The Blue Notebooks

Dudley M. Marchi

Raleigh, NC
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Preface

The *Blue Notebooks* represent a poet's experience of the world as well as the growth of an aesthetic awareness.

Born in Fort Myers, Florida, raised in Somerville and Newton Massachusetts, traveling throughout U.S. and Canada, visiting and living in London, Amherst, Hadley, Northampton, Jamaica, Paris, Oxford, Shutesbury, Chapel Hill, Toulouse, Rome, Munich, Venice, Siena, Florence, Athens, Delphi, Barcelona, Rothenburg, New York City, Astoria, Bermuda, St Augustine, Bordeaux, Raleigh, and Emerald Isle. These are the places which permeate this work. Some names? Sappho, Eliot, Yeats, Baudelaire, Blake, Keats, Shelly, Stein, Desbordes-Valmore, Rimbaud, Dante, Catullus, Dickinson, Pound, Stevens, Rilke, Plath, and Shakespeare. Beyond the poets? Socrates, Saint Teresa of Avila, Montaigne, Plato, Aristotle, Heraclitus, Buddha, Thoreau, Jesus, Proust, Joyce, Kafka, Woolf, and Camus. My family, friends, acquaintances, and even strangers have had a profound influence on my life and writing. My sincere thanks to them.

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Classics of the Pure Landscape
Bird of Paris

I.

Leonard is gone. Something I might tell falls from my desk, as sparrows do sometimes. Today in a dream, I seemed to play, without him. Air pushed through door cracks.

Nothing can help me. It’s fear no doubt that murmurs with half lips. A square of rain is likelier to appear, than our woes to cease. Then the impulse to hide friends like infants in grass.

Look: everyone passes here at least once. Fire in the afternoon, petals of smoke. Leonard cried while something burned in your cellar. There is hurt in this line.
II.

The blues is dead here, but don’t leave the sadness. Friday is almost over, music sighs. Open an empty bottle for something like an answer . . . They drift everywhere you glance.

He was all things, but airplanes listen too, become clouds of emptiness. Nothing like him. Thoughts never dwindle. Matches turn cold like the water of memories. I was right.

Leonard is gone. But don’t leave the sadness. It is a long and diminishing street. Maybe he’ll leave something. Perhaps he’ll stay. But don’t be fooled. We’d only break him.
Metro

I.

It is forbidden to climb or fall
as soon as the doors are open.

This is his welcome on a Sunday afternoon.
Breathing hard and steps of liquid
create the light he becomes buried in.
Something pierces the ankle.
The earth of the mind that no music
loves today. He lifts the voice but
from too far off. The light is thick,
and after a climb, there are garlic,
bones, and congas. The smell
of strangers.

Who seem to have hearts,
but live in their own silence,
while rain lingers. Who hang
on a sleeping awareness.

And all is calm except for living.

It’s true people change little
in five hundred years.
Some are new and polished,
others squirm with faces
like cut wet leather.
II.

Someone is alone talking to himself
waiting to be reborn
or to begin a fresh scar.

He was left with two hands thinking,
palms up, fishing for a dream.
He was almost starting to get old,
but a barrage of delicate statues
brought back that storm
of something acquired by practice:
the sense and nimbleness
of the alphabet.

There is hunger in his walk.
He travels, swallows dead things.
And once, while listening
to an organ play, in a church
surrounded by water,
he thought he saw
saints peeking from an arch.

The ride lights the skull.
A frozen lunch waits. Talk to him.
You Could Sleep This Time

This is why we stayed in the hills.
A soft blue line
protects us from the sting of night.

You,
a stranger:
Hold me in the sad peace of rain.
A finger is moving slowly
and wind catches in my throat
to feel the fever of your conversation.

We sleep in the dark.
Yellow eyes rustle
fear that turns into a moment.
Your eyes have deep places
they swim up my neck
with the vague scent of something born.

This is not the only place
where we can finally be life size.
But here there is time
to follow me further back
and into the galaxy of my nerves.
Now we hear swans
waking from their beds.

The warm comes. The morning comes.
Language enters without a sound.
There is another image
of you shaking out your dreams,

and the air picked clean.
Getting Ready to Leave

Boat

The sea is like a split dream,
water rushing in.
My empty breath is drunk
and in a nightmare drinks wine
from a bucket.
I run into redeeming air.

But it’s still early,
gendarmes whisper in the sunrise.
I awake from the sand
and spend my last morning watching.

Not really having slept
I fall in love with smells
under a window
while sounds slip by
and make private places public.
Look the day is moving

Again.
Day spilling into night,
It’s a song making the difference
and the warm hand of light
or some coffee to bring me around.
I get lost in afternoon’s fingers.
I is not the center
neither is the sea
even when curling around itself
to play with my head.

Yes,
I symbolize too much
but you said you liked it best
when waves become the blood
of life.

And this is how it must end.
Time to leave
Brittany
the graceful people
and the coast.
Street

But it’s getting late
and there’s no money.
So we make the morning move
and turn left at the foreign embassy.

This must be an important place
where time laps at hours
like this page does.

Light keeps rising
higher to your eyelids
which I remember
were soft in the nimble moonlight.

But this is day
I must go again and challenge
the swells of city laughter.

And how many daylights
will be so quick and full
as the contours of your conversation
and some friendly shade?

We keep on running,
then become a story.
Our breath keeps up
and Europe rolls along
with me in its way.
Afternoon

Suddenly I raise my head
a cloud gushes
spitting a racket to bewilder.
Meaning is lacking here
but the event is recorded

and the sky is yours.

Worlds above and inside
listen to the moment become,
which was not so memorable
as a breathing hand
about to write one more line.

The bliss of a shadow
crawls over my personal
asylum of blue,
the echo of your thoughts,
and a telephone where
I cannot connect.

It will never happen, this
classic performance
of life.
But we have some words, a summer
or two to smooth the flames
and quiet the voices.
I can feel the skull
singing me its blackness
where storms and waves provide
lost words that the body loves.

Again in my sleep there are faces
but this time melting
and the water runs between us.

A flower opens its eyes
you breathe
and the only thing that moves
is your endless day.
Desire

This is not the language
that makes us laugh.
That is perishable
and easy to lose
emptying into the slow of a dream
among the dark inaudible voices.

It was long ago
in towns like ours
where new born widows
made love to floods of images.
It was liberty
and the inexpressible universe
a new thing that would bring
white rain.

All day long we lie awake,
as a sandstorm divides the ceiling.
How did these raw waters
warmed by your words
plunge down between us?

We made no sounds that day
nothing changed
there was nothing more to say
except to talk music
and bury the dead.
Rebellion seems complete
yet it is never complete.

Ice shining on the windows,
our hands, a rented room,
blue teeth in a painting.
You hold me and pretend to sleep
and in defiance
converse with dark forests.
Then, something lullabies
the breath awake.

One thing is certain
it is never certain
and we are not
creatures of the air.
In The Light Of That Evening

i

This is the one called mother
twisting in the belly
of her netherworld
and her husband
stalking the curtains.

