.



What bird? What thin long bird with a flair for swift in-fighting?

Slender body, transparent wings. I pictured it quiet. Waiting for something.

Sort of iridescent. Like orange (neon) would shimmer from its willowy, pin-thin, tinder-like core.

Silence stopped by silence.



Night. Dark as salmon.

*The pond where she'd fished. It'd had turtles, bugs,
some (not a lot of) plants. Mostly it was deserted.
That was the sweet part.*

*The notion being time. (A thrust.) Like coming home
from war.*

"Look at the saplings, daddy!"



Whereas during the night she'd awakened and heard . . .
nothing. NOTHING. Like in the very high Sierras,
beyond the main trails.

Birds. But not a chorus. Only *tweet*. (Pause.) *Tweet
tweet*. (Pause.) *Tweet*. You listen like crazy.

Crisp z-shaped clouds collapsed from the sky, their
fluffy white incongruent with the maraud.

Alabaster non-noise.

Hey! They're peach!

Hey! They're peach! (The Negev's sand. The *sabra's* fruit.)

Was the Dead Sea dead?

There was a lot of salt. But, you know, I was so hungry. I couldn't think about the water.

Like picking a scab. Wanting to chew that hard little skin.



“Mommy, can I have the toy?” But then he threw up. Vomit rose like a fountain.

The son of an addict is clean. (That's what she'd said, laying his lean body down.)

He simply refuses (junk, medicine, pop).

When his mother smokes he says, “Please mama. You'll die. It's not good.”



Coo coo coo. Cheep cheep. Cooooooooooooooooooooo.
Caw caw caw.

The sky deranged. The woman in her corner.

A big person, she could see in three directions. But she couldn't twist easily.

She'd look out. Watch the caterpillar trucks load and unload their long swiveling bodies.



Bulging. Though her stride was that of the thin.

Clothing also. Soft sheer fabrics.

Cropped hair, garish tattoos. The jamming of her (inside pants, for example).

Loafers. Scuffs. Their wear (after wearing).



She wanted to read. She'd sit but then someone would walk by.

Gobbling it up. (Each morsel demanded another.)

Eating from the inside. Having it dwell. (A being consumes the cavernous world.)

She looked, watched, anticipated the little boy's coming.



Whoops! Was that a tweet? One bell bleated in the shallow late-morning wind.

Swirls of ash. (The stolid trees spoke nothing.)

“So I was scheming how I could rush out . . . but when I got in the car, well, I actually liked the quiet.”

She'd paused, removed the sweater she'd been unbuttoning. Then her hat. Shoes. Pushed them all to the side.



The purr. The steady hum. “Is that rain? Or is it traffic?” It was dark. She couldn't tell from her bed.

Rrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrr. Rrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrr. She listened harder.

“Why can't I tell if it's raining?” She tried again to hear inside the patter.

“I should recognize rain,” she'd scolded herself, watching her mind feebly scramble.



Leaves blowing. (Dead ones flailing.) Donning the tone (the radio's gentle blur).

Her wipers smearing patterns like a child's fingers might smear paint. A sad boy's, let's say.

“Why are your pants are so tight?” he’d asked. His own were baggy. Way big on a skinny beanpole.

Wild wind. (Dirty drops.) Grit sandwiched in the grooves.



The man wore a maroon sweater. Grey curls fell to his shoulders. “Sorry about my cap,” he’d said, fiddling with its brim. “Without it my hair flies all over.”

She’d looked at his thinning locks. They seemed worn.

Something about the way he’d fingered the visor . . . the relationship between him and his hair wasn’t current with his hair, it said.

He hiked. He spent a lot of time in nature. Yet unwizened, his body was that of a city person.

ONE LONG DRAGON'S-BREATH CLOUD

One long dragon's-breath cloud

One long dragon's-breath cloud in the happy after-rain sky.

And egg-colored rocks. The swath of rugged brown-baked earth (pinecone-covered.)

Hills relaxed. Trees ripe. "It's a moon day!" she'd thought, lounging in her pose.

She sped toward the sun.



"Is that a bird or a leaf?" Her eyes had landed on the spruce outside the window. Tweet tweet. Tweet tweet. Branches imperceptibly moved. But what she saw – it could have been a leaf, a dead one dangling, then slowly falling.

Fresh full air swept around her cushion.

Thump! A pigeon at the glass. It had swerved, but apparently miscalculated. Or perhaps the pane was so clean that it hadn't seen it. "Oh! Oh my!" students gasped.

She'd gazed up. The bird flew off. That's when she'd spied the fledgling (that had looked like a leaf) piping away.



"Real shamrocks from your Irish Aries!" The note poked from beneath the pot exuberant with trifoliate leaves and fluffy, white, trumpet-shaped flowers.

"Saint Patrick's Day! Is it tomorrow?" She'd been focused on today – The Ides of March.

Each flower had five or six petals that stood tall, then arched. Their backbends were of varying depths.

Several curled forward. "Are they dehydrated?" The path toward back seemed to be forward.



When the brahma granthi is pierced through by pranayama, a sort of happiness is experienced in the vacuum of the heart and the anahat sounds like various tinkling ornaments.

When the rudra granthi is pierced and the air enters the seat of the Lord, then the perfect sound like that of a flute is produced.

Just as a bee, drinking sweet juice, does not care for the smell of the flower, so the mind, absorbed in the nada, does not desire the objects of enjoyment.

The mind, captivated in the snare of nada, gives up all its activity and, like a bird with clipped wings, becomes calm at once.¹



Eastern breeze. Low sun. The soft sky softly (touching) sheltering dominions.

She listened to the waves break against the sand.

Her book had said that during the process of working through the knots (*granthi*), the yogi listens to ten kinds of sounds: the chirping of birds, crickets, bells, conch, *vina* (Indian lute), *mridanga* (barrel drum), flute, *pakhavaj* (another kind of drum), trumpet and roar of a lion. The first three could be heard from her porch.

“Maybe in the morning . . .” she optimistically thought as she laid the book down before bed.

1. Excerpts from *The Hatha Yoga Pradipika*, a 1350 text by Svātmaṛama.



The radio blared. Traffic at a standstill. Peace-marchers had clogged every city artery.

“The hill looks cold,” she’d mused, glancing at its shriveled buds.

Splashes of pink crossed the iris sky. It’d turned dark. Then brilliantly sunny.

Silver light

Silver light. Plumped by rain. “Will it ever stop?”
Traffic snaked around the bend.

Sliver fans. A perfect spread from beneath the Saab.

Tires, blades, surfing the road’s ever-engorged lakes.

Like slalom. She remembered the grace, the fine flush
of misty-blue ocean.



Reckless wind. Dolphin clouds above the moon.

A crane. A tramp. How many women?

Copper blue. (She felt the night relax.)

As if fast were color.



Coo coo coo. Coo coo coo. The air fell silent.

“I also like to camp alone.”

She’d pictured herself trapped in the position. Would
she have had the nerve?

“Rats do it. He’d probably figured his hand was ruined
anyway.”



From the vault, a tourniquet. (He thought he saw
a colt.)

Raunchy and available. You (they) so want life.

Legs and face. A bundle of contorted FLING.

Some wore skirts. In their jacquard weave, buxom
dragonflies.



Its muted howl (mouth skeletal). Jaw. Jawbone. Teeth.

The bones of these animals. Yak or cow. The yogi'd
said that if you wear them when you practice . . .

Heat. They arouse the inner fire.

Dim thread of pearl-colored shadow.



The binding of her mother. She'd tossed and turned.

I'm baby. Can I go?

The tongue of a babe licking its calf. Rapture sets in.
(Becomes habitual.)

The memory of myself wailing as a calf. "Mama!
Mama!" (I screamed to my calf mother.)

Yellow rays

Yellow rays. Dusty. Sober.

Rain during the night had left the air crisp.

With a wake of white, she'd thought. (She had a compelling urge to connect yesterday's bleakness with today's surreal steam.)

Deer, black bear, bluebirds on slim alpine trees.



“The internal alchemy of yoga results in the free flow of energy heard by the inner ear,” her teacher had summarized. “*Asana* regulates the body. *Mudra* channelizes *prana*. These are props. But they're internal, natural. They foster strength.” His words were inspiring.

Bzzzzzzz . . . up her spine . . . like the little birds' chirps.

Cheep cheep cheep. Caw. Caw. Coo.



Resilient cypress. The day had gone from dreamy (dove) to fearsome (*noire*) in about five minutes.

Cars whizzed. A truck jumped to the right, almost causing an accident.

Vehicles bounded, seemingly in streams, around her.



“The *agni* is a flame. You want to nurture it. You don’t want to snuff it out with cold, then throw a bunch of food at it.” He’d paused. “It’s like a candle. You treat it gently. And with respect.

“I’ve never liked milk,” he’d suddenly veered off. (An old text had recommended it for yogis.) “But in India, it’s warm. Fresh from the tit. Nothing like we get here.”

“What about goat milk?” a student queried.

“Goats are skittish. Way too *pitta* for our practice.”

“Soy milk?”

“It comes from beans, so it’s not really milk, though it’s fine (if it’s not cold).”



Chilly day. Sun bright but not warm. Her *hoya* gathered its rays.

A sparrow near a fence was pecking, glancing, hopping about.

“It’s risking a lot being out there alone,” she’d thought. (The other birds were hidden.)

Though it was only 2:30, the light took on the shimmering glaze of late afternoon.



A dark-skinned man, slowly walking, flicked the lilies' slender foliage.

He had no tools. "Workers usually take their breaks together," she worried.

Indeed, they had a whole room beneath her room, to gossip, eat, play. The place had a gay, comfortable feel.

But if you addressed them in English, their eyes fled their bodies.



Ash Wednesday. The first day of Lent. She pictured the penitents' foreheads.

"Would they be black," she'd wondered, "or marked Indian-style, with a colorful dot."

She remembered the god-intoxicated man who'd left his wife, children, job. For years he'd sat before a gravestone. So the villagers adopted him. Brought him tea. He was considered a kind of saint.



Pale light. Leaving behind its residue. Paler light leaving an even thinner film. Then full-fledged day.

She'd watched. "Which nostril am I using?"

Because she'd read that at sunrise and sunset both channels automatically open.

"I love dirt. I love the smell of wet crumbly earth. And gasoline," a person'd said.



Night turned to dawn. The sky looked like cream.

"Quick! From which nostril . . . ?" Sure enough, both nostrils imbibed the roasted air.

"Name the qualities," she'd schooled herself.

But what struck her were the trees. Stark bare branches, densely patterned, poking every which way.

The outer holds the inner

“The outer holds the inner,” replied her teacher.
(She had asked about the rule concerning hand-positions in long holds.)

“The outer holds the inner. The outer holds the inner,” she’d intoned monotonously.

But she was afraid. She might forget. Indeed, she already had (forgotten), forcing her, this time, to strategically rephrase the question.

A few weeks ago she’d asked, “Is there some rule? Which hand holds which wrist?”