Screaming forth
a slap for the little ass
while clenched fists
applaud the day
watery dreams
and the blue palms
and the crystal waves of light
and the bath of her skin.

April's sun
here comes the son
a final tongue on tooth
white knuckled letters from the south
flushed with joy
and weeping with life.
In the old photograph
posing in her lap
in some New Hampshire forest
she breathes the thick green air
and tells me not to pick
my knees
those amber scabs in the dusk.

Those dream hours
sober blue
sleeping white-throated
swimming in the misty pool
screaming like a dark river god
in the mud
in the brook and its chattering weeds
little fishes nibbling slime
squealing in terrible delight
awake
and cry for the balmy
shadow of her bed.
What if I now fail to awake
or am seized like a droplet
clinging
to the torn web called life?

Under the words you promised me
an everlasting sea
Bracing against the ugly swells
and the needles to my nape
nerves like quilts of moonlight
this ship rudderless mama.

You, the constancy of earth
heart of providential iron
I sing like silver
and am lost again
in the cold beads of rain
so far away
I hush
and can smell the length of your neck
flickering
then vanishing like a sinking coin.
When I Was Young

I.

I was the thin boy
always the one turning
with mixed green.

I had a frightful walk
lovely liquid eyes
holding an unexpected word.

I could never tell anyone
about the polished flowers
about the secret clouds.

Let no one see me in season.
Someday I'll return
and bring an unexpected gift.

I got this idea
to plant my legs in the sea
and call the ones holding my neck
to warn them of my heart.

They will hang like gestures
under a slow fire
waiting to burst
in the dark rain.

Under one blue star
I would shiver in the wind
like some wild thing in winter.
II.

Early in the morning - in my room.  
I would dream of feathers
in the light blue light, and kiss
the warm face awakening me.

I would slowly count the oases
shimmering on the walls, the camels
beneath my bed, breathing hard
in the suburban summer heat.

When I was young.  Dream at night.
Sometimes nights of blue rain
and wise spiders crawling on
the eternity of my Venetian blinds.

When I was young, Indians
coming over a hill, someone saying
something in a Chinese language.
I'd be scared, bury myself in the cool
side of the pillow, captured
by Christian pirates.

My room was the last frontier.  Hiding
in the cracks of the floor,
hair trembling in the invisible wind,
holding my breath
under the heavy atoms.
Mojave Reflection

The memories come after sunset.
why leave Sante Fe?
rhyming with Albuquerque in the heat
of the Glorieta turnpike
where even collections of national monuments
on the still maps smile
or roads curl like nerves
eating 300 miles on route 40 east
the tragic beauty disappearing
into a white coffee cup.

Yesterday drove
and split the burning
of primitive dust and silence
like a thousand bats
then a cozy road
a neon restaurant
and hello my name is
house of cars and guns and may
I serve cream on the side
instead of dry brain
in the desert?
I'm just a white slave doing
time until the wrinkle of dawn
passes and oh obsessive needs
and the smell of her breath
as a head hits the table,
asleep.
How long ago was Needles?
Could go all night but think instead
at last of silent cars
and engine bliss only ninety
dusk then desert steam
and nothing but fists of wheels
and not so fast this damned pedal
struggles with the blue interstate
and the desert bush.
searching like blind flies.
and how far is Nuevo Laredo?
as devils scream in the night.
Snapshot

the earliest memory is at 3 a.m.
distant kitchen in dark humidity
grandfather coming home
from the night shift
startling silverware
and the sound of voices
the recurring thunder of a spiral staircase
as a child awakes in sweat
blinking at a gang of moths.

and somehow the night’s mouth
opened like a wound
made him think of these
worn images
as the voice of mother rises in the air
between the need for coolness
and black and white
which bubble over and moisten the inner ear.
Nearing Baudelaire at Midnight

Never seen blackbirds flying
but I’ve felt like crying
of winter and ice
and things that I know.

In your room
hell has no sunshine
only a blue breeze
of sensibilities
lost moons
and pained animals with flashing eyes,

The last time I see
that you were meant just for me.

You say there is no satisfaction
in a world of naked days
sick and tired of visions
and what you dreamed of last night.

You climb the green wall
to drink vacant paradise
and the spiders in your bedroom
can no longer find
a word
to draw a smile
from the stranger.

The last time I see
that you were meant just for me.
Even Cowboys Get the Blues

The kind that I mean
scrape matches on zodiac boots
clean living versus the machine
(I really want out of this bourbon smile)
to cut the heart of headlights
and feel the dusty team
of cactus arm
and dogie thigh.

Tonight in quiet nests
and in deserts
i look as I've looked before
at stars falling
and long to study your lips
as moustache plays guitar
and twilight's needles
drop blue details
made beautiful
by horses and red lariats
and the stillness stinging your face.
Christmas

Nobody knows when he was born - out of the luminosity complete with tired paint brushes - *consumatum est*. It is as if we could live on a rustic gift, or some winter love in a grey corner, or just wait for the sun to stay. But christianize pagan celebration and wait forever. It was a question of the Saturnalia that was in the wind, and those tight-lipped fathers were no fools. There was no particular celebration of Him, just the exchange of candles and dolls, and maybe a bottle of Falernian or two. Back then the solstice was shot through with life; there was no emphasis on the birth of the son rising through the winter darkness to save us. New England finally triumphs in the nineteenth century, and carols today smell like roast beef and the capitalist stink. But oh, where is the son now?
August

Blue umpires on a Sunday afternoon
the count was full
and sister tagged along with stories
of how she hated father.

I was lousy on the base paths
and we lost.

How my neck burned
as the dark chain
of her bicycle
clanked circles in the driveway.

I could have shielded her
with my thin back
but she received the blows
those deadly hands
continuing to fall
on her bruised soul.

I hear veins scream
kick the bedroom wall
and try to forget her animal eyes.
The Problem With Miracles

To Jeanne from Chinon

Now I know
how you could forget
that everything else exists.
The alouettes
play in the summer flames
and a jar of poppies
glows on the table.
The hills seem empty
since you’ve been gone.

I’m thirsty you say.

Sometimes feeling small
away from papa.
Others, marveling at
the bliss of blood
and foreign conversation.

A heart’s pain designs a supple sword
and we are left
with those hard months
the evil grasses
chilling your lips.
The fact is
that when night swallows your hands
the lightning comes
to roar in your veins.

War is fading
you choke and cannot order words,
then become Saint
in the last light of autumn.
Helmeted but still
bright as a flower
not trying to escape.

In the morning they pick through
your warm bones
and heart spilling onto the ground.
Rimbaud's Letter

To Vitalie from Harar

I have received your package of last year.
The mail takes six months since this village is separated from the sea by deserts.

Yesterday it rained.
Very desolate here. I'll be a millionaire soon!
Outrageous Abyssinia!

A Catholic mission here,
a French priest, native children whose mothers I love but . . .
A great deal here:

filthy food, thick coffee and yellow air.
This is not the saddest part. Today I greeted a young nun,
her smile was like a fresh cut.
City

Another life is being led
through the patterns of traffic.
Working woman with violet heart
sliced in two
looks for her lover
Come to me near the river he said.