This time: “So the outer holds the inner? Right?” Which sounded *as if* she knew and was just checking.



Porcelain sky, its reserve of wet. She huddled in her room.

Hey! Tulips. (Wizened white bulbs.)

Gladiolas stretched from the tippy tops of their stems.

“It’s May!” she screeched, scrunching deeper under her covers.



“Bye, Gail!” She’d had slipped through the door at the end of a long class. He’d never bothered with salutations.

Earlier he’d shouted: “Elbows in. Elbows in. You know better!” Usually he’d said, “Elbows in” in an exasperated tone.

“The class was about legs. In case you hadn’t noticed.” (He’d been fielding questions.)

She’d shut her eyes. She hadn’t.

Everyone else laughed. If “they” hadn’t, their legs had, their chortling seemed to say.

Where were her legs? “I mean why can’t I mentally put things together?”



“Legs are about breathing. Work *samokanasana*. Your backbends, everything will get easier.

“Lightness, remember, is not about weight. It’s the degree of freedom each part has with its neighbor.

“There is no pose,” he’d added, suddenly. Then he, too, grew quiet.

Puffy white cumulus. The horizon bald. Each blossom-cloud, an enigma tongue.



Brilliant May. (A swaying awning of trees.) A eucalyptus spur shot from the hip (not the chest nor the shoulder like its other brother branches).

“It’s primed for pain,” she’d thought. (Ebullience instilled pity).

“And her hydrangeas. One, two, three, pin-head rosettes.”

“Zestful leaves, pungent-green. Greenhouse green (which I find unnerving). Like I want to explain, ‘*You* don’t have to prove anything.’”



Her raw voice. His harsh retorts. Their squirrelly Russian through the suddenly-opened door. Then, just as suddenly (one of them had closed it) lopped off.

I get this picture of him following her around. Her shrieking, him mously making amends (though not really feeling it, not at all convinced that he’d done the wrong thing).

On some level she knows this. She screams, but she's not saying, "Why don't you just fucking be direct with me."



Splats of rain through a ceiling of taupe cloud.
"O radiant sun! You were just here!"

She cruised. The red-green trees, drip drop drip, looking sulky by the roadside.

"I couldn't see," the teacher had begun. "There were parts of your body that I wanted to check, but your clothes . . ."

"Thank you," squeaked the blonde woman who had just demonstrated how to teach *Ustrasana* and *Urdhva Mukha Svanasana*. Her rosy-yellow sweater hugged her waist and flared, calf-length cut-offs.



"Which would be best for a child's room?" They were pawing through a rack of indigenous Chinese paintings.

"This one," she'd answered. "It's lively, simple. The naïve design is easy to grasp."

"The one with swans! I could see it in her room." She'd pulled the others forward, exposing it to full view.

Its bottom edge looked as if it had been torn from something with a ruler.



“I have a question.” The woman waved her hand.

“It’s about sleep. I have trouble getting up. I want to do my practice and yet, in the morning, especially when it’s dark, I just can’t. I can’t drag myself out of bed.”

“Do you have children?” (The yogi’s voice was tender.)

“I have three. The youngest is two.”

“Practice in bed. No, I’m serious,” he’d responded to the class’s hilarity. “You can do all your breathing exercises lying on your back, under your covers. For a mother, it’s good. You shouldn’t get up. (Listen to your body.)”

Spring evening with mild breeze

Spring evening with mild breeze. Coolish.

Spaceship clouds in the powdery sky, speedy but immobile like rockets in a painting.

Her gardenia, yellow now.

Its still-tight fist's fresh-from-the-pail purity.



“Your skin. It’s so yellow. Do you know why?” Large cat eyes gazed at her lovingly.

“It’s not my liver. I’ve had that checked.”

“The Vedic texts say that very high *pittas* have an orange cast to their skin. It’s beautiful to see. I’ve only seen a few.” She tucked her feet beneath her sari.

That was when she’d noticed the green spot on her forehead. At the *ajna chakra*. (The point of Christ Consciousness.)



Dazzling day. A radiant sun splattered itself about. The scent of jasmine rose from a curtained window.

“Boil one cup of rice in four cups of water. Keep boiling till the water becomes chalky. Then, take just the water

(throw away the rice), add salt, pepper, and parsley if you like. Each day at noon drink two ounces.

“It’s called *peya*,” she’d continued. “There are seven kinds. And there are seven steps before your *agni* will be able to handle the food your body requires.

“Your *vata* pulse is better.” She’d bent forward to feel it. A small rosewood *mala* and silver snake separately hugged her wrists.



“Look! The moon. Rising in the eastern sky. It’s so pale. (The sky that is.)”

She’d tried to detect the not-full part.

“Tomorrow. Tomorrow is a full moon day.” She knew that *after* a full moon things could be chaotic. She wondered about *before*. Or right before. “Like it’s almost tomorrow,” she’d thought. The moon looked round, white, clean.

“We’re going to war. In two days. The President just made the announcement,” someone had said.

“Two days will be one day after the full moon,” she’d calculated.



“We needed that rain,” her teacher remarked as the morning dawned with a precocious eager edge. He’d flung open the window. Cool, lovely-smelling air flooded the studio.

“Baby birds are brash,” she’d thought as branch to branch they flit. They reminded her of insects. Black and a little erratic.

“They’re feisty (baldly bold).” Like her hydrangeas, having been clipped.

Her *hoya* too flung a long wing westward. A wild unwieldy brazen stick. Poker bare.

While the little birds’ brashness seemed hollow, her *hoya*’s was more sedate. Its trajectory (however sheathed in shadow) still was its trajectory, whereas fledglings – well, there’s an imprint certainly but less circumscribed (constrained).



Daisies in the sun. “Hi!” they waved. Bunches bowed. “Is it summer yet?”

Because there were signs. A jaunty smell. Or dog jumping for a ball with height and rough twist of its ribs.

A gentle coo nudged her from sleep.

“Sunday. (Right-leg-in day.) Tuesday, Saturday, Sunday, correct?”

Because on Monday, he’d said, “Right leg first.” “It’s Monday,” she’d commented (not in a threatening way, but just noticing).

“Don’t be rigid. We’ll be crossing both today. Mix it up!”

Come over here

“Come over here.” Her teacher occasionally nestled himself in a tightly drawn circle. He’d begun with torqued spines.

“Even the suggestion of correct flow of energy helps the body push through to that flow,” he encouraged, contorting his arms into knots and then freeing them. “Like a hose. Water gushes in a stream when it’s loose and unencumbered.

“You can’t address the dysfunction until the body’s defenses are down,” he’d added.



“It works better than Ex-Lax, better than psyllium,” said the man who’d probably (from what she saw of his body) never been constipated.

“Women’s guts don’t work like that,” a student had retorted when he’d suggested that an earlier dinner would facilitate an earlier morning poop. His colon no doubt emptied itself regularly. It certainly didn’t bulge as did most of the colons in the predominantly female class.

They’d been in *sarvangasana*. “Put your legs in *padmasana*,” he’d begun. “Bracing your right hip joint in

your right palm, lower your legs and twist so that your right knee is as close to your elbow as possible.”

Like the gods’ (her thoughts galloped) – their profiled shoulders revolving into thighs, calves, feet. The arches in their feet.



“Instep! Instep! Gail, please! *Savasana* rotation, then instep.” (He’d made the same correction before.)

She’d been thinking about clouds. As she’d driven east, a pale blue layer of light had settled above a dark low mountain mass. The sky, coal-black, swished about in just-make-out-able zigzags.

“Where is the moon?” she’d wondered. (It had just been full.)

A plane wandered through, beeping yellow lights.



Her window yawned. The sweet smell from the day.

“Evening practice needs to be vigorous. Wind builds up through the course of the afternoon. It’s toxic.” The yogi paused.

“When I say ‘wind’ I mean the element air. From cars, chimneys, air conditioners – and from dealings with

things and people. Fumes leave a residue that is poisonous to the system. Our bodies needs to burn it. No ‘exhaust-ion’. (No seriously.)

“You all know what I mean, don’t you? Airports, cars, arguments. It’s stale. Asphyxiating.”



Buoyant black over buoyant white. Night hung heavy.

Branches through the bog. A sharp mist wagged its blandness.

Three trees (were they cedars?) Stately, tall, stick-straight and centered in her cabin’s portal.

“How did they get so perfect,” she’d wondered, staring at their silhouettes.



Last flush of light. The hill. Was it saddened?

“For you my darling.” Pristine. Crisp. The gardenia floated in an oval bowl of water.

“Do flowers carry time?” (She’d remember the smell, not the occasion.)

“Wind does. Clouds and shadows also,” she’d thought.



“Let’s just be together. Let’s enjoy ourselves as a family,” said Clint Eastwood’s second wife. Wives, kids, kids from other women, their partners – she’d gathered and welcomed all.

It made sense. If she loved Clint Eastwood, she’d love his child, nevermind the particular womb from which it had emerged. Women carry babies (bring other women’s eggs to term). What could be more American?

“So let’s say he dies.” (Playing this out.) “As a young mother, she may be most consoled by the child of someone with whom she’d otherwise have nothing to do. Or by *that* person. Or by that person’s husband.”



Wetlands (a canopy) spread beside the water. Yellow turf (its undulant creek) whiplashed and hard.

The bony core of loop (eyelet, coil, whorl). Each steep wheel wandering away from itself.

“Is it quicksand? What’s underneath,” she’d wondered, gazing visually seaward.

Or landfill? The expanse was huge.

Tweet Tweet

Tweet Tweet Chiiiiirrrrr

Chiiiiirrrrr Yu, yu cried the deer nibbling
southwood in the field.

Summer was lost. Where had it gone she wondered.

She turned over in the dark.

Gangs of dogs and ducks and geese gnawed the dirty
hill.



She wedged around a bend. Sapphire veins spanned the
horizon.

“Is it a moon day?” Her diary had inscribed a tiny black
circle.

Though she was aware of feeling embarrassed . . . that
her knowledge of the moon derived from a diacritical
mark.

“Saturday. Saturday’s the new moon. Today’s Thurs-
day,” her teacher’d responded.



“Some yogis suggest placing one’s consciousness on the right side of the heart,” he’d continued. “Physically it’s the spot where the heartbeat begins.”

She glanced at the sky. Sheep grazed on the blue-green bluff.

Plough cattle, pear trees, languished in some duckweed sprout.

Silver-studded riffs ensconced a mountain tip.



The man stood like a tree.

“I’m waiting,” said his muscles, twisted, and at rest.

His blanket shuffled in a breeze.

Softly the chimes. A few birds. A cat.



Timid dawn, approaching, back-pedaling.

CAW CAW CAW. CAW CAW CAW. Creeping through a cantaloupe-colored rise.

Sloppy birds (with their *non sequitur* purge).

A squirrel darted, stopped, listened, scampered off.



“I smell anise.” A sweet, licorice-seeming, odor wafted through the windows.

She glanced up. Coreopsis, impatiens hugged the mountain grass.