But she can't.
Must work like papa
must count tomatoes
and cut pork.
Quiet hands sort onions
in the dirty moonlight.
She could be sitting now
turning soft pages
without a smell.

But she must express the store,
as her apron or her heel
listens to a blank
shopper's reasoning.
Waiting for awhile to skip upstairs
white wine and peaches,
there's baby too.
Head tries to forget.
She dies again every evening  
thinking about living,  
and the tired bread  
of her back  
waiting for day.

Open forms of evening  
dark coming up  
we admire her  
honest as cotton.

Look at her colors.  
They'll keep until she's ready  
to bury them  
as her child looks up  
and reaches for mice  
that peek from hollow shade.
Eclipse

Tonight a god or two looks to us for assurance, wondering why we have forgotten what we tried so hard to learn.

There must be a decision, whether the kiss of a beach on some morning is worth the green core of the human will.

The poetic gift is not rare, numbers ride down hills on golden ponies at dawn and daily help to produce the bliss of summer harmony.

But across a field the wind blows, a wind that makes one forget what a memory is, or what joy a sad grey can bring.

In the cove of a lyric an old ship lays enchanted laden with alligator eggs.
Satin mahogany hides in a dry corner of the hold, 
waiting for something to be shattered 
and to quietly breed another youthful vessel.

But listen to the quadruple of any voice, 
and something hides the darkened moon: 
vermilion explosion of an old dream.

There must be a decision 
between the fleeting breath of war 
and the sheer landscape of struggle.
Memphis Blues

No wonder ancient lips get ready
to move. There are night loops
of city buses, a child running,
trying to leave home.

His heart is as robust
as a coca-cola truck.

Sweat leaves a stain in the air.
The perfect rhythm lock
lying awake in the next room
with garlic greens and Hank Williams.

Then the tension of aunts
starts talk around the table
and the coffees and southern moons.
Dream of Truth

As if nothing else were worth it. The magnificent poetry of reply does not understand paradox or the blue and white winds that make each attempt at understanding nearly useless. It has been called the triumphant purposiveness of victory, the domination of that authentic earth of family. An offering is an easy way out; an open secret is a hateful sight to so many. The old weakness / true love modality. A sincere pang of immortal grief is hung around the neck of the mistaken son, the misused pig: cut too late for sweet bacon yet too early for raspberry Jell-O. Another instance of adopted identity. As rusted weapons slide into scabbards, the jeweled humanists, the loving fathers, the lying doctors, the confused mothers gaze at the silver promise of lie and combat the world with a great galore of meat and smoke and the final ash of what is. Let someone else restore the corpse of victory, cracked hands, dry memories of a tree. The more true, the more likely to disappear. An evening bird ravages the crop of the daily search for the love, the home, the true, the one, the soul, the body, the other, the word, the poem, the truth. But the poem is dying, you live far away, and in the burning enclosure of a room, stones drift into the history of your death (the death of your history) - a land of dirty snow and fruit. Another cliché falls onto a cold desk. A search is needed for the next turn to take as the sand of a winter’s wish becomes a plant with a shoulder crawling up a leg. A nightmare with lips of morphine, the lungs of a voice, a trellis of mistaken love, and the deafening silence of an unwritten letter home.
Now a bit of dog, a tired sidewalk, a rotting paper cup.
A vague moon spies two bodies in a desert, a lizard expands
its breasts under the tough gaze of circumstance, under
the malaise of deceit. In the frustrated mind of water angels
wait for glass photographs of horses to soothe the quantity of
outdoors, the timidity of certain extremities, and beauty which
defies the intelligence. No one will awake from this dream because
no one sleeps very well these days. You were born somewhere
in the south. The wind was red. The false calm tore your hair.
You were born on the steps of a motel. You mix the clouds
with ugly verses, and thirst for what you think is solitude.
Transparent being, yourself, feather of a century, child
of brute tonality. You will pass away to appear, then all will be.
After the Storm

After the storm we were left with ourselves huddled in some corner waiting to remember what to do next. In the next room gray light astonished a wall, and questioned the existence of our silent energy. We walked on the ceiling for awhile, put bandages on assorted fingers, and peeked outside to assess the damage. The evening sat heavy on our eyelids. The sky searched for a tone it had once known, while the wind ripened into autumn ritual, waiting for us to admire the porcelain of its breath. Somewhere a child is running loose, a bird is startled toward a field’s edge: living bird phantom. Then there is the darkness, finally, we go on speaking to the night, get tired, and speak of childhood, skinny mist rising off of waterfalls, wandering animals sniffing for sure-footed food. Something happens, absence makes itself known to us. Some other thing dominates the world, breathes dimly, lives for the flesh of dreamers, who squeeze their legs with hearts pounding, huddled in some corner. There is knowledge in the eye, but it is in the broken rains that we seek answers. Energy reaches out so far that it denies ourselves, raising a dusty window, digging for onions in the moonlight, sitting on a lean bullet of silence. An orphan of simplicity knocks on the forest, restores mystery and kindles youth, brings cold soup on a hot summer’s day, becomes beautiful and silent. We have a broken wall, automobile fenders, blue jars, and must be patient with the new shapes, the naked colors, the orbits of words. The nails and boards of our arms become drugged with the harsh stars, the pointless battle of planets, once clean faces, and a garden full of weeds. A cricket passes an open door, we disguise ourselves, and become part of the new world.
What Happened Near Tu Fu's Garden

1

He waited for you
in the warm blizzard light.
You went to him, learned his worth.
You have tasted gardens, vexations,
torn his letters,
watched the sun eat words.

12

One day
he waited in the wrong blizzard.
You pushed him into a rowboat.
A meadow lost its glow.

53

You walked.
Wind splashed the morning.
You waited for him

in the shade of a plum tree.
The river was cold.
The grass spread out
for six or seven miles.

Now, your door stays shut,
dancing clothes idle.
The room flows with music lost
in the evening
as the moon moves.
Midnight Menu For Lovers

Others may sing of volatile allurements, and for those that play the game, something is truly bred. The movement of space and nothing that is worth missing.

These times. Twilight no longer soothes the breast, but dinner will bring prosperity, indiscretion, a purple evening and a drowsy time that lets others wait. Maybe that space where suspension lives, a dry dialectical drunkenness, the greatest of all arts . . .

The pop of chocolate chestnuts makes a nice accompaniment to the fresh croquettes and the almond croissant of praise which greet the pure canopy of your love.

The onion tarte à la parisienne fills the air while peach pastilles mix with the lemon moths. The cold ortolans are enjoyed and conversation turns to the spicier endearments of noisettes italiennes.

Cinnamon scones unarranged and the order of pepper tartelettes stir the body into the middle of a little warm water. When moistening is complete the fermentation of American whispers begins.

For savory western recipe of virtuosity, let myth of watercress toss the rich garden vegetables, stir the oyster coquilles, and plunge the soul into some edible brambleberry steak.
The name of it comes, for sure, from the suckling pig of the Occitaine, the chipolata of moral sausage, the boiled pudding à l’anglaise, and the gazpacho with heaping sides of mincemeat fritters.