“The symbol *Om* (pronounced A-U-M),” began a student. Its curves are states of mind. As we do *gomug-asana* let’s chant *Om* three times,” she’d encouraged.

But the sounds were hoarse. Voices unsteady. The backs of peoples’ throats were closed, making a whimper instead of a round, full chorus.



Soft birds. The chilly morning dour. “Where are the deer?” she wondered.

Indeed a deer was in the painting of Yajnavalkya and his wives Gargi and Katyayini.

The latter stood next to him holding an infant. Gargi, two children, and a doe were at his knees. The doe was yanking on Katyayini’s shawl. Or was it the leg of her infant?

It was hard to tell from the faded picture.



Among Yajnavalkya's preceptors was the great sage Vaisampayana. Once walking in the forest, he'd killed a child by mistake. He'd summoned his disciples, told them to perform the atonement. Yajnavalkya said, "Sir, I will do it. The other students are not very efficient."

"How can you speak ill of my students, your peers. You have no place in my *gurukula*. Leave the *ashram* immediately after returning all of my teachings."

Yajnavalkya then vomited all the teachings.

The other students, not wanting to waste the precious knowledge, took the form of *tittiri* birds, and ate it.

How it eats the evening light

“How it eats the evening light!” she’d thought, gaping through the screen at the hillside’s sunflower grasses. Wind cropped the low-lying trees. From afar, the summit, a gathering of ruby studs.

Caw caw caw. The sky darkened. Shrieks, more porous, hedged the flailing shadows.

His Muslim sheen (the color, gritty, then blended so that beneath the smooth, monochromatic surface . . .)

“He’s always been the altar beneath the cathedral,” she’d said.



Turkey in the straw.

Of taste (the fleeting glimpse) that morning in Florida.

The wafer was chocolate. (Raspberry + dirt.)

The smell of day. Early but not crack-of-dawn early.

Having just rubbed the unctuous sandalwood oil clockwise around her throat.

Turkey in the straw.

Pale light. Everything airborne poised.

The shock (the Mother's divine breath?).

"In a jiffy. I'll be there in a jiffy," she'd said, but stopped, having just . . .

But it left. Like a ghost, sloughing through its old terrain . . .

Turkey in the straw.

The aura of her. The old, steady yet hovering-on-the-tentative, modulated voice of precise intelligence.

"Is that why her cough disturbs you?"

"Holding a stone is like cradling a galaxy." (She slowly pulled the band from around her brown curly hair.)

Her mauve sweater, flat chest. The outline of an undergarment.



A bell or two. The bleak clear rain.

It's hard (the water). Not like the tropics where you feel almost petted.

Listlessly she stood ogling the birds.

As she began to sing to the swarming mass around her, a brisk wind whipped her long black braids in stinging lashes across her face.



The Jyotir Vidya actually draws to herself those people she wants to possess her by attracting them to a guru who already possesses her. The aspirant first tests the guru (for knowledge and teaching skill), then the guru tests the aspirant for fitness to study the science. Once satisfied that the aspirant is worthy, the guru initiates the long years of oral training. The Jyotir Vidya (through the guru) herself directs the disciple's studies. Then, after the mentor ignites the Jyotir Vidya within the student, it slowly settles into the disciple's mind, and thereafter personally guides the fledgling through the path of divination. Disciples who follow that path sufficiently far become able to comprehend the spirit of the astrological rules on their own. Their every use becomes a way to honor Jyotish.



There are five styles of *Jyotish*, her book continued. The *rishis* of one, *Nadi Jyotish*, had grown so adept they could generate the horoscopes of people not yet born. The gods, alarmed, burned their collection, though a few remnants survived.

Each *Nadi* collection is reputed to contain the horoscopes of only those individuals destined to consult it.

When complete, a *Nadi* reading traditionally consists of four parts: the first, *behave phala*, deals with career, marriage, children, health and finances. The second, *yoga khanda*, gives precise predictions, usually involving political, social or scientific attainments. The third, *karma khanda*, pertains to specific occurrences in a previous life (misdeeds for the most part), whose effects create obstructions in the current one. The last, *shanti khanda*, prescribes remedial measures to mitigate or nullify any lingering undesirable results accruing from past-life misdemeanors.

A curious fact, the author warns, is that while strikingly precise regarding one's past, predictions of the future rarely achieve the same success at detail, though they are broadly accurate.



“Baba, can I sweep your room?” (His books sat in a corner gathering dust, ants, mice droppings.)

“If it will give you pleasure.” He himself hadn't noticed the dirt.

She pictured the little girl for whom magic had seemed enough.

Night landed like a tarp on the city.

Flowers in a cast

Flowers in a cast. “I kept forgetting,” said the woman.

Old light. Waiting to peter out.

Its last vigorous flush?

Before that . . .



Think of fire. (Our duplex was on an incline.)

A bird soared. Its arrow-shaped tail yellow (plaid).

How many sleeves veiled the color of your eyes?

Sheep grazed. A smoggy bedlam.



“Hey! There’s a fire. Look! On the second floor.”

Collar of agony. He wanted it to glow.

The old woman’s hand. Her wrist, the *marmas* . . .

She knew that in snow country, snow often brought warmth, or at the very least, warmer weather.



Red yarn. Bucketfuls. Soft like melting butter.

A persuasion of color, though the woman'd said,
"I want orange. I love orange."

Looking for orange. Finding brown and green.

Its moment.



A man watches t.v. Says "This is life. This is real life."
But he gets tired. His kid shrieks. (He can barely get up
from the sofa.)

She'd been walking through the hall. Old leather shoes,
a pair, outside a door.