It is time. Somewhere the cream of Christmas omelette will make a difference.
Journey

I awake that morning as the wind moves over the leaves. We climb the walls of Montségur, an arrow pierces my armor and I tumble to the soft red earth of Southern France. The counts of Toulouse keep on fighting under the cold sun while I walk through a garden in the underworld. The moon is blue and on a nearby hill I crawl through a grove of wet elms and think of reflections on a dark lake in the afternoon. I try to rise again from the bloody field. Oh, the fire in my bones! It is night and groaning flesh sweats in crumpled black steel as I try to pull myself from under my Lord’s horse. The promise of glory and riches he had told me! My heart tightens and hears the smell of screams and waiting among my friends and their bodies and waiting for someone in a white robe to bring me water and waiting. I listen and feel some light, spend the evening praying, thinking of my vassals off in the distance drinking, swearing, and wondering where I am. Where is that victory? What is the true earth, and that thing called justice, that thing called simplicity? What is that scratching behind my eyes? Now I can taste the smooth pebbles of a mountain stream. I remember that day. We stopped and rested in the shade of a tree.
Blue Poem

Logo, locus, the place where things happen.
Multiplicity of moons.
Irradiation of memory,
and buildings in the wet sunset.

The dirty pink arms. The dark blue eyes of twilight. A year passes on the way home.

Home was a souvenir, sad grass winding around old pears, laughter from the front porch in the dark, summer trees in the warm wind.

Mornings
where sun filters through the rain. The cold walls forget and I drift awhile. Purple waves of an old story.

The canvas of evening ends again, while stars stimulate the cold parks dotted with still trees.

Demystification of confusion cleans the light, falls away, leaving time and pieces of eternity floating lost in a cloud.
Night

Between two stars a cloud burns.  
Light becomes lost in mean watercolors.

In a wind of dust and roses, we wait,  
while outside the curtained windows  
the city laughs and sings wildly:  
a multiplicity of cities chattering  
throughout the air.

As the night becomes cool and green  
we hear the grief of unborn animals.

In a dream, salted by the winds,  
we sail the seas,  
and try to stay warm  
in beach caves.

In the morning, waking in a field  
we see birds  
fighting for pieces of the sun.
May Poems

#1

Fierce blue ocean, somewhere in the mind.
Large white flowers, somewhere on a museum wall.
The black contours of petals, emphasizing
that afternoon in a large room,
miles from the hot noise.

And through a turnstile is still another
world. Vertical gray and bloody rose,
horizontal black and green. More
untitled abstracts, dirty beaches waiting
in the distance, dead weekends,
and the foreheads of sad children.

Problems of another evening.
How to get to the end. Cool liquids,
stretching, and thin books. Clean windows
and new skylines.
Under the sunset of the one hundred and thirty-seventh avenue, walk people with emeralds in their eyes, cool cotton breasts, and pieces of the universe.

One million smiles, deceptive curbstones, localized perspectives. Sometimes it is like this. Others look at the sky below, feet barely touching the earth. We think about moving about in bottled air. Any day now. More lights, more people. Any moment now: free interpretation of the landscape.

The winds turn grey and through slim buildings grim alternatives. Puppies in windows, red sneakers, and old smells. Then, the glow of American frescoes.
Lost in the botanical garden. Birthplace of the thin skin of Indian lands. Thousand year old blossoms under the wood pine. Stepping carefully over the cold grass. Then the meaning of pain. It turns blue and trickles down dark Chinese trees. The laughing and talking of small round voices. One sentence touching another. A forehead brushes a cloud: white teeth ripening in the electric sun.

In a valley of the city, a mountain laurel slowly opens, its secret slipping around the bold rocks, before the deep rains come crashing down.
In the cool white room, green peacocks spread their tails and walk around in the cave of your thoughts.

Hours before sunshine, distant lands behind the forehead. It’s the time of year to search for warm grasslands, lean on each other, and drink old wine in the new shade. In the shade’s grace we wonder how language emanates from your collar.

Over the hills to the east, the sky is still blue they say.

But here the wind is dense and the stars wet. The birds fly so low that they can hear the loose moments between your words.
Dreaming over Africa

The wind is so fat over the Kalahari. There are no words to describe it. Giraffes gallop across the dry riverbed, dust rising in the slow motion. It is the hot season, time to squeeze tubers and watch a little water dribble down my son's laughing face. Far away, I was told, other people with big wheels and hard animals are trying to kill the sun. This is difficult to understand. In the evening around the fire, my family chews dry roots and talks about the gazelles to be hunted tomorrow. The orange moon is smooth tonight as laughter gets lost in the honest blue hills, our voices disappearing in the bigness of the dark. The rains will come soon. We'll live in the trees awhile, hair getting long in the wet branches.
Liberty in the Backyard

The dry city breeze leaves our foreign guests speechless, on the roof, dancing in the pulse of lights, their smiles as nourishing as children’s lips. On the roof we could see the rest of the world. Angels slept in hammocks, listened to us talking under the generous sky: then planets weeping on the primal horizon. Somewhere there were birds dreaming, cats being born, and neighbors basking in the light of their televisions.

In rooms below, strong ghosts sneak around cool corners. Long ghosts that cut the moonlight, and make small voices, waiting to speak. Again, the wind goes silent, people sleeping below, their breath warming the red rain in the black sky.
Liberty

I.

Liberty and generosity, quiet ships on the new water. Here is that other life. Tired bones regenerating themselves. Conquering the crops. Here we are. That red flame in the clean sky.

Liberty and genocide. Rose colored dust on hard skin. Bathing in long moons, grandfather’s stories of wild elks by the blue rocks. Crane tails flowing from buffalo robes. Here comes a ship, the smell of olives. Far-away frogs singing near the water scatter in the half light. Ships full of voices, hairy faces on the turquoise sea. The big ships and writing, the forest burning. Look they say, look at all that land. New lives. My family’s memories resting under the water rushes. The wind roars over the hunting grounds, blazes under the black sun. Old feet kicking new land.
II.

Fighter planes over the city today. In the brassy moonlight, people drink things, laugh, and wonder. The birds watch and wait. Hope is lost in the thick air, buried by hard windows, strangled in the sad weeds. What's left? Voices floating in the stolen moment, celebrating the deaths of others, in the swollen night.

The wet streets. The moon drops its white nail on the window ledge. Sitting before different pages with the same hands. Soon. All is lost. What matters is to do, to do something before violet light fills the air already filled with waiting and waking and sleeping between the thick choices.
Revelation and Development

Because that’s one of the better things we can do. Writing on water, writing on air. Beyond the clear outlines of the golden city, there are twilight filled rooms, the purple rustling of a page where the sun falls and leaves behind the world’s agony, as a gentle face smiles. The wonder of the stars is known, and for a second, the dark cavern where days and nights are spent is bright with white wings and delightful animals, which come out of hiding.

The crimson of day doesn’t reach here. Only nocturnal blue, thoughts of desert journeys, the branches of sweet song quickening breath, visions drifting away. And this youth pushes its head through the liquid of life, becomes alive, and speaks in silvery tongues.

A silent lamp watches the moment last forever. It is like a walk to the edge of the woods, a daring feeling on the neck, the nose filled with a new bloom. Hyacinth embraces summer’s peace of land. The brook runs on, into the future, into the past. Hands are filled with pieces of planets, with secrets of crooked trees. This, the sacred garment of existence. Oh, that orbit of wonder,

your beautiful blue soul.
After the War

I.

Things tried to sort themselves out.
We walked through time, dull moonlight, quintessential earth.

Woke up in the morning.
Cleared a new beginning.
Where was everything?

Sitting in the morning sun
and not knowing why.

When the earth starts to glow,
who will understand what it means?
All the scientists are dead.
Why, why, why?

Time leaves slivers in a heartbeat,
whispering. What is not understood.
Who cares? Leave it. Pick it up.

Earth goes to sleep forever.
Light hanging in the burnt air.
Who says that in the morning
the sun will shine? That the ponies
will awake at dawn?

On the roof it is bright,
maybe it's morning.
II.

A long way to go. Thinking really matters, and the hard solitude of night. Where the ancient and the new produce thoughts and words that shiver in the chest.

All the machines are gone. They are asking for poems again: no one can remember anything.

Sometimes nights in former rooms. New ideas and older skin. Other selves and the same eyes.

Too many dogs in the city. Love that sneaks around corners. Hate that buzzes like flies caught in storm-windows.

Weeding the garden of the self. Inner shots of a nightmare. Furniture and books in cars.

The poor and sick alleviate the pain by consuming more hopeless dreams.

And where are you tonight, as I cry out? The miles of air separate us.
Nora's Song

Wanders somewhere in the big universe,
cool clouds in her hair. The jasper mountains,
the pale petals,
the soles of her feet.

Sunset. On a boat in the lagoon. The breeze.
Snow falls and cranes leave the shadows
of her hair,
and head for the moon.

Secret places in her silk robes.
Vines glow, vines which once withered
in a lost garden. And now:
Pheasants on the warm river bank.

Memories ignite and bones and
the world remember her. The paths
she walked. And now,
rainbow light on the forehead,
wild flowers on the open sea.

Miracles in her arms. Waterfalls
in her old pictures. She smiles,
then continues to wander in the night.
Lelea

Goes by in her old coat
speaks to rain under the sporadic sky.
In her shiny leather boots,
she leaves traces on the soft wet bricks.

In her thin fingers she holds something:
papers on injustice
in the history of foreign events,
on beggars in forgotten countries,
and starving children on winter floors.

A new philosophy somewhere to hold
her together. From the library, she watches
it snow wet snow. Cold white to purify the air.
Warm legs sitting together in a small room.

She has some answers
she wishes she had given
during last night’s conversation.
Under the cold sky, her eyes stay clear.
Sitting half warm, trying to write
a few more words.

Walks by in her old scarf, touches the wind.
When she dreams it is a strong dream,
used the next day, woven into a friend’s life.

On the sidewalk she talks
to the air. Cutting through her life
in round thought.
The sirens stopped. There were things coming from me that morning, water poured from your mouth as you looked at your skin in the mirror. We are ready to fly anywhere. In the window giant blossoms try to find their way in to touch your arms. You were sleeping and now the beach in your hair moves to the sound of the traffic. You sit in a chair under the covered moon, while the grasses of your breath move in the space created by your folded knees. It is the last moment. Bombs explode at noon and on the streets it is cold and it is autumn in the room, and memory and years are waiting on the wooden floor. A new color is what we need. Some way to hold onto those other evenings: thyme in the air, lilacs under the feet, rosemary and forest in our pillows. Now, we walk the streets, and watch other people singing on rooftops under the lonely stars.
Then opening the pages of a self-styled history, a country of lives, words arranged, so he'd feel better in the evening.

It was so much fun: post-war commercial Christmas. Smiles in the morning, camera lights, red ribbons sticking to Dad's slippers. More egg nog, more ribbons, more. A forest of lights in the living room. The warmth of everyone around kisses and donuts. It's all on the home movies. Yet somewhere we sensed, we kids, that outside there were hungry Santas that day. Sticks and cold socks. Old cars and dirty turkey bones in the snow. No festival of crumpled wrapping paper, no shining morning. But here, warm smells from other rooms. Ideology of holiday. It was so much fun. It is still swimming somewhere in the body, a heavy motion, red and black and green.
World Series

Ever since we were young we waited for the white ball to climb over the big wall. It usually came at the end of the evening, scuffed with rusty dirt, rolling near someone’s cruel foot. Twisted blue cups glistening between the red wooden seats in the cool green light. Gone home, cried, dust covered sneakers, sleepy eyes, the crumpled program, the torn ticket. It never happened like it did in other cities on television. Crying in the back yard, swearing in the late summer sun. Then we left the city and those white and red uniforms far behind. The white ball slept in a dry leather glove on a dirty shelf of a crowded closet, and the green wall was barely visible through the mean blizzards.

In a dream, the ball kept sailing through the soft night, climbing further into the sky until it hit the yellow moon. The air crackling with the sting of wood, people on their toes in the magic light, the emerald grass and the chocolate soil. We still wait for that moment. The dust flies, hands slap hands. Evenings of blue arcs, pure geometry, and bards of the body.
Vincent

Burnt flower in the heart of a wheat field, the unfinished sky. Thistles in the brain and thirst in the undergrowth. Something comes apart in triple ideas at night then lives inside a star where the spirit twists endlessly. Frozen poppies explode inside the eyes. Trees on the banks of a stream. Crows take your breath away in the dark blue afternoon.
Psyche

Psyche jumps off her horse, looks over the unfamiliar skyline and hangs her head: "Here history is polluted with hard fog under a sky where blackbirds plummet. There must be some life left. Today, the clouds seem whiter than the teeth in one of those beautiful magazines."

"I've heard that only a few golden villages remain, where the atmosphere is clear and wet with laughter. I must find one, where peaceful palaces far away from this world of words and numbers sit and dream and people still sit and dream." The yellow wind blows another day of dust into Psyche’s tired face. She slips out of her sandals, curls up in a dirty white robe, and sleeps next to the underpass.