One slumped on its side. The other – pointy-toed and
black with a small old-fashioned heel – had clearly
been kicked off.

"I'll just talk to the shoes," she'd thought. "I'll apolo-
gize to the shoes."



"So think, move. What's to be afraid?"

Slow motions ascribe the hesitancy of her life.

"Well, like yesterday. I got up and took a walk. I wasn't
sure where I wanted to go but it was early. Cool."

She enters a room, then hovers near the doorway.

“When I got home I took another walk. I didn’t know. I didn’t know what to do.”



So sequencing. Principle one: know where you’re headed. (Her teacher’s voice, stern.)

There’s pose/counter-pose.

Or synergy. Each position has its specific effect on the muscles, organs, glands. Grouping them together enhances this effect.

Or you can organize a sequence around a seed *asana*. “There’s only one backbend, one forward bend, one twist,” he’d quoted his teacher.

Hanuman is a seed *asana*. Vary it, then lead into abstractions. (He seemed exhausted.)



Skinny sapling. Paws against the day. Blinding sun before 6:00 A.M.

The sky, a rainbow of early mauves.

Later, the birds. Cheep cheep. Silence.

Their frail jejune calls.



Arc of cold. It browned the dowdy hill. Her brown
gardenia tilting.

She stared at the woody rounds. One petal had turned
cocoa. Another, buttery, elephant-hide yellow.

Honey-colored in its youth, the tight revolving core,
lustrous with glee, had intensified.

A basset hound in the elevator reeked from flowers as
he splayed at the ankles of his mistress.

Blue out of blue

Blue out of blue. A man slips. Looks down a sheer cliff.

He grasps an edge, an indentation in the cliff, and is able, with extreme effort, to pull himself back.

He knows there's water somewhere.

The sun. The call of a bird. I'm asleep. What do they want?



“I woke up this morning and just wanted to go home,” said the yogi, far from his native Australia.

Some shiny-scalped men were swabbing the asphalt.

“The feet are like fish,” the yogi explained. “When you stand on them, you should feel you’re floating on water.” He’d picked up his foot to demonstrate how, from the bottom, it looked fishlike.

A breeze barely stirred even an exposed (outermost) leaf.



“I like your t-shirt. Is it a snake?” (A voice across the class.)

It was black. A tan thread spiraled up one sleeve then spun at the chest into an animal's head. A second smaller design hovered near the shoulder.

"It's a panther. I bought it in Singapore," he responded.

Both arms had bangles and his wrist, a *mala* of the same white bone.



"Empty your bladders." (After talk. Before *asana*. Half the students rose.)

"Sit on your heels," he'd requested of the rest.

Then, just as the room seemed full again, "Is it safe to walk to the bathroom barefoot?"

Frail tree. Its branches drooped. Caw. Caw. Caw.
(The gray lapse of dawn.)



"It's the wind that moves. Not your body.

"The eye and the ear use things up."

Earlier he'd said, "Inhale." She'd inhaled. Then exhaled. Inhaled, exhaled. Inhaled, exhaled. Then he'd said, "Exhale."

A German shepherd from the next-door compound
wagged its tongue as if it were hot.



Young larynx. Old larynx. *Squawk squawk squawk.*
(Sparrows jabbered away.)

“Once I saw some hatchlings get into a tussle.
(Dripping, bleating, slapping the grass.)

“Something had startled them so they’d raced quickly
from their grazing spot, then settled for another near
an ice-covered river.”

“Do deer eat cats?” (At the pool, that blast of voice.)



Denizen of night. It told in the swampland. How many
berries hidden behind the oak?

Borrowed from winter, light sat at the edge (just) of the
darkening day.

Hot light. The kind that makes an array of aura.

Tooth of a storm sideways through the brick.



Brutal water. (Streets leaking sand.)

Hillside poppy. Its halo (sanctified) downwards in the gully.

Copper petals basked. “Look. The sky’s bloated (all hollowed out).”

A noxious haze settled on the heather. Pink. Or not even pink.

○

Are those daisies?

“Are those daisies? “Sprightly stems waved cheerful blossoms.

The flowers, growing wild, were firmly rooted, tall.

Prickly sky. A dwarfed day. “A poor day,” she’d thought.

Pastry clouds tossed. Bells broke the evening silence.



Slowly . . . slowly . . . soft (impending) haze.

Lavish plumes of color. Little hoops crisscrossed the lane.

Which the birds jumped. Teeny birds. Not cute.

Peep peep peep. Peep peep peep.



A large black crow had landed on her tree. (She called it hers. It faced her window.)

Its swiveled beak poked the corn-colored fronds.

Mellow bees. (She was on the patio.) Whorls of cold through tinsel air.

After-beams in a deck of clouds (black, fan-flared, like the background of a Noh drama).



A dreidel spun. “I want to play,” said the man. “Don’t you ever have down time?”

She’d been reading about emotions. When suppressed, they’d crystallize (accumulate in the feet).

“Café glacé and two cakes please.” She’d shifted her child from her backpack to a chair. The chair wobbled and the child began to cry.

“We’ll walk, yeh? It’s *shabbos*,” said the woman wiping crumbs from her still-whimpering toddler.



A viscid sky. The hill a ream of drip.

Men in jeans (cowboy-style dress) rode horses over a roof.

Just at the edge they'd skidded to a halt.

Then one of the horses didn't. It humped its back as it floated to the ground, elastically landing and continuing across the field.



"Oh my god!" she'd gasped. The stallions galloped with ever-increasing speed.

A slew of fillies copied the act.