Her dappled gray horse remains close by and dreams of fat Macedonian apples. In their sleep there are blue voices throbbing above as she sees grandfather for the first time since losing her way one evening, long ago, riding over the throat-dark sea.
Ode to the Age of Mechanical Reproducibility

First there was the machine creating words. Yet this time not a human machine. Here, no purple quill scratching yellow parchment in the rain of red candles. Words strung together in magazines which lay stuffed under old radiators. No more ancient joy of recital where wine flows from poet’s lips to lover’s face. Here, machines storing up dead words for next year. No more drinking halls where bards sing of those good kings going down to the dragon’s den for the peace of people’s night. But words painted on walls in large white rooms in foreign cities explain what it feels like when one wants to turn over a rock in a cool field and see what crawls from underneath. People who pay with their souls to have a few of those old precious words adorn pleas for their coffers to be replenished by the acquisition of artificial food. Here, no more prophets with electric hair crying their visions from mountaintops. But morning tries to bring something, continues past the sky, and distributes its roses over the dead land. For here, too many garlands of fatted words, slippery mouths stealing whatever they can from each other, hands spilling pain into the air. But voices, scattered, looking up, very high up, on some days watching cold leaves fall to earth. Coasting through the twilight some birds stop and laugh at what’s below. Time swells as emaciated angels look for a place to spend the night.
Elegy

I

Then she said to us, sensing the movement in our feet:
I would like you to come closer,
and hear the wind beneath my breast,
before I leave tonight, slowly,
like blue fish wriggling their way to the stars.

In a room of wood and paper,
We would undress her,
wash her, and wrap her soul in smooth cotton.
The ocean will surely swell tonight.
We'll drive out later,
dive into the water, taste each molecule,
and try to remember what it was like when we last played at low tide.

She's leaving tonight.
We can see the fixed points of her life hovering about, zigzagging against the flowered wallpaper.
The fireplace downstairs is cold.
But it's June and that's normal.  
Broken, our voices, our limbs,  
cold and motionless on the bare floor.

Trying to talk about  
the fate of her atoms.  
We feel like running away  
to the North Pole.  
Now scattered in the black yard  
under the cold moon, each in a green  
metal chair, remembering her in an old  
gardening hat, sitting on the front porch  
under the wet sky.
II

Miles away some sand blows up and spreads over the cellophane backs of the waves. She escaped and went running over fairways, not wanting this to be the night to leave. We watched through the hard car windows, dreaming intermittently, of sinewy forests, which blew cool in the late August breeze.

Beyond the North country, they say there is a land of eternal sunshine. Virginal spheres and harmony of air. We awake and sadness is sharper than cold rain on a young face. She’s still out there, and we are like stones in the fireplace: blackened by years of intentional forgetting.

It’s time to remember. She sits up, glances, drinks, and asks to see the flowers one more time. There is movement outside. We can feel a white wind blowing through the walls, walls she no longer recognizes.

This makes no sound, yet it is bigger than all the others. It deafens us, we look again, she says goodbye, and leaves for several days.
III

On a path deep in the forest,
We hold back the clouds in our brain.
Look again, there is the dull motion of birds.
It is time to remember. Autumn mornings.
The thickness of the cold dew. Then it is night.
Coming home through the short grass.
Her head bounces like a sunflower waiting at the back door.
She’ll be back.

Another morning,
We found some old clothes,
hung them in front of the fire and sighed. And slowly, slowly she appears. Walking on rain water.
Breathing the deep cool air.
This is the first step toward her dream.
A moment’s victory.
Body and lips beat eternally:
all that remains in the vivid light.

Now we sleep like wine and make an effort at becoming. We adorn her hair and take refuge. Treasure buried behind her ears. She is a sphere of night, lightning green. Hands smoother than the dunes.
And what word is there
for a cemetery in the snow?
All that is left now is snow.
Yet it is intact, covering absence,
keeping time alive.
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I

Ragged boys in the streets of a village in Mozambique show us their dirty thin wrists in the dying green light of another day in the uneven brown streets. Tonight, they will sleep huddled five or six together wrapped in potato sacks, stomachs screaming white pain, bones in the numb air rubbing against grey faces. Scarred ankles cuddled together in old newspapers trying to wrap out the African cold. Mama in North somewhere, Papa in South. We spend day begging, no eat for two day, I like come America go school be capitalist have warm TV bed food. I cum wi u? Their dry lips rustle through the radio and I turn my head.
II

Somewhere under Metropolis city pale ankles in a silver train. Yes, going to shop for last night's dream. Maybe an Oriental image for the blue room or an Arab one for the white. Oh those days when I can't buy. But today can, can, can. Pure fingernails scratch pink skin. Green eyes gaze through dark tunnel glass. Today, today. Beautiful room, beautiful store. Grey limousine. Smooth boxes. Tonight, tonight. Ethiopian food on small tables. Slow images of night passing by the restaurant window.

Oh city, oh honey, oh money made on the wasted lives of those people.
Evening Eclogue

Can your quiet face and wise breath be preserved here as in an ancient statue? Why can’t it be held forever between hands, the soft brown hair dancing in the window’s light? Will you turn and whisper through wild wet teeth suffered dreams and the wood smoke of memory? I don’t know what this means to others. This square room, world of my life. Sleepy words grow out of you like fragile branches on black trees. One by one your words are like soft little bodies shining out in the dark. They turn blue and speckle the skinny moonlight. We’re here just like people everywhere in the vineyards and stockyards and backyards and graveyards. But here it is different. Your skin is honey and your sleeping throat: fat blueberries. The western world sleeps and sometimes groans. The cat’s face glows and I sit up and wait for a miracle to appear in the thin darkness. The cat hears fog drifting by and your words sink away into another world filled with silent mice and girls in white dresses playing in an autumn field. I don’t know what this means, but I can’t live without your sleep. Writing poems in the tightening dark, without commas, maybe with a flashlight. The square white space is captivity. But here you will always be, on these spots on a page, even while your sleep freezes, your waking waits, and your voice stops. Then new words are red ribbons spinning around in the black distance.
Electric Astoria

I. CIRCUMSTANCES

And you finally came over, eyes intermittently changing from rivers to roses to snow on the sea. Eyes finally free to see their first image.

The first lines of evening, frescoes of a hidden world. And in the country, olive trees cry, and birds arrange themselves for the night.

THE MOON
abandons its light as you stop walking and listen to the flood of words passing by in the cold. Silence. The strange sources of experience. Judgement = error = living on loud silence, living on words. Looking for that new language. If a face comes near, you are not scared to experience its odor. The oil spots on the street are no different here. Violins play from a window and nobody talks to you. Welcome. Living in a dream, waking up, reading about past lives in brown books. Letters, newspapers, mornings on the wet balcony.
CAN you feel the festival of life, carnival of the new bohemia, international speech of the self-proclaimed last generation? Starvation of a world. Destruction. Women walking in black. Buildings on bodies. In the morning too many thoughts and try to write home. IT IS HERE. Afternoons alone in the cold park.

CLIMB a poorly paved side street and crunch the broken glass and find everything dominated by the length of your damp breath in the violet shadows. Even when you walk along the boulevards people try to examine your heels. Where a voice tries to speak. Angels weeping underneath the dark arches at dusk.
II. PALLADIUM

Midnight everywhere, summer in February.  
Stepping into a postmodern underworld, we 
think of Petronius. Rich pagans and models, 
sublime in their thinness, classical in their stillness. 
Suns fly overhead in the old theater, three 
thousand feet trample the sweat of dead actors. 
A gaze. A wealth of bodies. 
A million dollars worth of shoes.

Oh, Palace in the city. Evenings on boats 
on underground rivers, dark 
rhythms and smells, and maybe 
some conversation.