*"Oh my god! Oh my god! Look at those animals!"
(Their nubby infused color.)*

Black, white, stately (regal) magnificent (piebald) stallions.



One horse (alternately) mounted another as if it (the horse) were riding the other bareback.

"Oh my god!" she'd exclaimed again.

The rain had stopped. Dew sparkled outside the tent.

Small trees bearded with lichen, down trees in various states of decay, and old logs speckled with moss lay sedately in beds of deer fern.



See the mountain snow. And the stately cedar blazing
in the sun? (Sounds from below were niggardly, without
zest.)

What if it rises? What if, like floodwater, it creeps up
over the sill?

The skull (the rape) the centuries of fog whose shroud
huddled just outside her window.

So weep. But she couldn't.



A small woman with mottled skin knitted, talked.
“Please don't turn on the light,” she'd said.

Then after a pause, “Knitting makes me so happy. I
don't know why I stop.

“One strand is cotton. The other chenille. I started it
ages ago.”

In the cool, dim night, its fresh peach shade.

Will it rain?

“Will it rain?” It smelled like rain. *Screech. Screech.*
Screech. Caw. Caw. Caw.

“I watch water,” commented the woman.

Lupine blued the earth (its foliage cloud-coiled and covered with dew).

A cool breeze gently swabbed the duckweed.



The woman had a child to whom she'd offered her breast. He'd cried. He didn't want it.

Grass, shrubs, birds. But the people were scholars. Gardeners did the yard work.

Blue upon blue. Streaks of white like fat.

Double-mint. That taste in the sight of water.



Saplings shrieked. Braced by stilts, they'd wobbled in the wind.

Heat-crazed kids swerved off the road.

Toddler-trees (with one pole-crutch) seemed so mature, so accustomed to the elements.

General leafiness, shadiness, waving of boughs in the breeze.



“It’s due to break,” someone’d mentioned. With everyone using fans, she’d kept expecting the power to go out.

A moth (silver-hooded) languished on a cloth whose coarsely-embroidered rat bowed beneath Ganesh.

“There’s that wolf! The animal bounded . . . like a rocking horse,” she’d thought.

Sun braised its cinnabar fur.



The little settled body, twitch twitch (like a dreaming cat).

Netted wings slim and refined.

Earlier she’d watched a butterfly. Its leaf-of-choice had faded skinny veins.

Twirling, swirling. It hadn’t seemed at all tired.



A piano whizzed from the floor below as darkness, in its cairn, sank over the lake.

Calciferous. Void. Blood notes from her dream.

Seated prettily near the olive woman's hands. Fuselage
of time hovering like a train.

A feline fishing (its spot of red ransacked).



Tributaries (plunk plunk plunk). Wandering caves
of fingers.

Phalanges they call them. (An octave toward her
grave.)

Darklings danced to the tawdry keys.

Night fell. It was real. Radiance bled from their inner-
most shrine of feet.



Dirty reeds poked the sky.

“Daddy, that man looks strange.”

“Places affect me,” remarked the boy. (He washed
windows.)

Simple cloth and sometimes a band around her hair.
Or she'd just let it hang, brushing it away now and
then.



The Japanese dad held his daughter's fist. He bent to
the side to hear her better.

Stars covered her leotard, all except the bottom.

Tendrils from a fellow. (They'd lingered in the
doorway.)

Squishy night with its bit of pink. Its perky imago.

Is that rain?

“Is that rain?” Lush drops in what had been cricketland.

“It smells like water. It smells like grass,” she’d corrected herself.

Alone in her garden (near its melon-colored bulbs).

“Grass that’d been watered by summer rain,” she concluded.



It differed from winter rain. Or spring rain. Even autumn rain which was cold (starting to be hard).

Summer rain was soft. Bing . . . bing . . . her bells (softly).

Once there was a bell. It was so soft, so soft. “Is that a bell?” She forgot she was in *savasana*.

It was early (dawn). She’d gazed out over a meadow.



COCKA-DOODLE-DOO! COCKA-DOODLE-DOO!

A beautiful rooster full of brio and spirit.

Lavender air gushed through the open window.

The path through the cornfield ended at a store.

“She looks sad,” someone noted, having entered the hovel and glanced around.



“Look at the sky!” She’d turned toward the voice.

“Did you see it? You must see it!”

A small woman madly poked a bobbing finger east.

She’d squatted in a chair. Several strands of gray drooped from her parted braids.

Still-twinkling stars. Their redness through the swallowed cirrus.



“We’re more than girls,” neighed the woman.

Plucky cheongsam. As a child she was indolent.

Rather, say, she was a great reader.

And sassy. Tongue like a cleaver.



A jogger, a walker, a panoply of peacock-blue.

The trope of her. Her wild acidity of doctrine.

Curlews and finch. (A blitz of frothy bees.)

The native danced. At seventy-eight his penis was sore.
(He wasn't used to white people.)



Her skin had eyes. You felt them peering.

Radical green. (The blue chunk green.)

The slope of his penis. It fell longways. Not on the bed
but on the bedside.

Letting its sword run rampant.



Sea-faring fro. To and . . .

Umbilical cord slippery with grease.

Each night when she had to pee . . . crawling down the
skinny stilts.

Addled birds. (They'd heard the bugle.)



"Needles," she'd said. (Her tattooed face.)

Deeply telling my green green history.

Seashells. Conch shells. Their long strand from the
ocean's bust.

Only a parrot howled and she was discovered.

Had it rained?

Had it rained? She couldn't tell. It looked like it hadn't, yet the trees, the earth, held rain's memory.

In their flesh. (They'd *known* rain.) Mist egged this out.

Swoosh! Pigeons! A flock from the grimy streets.

She pictured rain swimming in the air molecules.



Lying in the dark, the window above her cracked. Bits of water had accumulated in the curtain.

Droplets dribbled down her neck.

Then it'd stopped. The sky turned shell.

As she sidled up the path, flouncy skirt awry, her brimmed, beribboned hat had sailed off like a frisbee.



The curio shop had been on a narrow lane next door to a small (maybe six-boothed) eatery.

That's where she'd seen the statue. Tall, slim, gouged with the craft-person's tool.

Thin strokes of green edged the deity's robe.

“Probably it’s Kannon.” (But she vaguely remembered being told that it wasn’t.)



“Sorry. I speak English.”

The young Korean smiled, lavishly displaying the bill.

“My daughter. She speak.” (More smiles. Squirrelly motions.)

Rubbing (dreaming) as a way of paying attention.



The day shed light along with heat.

The path, too, cobbled, beflowered, lifted its chest toward the hills.

Spine humped, fronds spread, clumps of decay nestled under tips.

The old palm stiff, barely flexed in the evening breeze.



“What’s that?” she’d asked. They’d been upstairs changing into something cooler.

“Shush,” averred her grandmother.

Outside the window two red-winged blackbirds were quarreling.

“Well what are they, grandma?”



Words formed the evening. (She lit candles.)

Whole notes strewn across the sea.

Once there were pirates. They'd ransacked the ship.

A stand of trees screened the ocean view (though she could hear a wave whispering to itself).

The moon looks drunk!

“The moon looks drunk!” She stared at the robust ball.

“What happened to its head?” (A dense, labor-intensive structure.)

It was Monday. A moon day would be Friday.

First light. The bird’s broad voice. Its notes as we were.



Ever-so-slightly rolling his left shoulder skyward. Thin beige blankets engorged him like a bun.

A bulky body. Which he’d tried to rouse.

“I’m so sorry to have disturbed you,” she’d muttered. She’d squatted, waiting on the other side of the car.

Traces of day not yet splattered toward the west.



A silky sun slipping, tipping. “There’s that man.” (At the university’s green front gate).

Beds of moss. A dim morning folded in on itself

He’d inhale. Air waffled through his chest. Now full. Now billowy. Now flat against his ribs.

Dark-skinned. Agile. He smelled of patrouli.



“Would you say he was a short man?”

“In stature maybe. (How callous the bearing of any deed.)”

“Yet he took a wife. Who had a sweet face. A very sweet face.”

He’d be confused. She’d bend over his shoulder, gently helping (trying to understand).



That day she had on jeans. Which resisted her thighs as she’d tugged on the flowers.

Stern yet soft. Her skin still slept while her body readied the room.

Near a cubby-altar lay a mat. She’d angled hers perpendicularly.

Students trailed in. (The girl, in her efforts, clipping, stripping, arranging the stalks in a vase.)



Tall and lean a body crept.

She’d appear (evaporate with the dew).

Beeps of lights. (Firefly light.) On again, off again.
“She’s Alice all right.”

Tender, guileless. Having no history.



Charred breeze carried night.

Fading light. Fast fading.

Waaaaaaang. Waaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaang. “It drives
me crazy,” someone’d said.

A Nigerian woman (in poofy Bermuda shorts) perched
in the moon in a difficult half squat.

Where's the light

“Where’s the light?” She’d glanced at the clock. The still-black dawn seemed as sluggish as her body.

Miniature limes on her avuncular tree drooped from a stubby stem.

“Whoops! There’s a person!” A passerby, brief-cased and jacketed lurched forward chaotically.

She slowed down. As a bow (sort of). In lieu of other forms of acknowledgment.



Flux of trees. (Dimpled birds.) Winter sounds. Making ready.

A thick band of rubber bound three spindly trunks together.

One jay squawked. The suited woman hurried along.

Two mailboxes huddled together. “Like an old married couple,” she’d thought.



The sudden lull, then full-blooded chirps. How do they know? I mean how do they KNOW.

A coarse-throated call roiled through the glen.

Queer birds. Scream and rest.

Close your eyes. Listen to the bleat, the after-the-storm hollow.



“What’s that noise?” She couldn’t tell.

“Hey!” A man, wildly hitting her window.

“Where’s a gas station?” she’d yelled back, but her window was up and he’d scrunched his shoulders.

Narrow skull. Bowls for cheeks. She’d looked more closely. The shock of his skinniness.



Naked sky. The bare non-color.

A blackbird blinked, turned its rubbery head.

“Hey man. Are you cool? Are you cool? Huh?”

“Yeh. Yeh. I’m cool. I’m fine, thanks.”



“Somethin’ about me . . . I mean so early in the morning . . . I could be a crazy person.

“I don’t wanna be a looney bin,” he’d added, squeezing his thighs, wrapping one shin tightly around the other.

Her t-shirt had a hole. Through rising sun, her ruddy flesh.

Frogs croaked from a rivulet.



A glove. A box. The throat of so many books.

Pigeons rascally. (The embers of his conflagration.)

Boston Irish svelte. Devour the words of its Italian neighbors.

A tavern, a pool hall – within the radius of himself.

Once There Was Grass
was designed and set into type
by Linda Davis at Star Type, Berkeley,
using ITC Bodoni Twelve.

This typeface was originally designed by Giambattista Bodoni,
in Parma, Italy, in the early 19th century and redrawn for modern use by
Sumner Stone, Holly Goldsmith, and Jim Parkinson.

The type was digitized by the ITC type foundry.