Lately we’ve been leaving things behind: scarves, 
books, old friends. The morning’s marrow is a savage 
country with the playing of its drums. The air goes 
feathery, the numerous windows, the lights reflected 
on teeth. There is madness in the world, sad animals, 
weather which kills, the heavy intervals of sea washing 
over us.

Came to a field and the grass was silent. WE THOUGHT. 
We held on tight and took off our shoes. Another type 
of language. Rubbing the heavy grapes out of our eyes 
as we remembered.
In the islands we would awake under the heavy branches, 
turn eyes seaward, and wander in the tough air. 
Pale rain and yellow shells glistening on the shore.

No words, days without paradox, and dolphins 
on the horizon 
m mingling with the universe 
of our shivering thoughts.
III. OUTAKE

The pain and joy of the family
shoot down the arms. Specks
of winter cook prematurely
in the grass of an old photograph:
picnic at an outing, lost faces
basking in the appetizing sun.

Colored blankness answers
its own questions and does not
listen. Broken genealogies,
misplaced heredities. Clear faces
once so smooth and smiling.

EVENING under the eyelids. Moons
dangling from the ceiling, illuminating
time. New territories at last. Shaded valleys
and rich hills of the shrimp-streaked sunset.
Charcoal moments. Lost tribes in a dream.

Swallowed a lightbulb and journeyed into space.
Belly glowing extraterrestrial – living electric bird.
Fingers are fuses. Software of consciousness.
The planet becomes a cool dot on the blanket
of infinity, and we use the glow of your abdomen
to illuminate the star ship.
Poem of the Month

It was maybe on a Tuesday
that the blue wind blew
and left us speechless
under the alabaster clouds
of a city sidewalk.

We went inside.
No more pacing around
at the cold white gates.

Inside it was warm
and we waited.

You gathered yourself up
and tumbled out
laughing and shivering
with ears like
wet roses.

We wrapped you
in warm things
white and turquoise
and listened to your first sighs
under the warm lights.

The room was bloody.
You laid there
hair rustling,
skittering
new rhymes into the air.
Museum of Young Nature

I can no longer see you,
but I think it is quiet,
as I sleep among my animals
and breathe warm smooth.

I can feel you out there in the black.
Your shadow turns
from time to time.
I sigh and inhale
the still white cool
and gaze
at the stars behind my eyelids.

I'm going to try
to raise my head and call for you.
A small voice
that beats its soft wings
against the hard air.

I see
your strong fingers
and it rains outside.

I lay on your ideal heart,
colossal breath,
and glow with peace.
Love Among the Ruins

Between one age and the next, the bending of an elbow. Maybe it happens in a mirror brushing hair against a pale wall and a dark blue sky.

But when ages pass in the blink of an eye, how can your thoughts turned cold forget the soft mornings of some time ago, the awareness of everything, and a small spot on your lover’s face?

Sitting up in bed until noon while the world burned.

That would be a confession, if we were home. But living here in the city, no one knows us. Progress moves its slow blind feet and huge compulsions spill onto the pavement and onto the choking leaves.
Listen.
On Sunday morning everything is breathing and sleeping. The walls are still and outside the grass is cold and wet. Through the window’s reflection, I try to stare no less deeply than I used to. The trees, the sky, are painted on those windows. And somehow, through all of this, flowers the beautiful unused furniture in the living room.

Don’t recollect too much.
A few steps is enough, those red afternoons. But further back appears the baked blue ocean in the sunlight, the time to share and to ripen together. Now crossing the path of my grandmother’s daily footsteps. How many left? Don’t remember. They hurt too much.

This is the time.
The smooth air coagulates. The time when the world returns to the shadows and wind comes to chatter in the ears. Then daylight anticipates, and shatters the calm emptiness.
Echo's Poem

Somewhere
I hear
Echo near
making my hair
stand
on end.

Now
some melodies
in the rafters
of her ear.

A cold song
a feeling
the afternoon rain.

Stretching
in a pale shirt
on the train.
Over the City

the fog is grey
and pink.

the golden streetlights
color the faces
of the homeless.

gliding by
a beautiful smokestack
its white puff
swelling in the black air.
Light

will pass
through the reflection
of your eyes:
green oceans of curiosity.

Your lashes
blink away
the attacking mosquito.

A surprise:
your fingers interlace
and under
the frozen blue
your face is sprinkled
with the end of day.
Car

So new
and black
and shiny.

Gliding
under the grey sky
and the orange moon.
Old conflict and new, in the thick green afternoon, as we sit under the old pear tree. New and old producing shadows of past lovers walking through the yard at night. It is then very quiet as the old taps on your shoulder and tickles the back of your earlobe. Behind the house, a family used to live somewhere in the spaces between the grass, and old shoes lie buried underneath the tomato plants and wait for new neighbors to dig up their stinky memories. Nearby a tree crashes, and no one remembers the name of the family living in the house on which it falls.
Ritsuko's Dream

i

Yellow fog
the year fades away
no green left to hide the grey.

xii

The wind comes
morning light fades
chilled steeples in the rain.

xxiv

Fat sounds in thin disguise
the voices of insects
scratching the yellow stars.

xliii

The mists arrive
and no one knows
how to write a winter song.
Twisted plum tree
a guitar plays in the dark
white petals under the garden gate.

Lightning flashes
between the fish
trembling in the blue thunder.
In the islands we awake under the graceful branches and look around in the ancient air. It’s so often that we want to travel some place new, and when there so hard to remember what it was like before leaving. What makes the old ground so special? In the morning we would peek in and out of stones and try to feel what it was like when real people lived there. Cold sand under the feet, blue rain, soft shells on an abandoned grey shore. Afternoons it was wander through valleys and read some of the old poets aloud while getting drunk on the local wine. This made us feel even better while sipping thick coffee and milk the next morning on the wooden steps of a farmer who kept his goats fat. Feeds them poetry books he told us: especially the classics - more filling. He asked why we had come, and what we wanted to pay, before we disappeared down a dark green road. The evening took its time and we burnt some daydreams to keep warm in the winter sun. Later, we would walk to the sea, and under the stars, spend a night without paradox, forgetting the next day where there would be no disasters under the Matisse blue sky.
Evening

What was life like on a tired brown evening? The ticking of a winter clock. New roads covering old bones. Fields where people used to dance. Dead fires warming children huddled under cardboard tents in the rain.

A new world, women’s hair, lazy movements in the twilight. Other lives, covered over with flowered wallpaper. Neon and backfire accompany memories of tambours, lutes, and the poets waking up with new lovers. A young troubadour sits still, tired, nothing to sing. He laughs sadly at those who speak golden lines, yawns, and sleeps. People dance, a dog sniffs a traveler’s foot, in the old quarter. Other people settle in for the night under the cold city fountain.

In another part of town, friends move their feet, someone else turns a new page, another bites her boyfriend’s shoulder. She jumps onto his back and they fly to another country, and live in a Persian temple near sacred water.
And further south, nights become longer and remain warm as perspectives stretch to the outer limits. Somewhere in this night we climb a white ladder up a crumbling wall, slip and grasp some jasmine and make it over the top.

Inside we tumble and finally reach the fruit gardens, play in the fields awhile, and forget.

The morning is far away, the night continues to rise in the dark green light.
Starlight

It’s quiet in the Pasha’s tent tonight. Outside the camels sleep while young princes drink honeyed wine under the warm moon. Misty bells echo through cold fields of yellow wheat. Caravans of food and jewels arrive in the dust. At least we’ll go to bed with our bellies full tonight. The guests arrive one by one while I sing with my lyre of the clear springs and silver stars.
yes, blossoms flourish in the shade too
the dripping white petals
bloom disconsolate
as we walk in the early morning
and a vine covered branch
hangs its drooping life to the west

past a dying log
full of winter lice
it crumbles at a kick
never to be firewood
scattered in a dark meadow
quivering in the sun
perfume of fire
under the lovely trees

pain is often undefinable
overcast lines of forgetfulness

what is wanted from the moon
is the constellation of brightness
wine and swollen ashes
tasting of melancholy
sprawling in the wet fruit
the gourds rotten with evening’s bruises
in the violet mists of dawn

we remain under the cliffs
panting in your frothy hair
and the delightful sparks
of the Italian sea.
6 a.m.

A dedication:
for life is only like this
in the cool green morning.

The poets are breathing quietly
the stars are still
brighter than the sun.
Classics of the Pure Landscape

I

Early morning shadows and watch the sun playing with smoke over the French meadows. Descending the hills of Provence and cooking fish in a cave near the frozen puddles of St. Tropez. And the water. And the vertigo of grey red turquoise green. And the December birds. Dead castles, and the wind, and the sad peace. And the water. Deserted cafés in Nice. Swollen dusk. Coffee and milk at a dark table. Thin streaks in the worn sky.
IV

Moving on the endless circle of European trains.
Reflections of fortresses in the black evening glass.
Large eyes of tired travelers awaking to shake
the latest dream. Where are Europe's children tonight?
The orange sun plays with the Italian sea.
The blue electric sea. This and some small
volume to pass the night. In the morning
we'll awake and build a sand castle in the rain,
thinking no one will notice.
 IX

Today I saw you walking in a white robe on the Palatine. Cold hands, damp breasts and graceful feet. You saw a rose growing from a stone. We drank Roman water together and climbed the hills. It was the day before the festival of light when the people leave candles and dolls on neighbors' doorsteps. The streets old and silent, the crisp pagan air biting its way into our lives. Will there be time to do the things we so desire? A fountain goes off in my head. Then in the golden smoke we hear children waking and stretching in blue leather slippers.
The thin sun drips a certain gleam. We watch it thrive, then die. The heavy willows to the west. Running across a wide field to dig for rubies in the black soil. Unmentioned clouds, the cool grass, and skylarks. From green to brown, the noises die down and we recite some poems, repeat our names, and learn new ones. Near the fire, the dark rain cuts through the smoke as we curl up on piles of small leaves near some horses. The smell of animals, love, and pine. We drink cold water in the morning, rustle our clothes, and live.
XIV

Where a day seemed like seven years.
Petrarca, I saw Laura riding by on her motorbike. Buying a sweater, eating soup, writing a long letter in the steam of coffee. Firenze with its sky and tough-boned paintings of sacred women. A Madonna touched my face, a peasant turned around and looked, other women combed their hair in the cool moonlight, and then went out. The men read newspapers, and then went out. Cats and saints wandered around the fountains sniffing for salvation. Softest winter, then a statue, a breath.
XVIII

In the rain I can smell the bones of Christian martyrs. In the unknown you establish your identity and continue down a cold gray road. The mouth of truth leaves my hand intact, and you say I am very, very lucky. I see you waving from an umbrella underneath an open window. In the evening we sit and look at pictures of the catacombs. You rub an eyelid and somewhere south of here arms scratch their way to a new existence.
XXI

The sound of heels on purple stones complements the sounds of your whispering. Somewhere on a hill we sit by a fire and wait. It is cold on the Palatine tonight as oranges rot on dull green trees. In the streets below the children beg for money and candy. In a dream you walk through your past and do things a bit differently. Now it’s tomorrow, we sit on the stones and listen.
The morning in renaissance palaces,
the afternoon in a fountain, and evening
in Jesus' mind. A nun's heart explodes on
the piazza, a shop girl dreams of gold, a fruit
vendor wakes up. His daughter cuts bread
with sleepy hands. From a hillside: the orange
domes. Yellow and green bridges. A red slipper
floats by in the grey water. Naked feet walk
somewhere into the future. Laughter in a convent.
Then, there is no noise. Hot dreams in cold
museums. A woman sleeping in a night train.
Postcards written in the dull twilight.
On Sundays there is a tradition here in Rome. People sell their past for a price. Look, now we see: a grandmother's locket, a general's brandy glass, a soldier's earnings, a merchant's laundry. All bargained for in the cold sun and chestnut smoke. In the streets girls smooth their lips while boys think about how they will go about kissing them. The fountains are turned off, and gypsies with their crippled children settle in for a day of begging. Long tables start to glisten, bells begin to ring, cold thoughts wander in the sublime air.
Out where the purple fields meet the winter sky, I saw you walking in velvet slippers. You were dreaming of chiaroscuro. The morning sun exploded in the old white room, and the southern winds wouldn't let us go. The Spanish sea appeared and sand poured from your dreams. Then, on a hilltop, we huddled alone, coaxing the fire, and feeling the bite of rain. The next day, walking through the thick ivy, trying to put old words to new music. A flame caught in your throat, and the pale stars were gliding by, as the train moved further on down the coast.
Where Sunspots Fall

I.

It had been another long day. She had never wanted to live in the south with its dark gravity. Family in Boston. Drove here after college. And now, life happened in the blue shadows of the front porch as she watched the end of day become the beginning of one somewhere else. Brushing the full honeysuckle vine that clung to the rotted wooden railing, descending and waiting in silence, and for a long time, hearing nothing. This is the way it was most evenings. The squirrels were coming out to eat; there would be trouble in the yard soon: moist dogs with firm hearts and slim black noses. Sitting on the porch made it easier to forget. This is where they had left each other, at the same time of day, when she last touched a shoulder and cursed the blackbirds circling in the swelling clouds of dusk. She felt warm about such symbolic import and then more secure in her isolation. The sun was leaving its traces between the equidistant elms where the white tee shirt was last seen disappearing down the old road. Now the light was little more than a frightened glow. Mixing metaphors with thin fingers squeezing the worn edges of the railing’s peeling history. Climbing inside the brown screens, sitting in a rocker near a grey cat with pale green eyes.
Now she can be heard coming into the kitchen through the side door, not looking at the clock, not thinking about supper. From a corner of the hallway, she can be seen smiling, pulling threads from a sleeve, remembering those northern Octobers. Waves clashing under Neptune's lightning, silver wind piercing breast and soul. She missed traveling and writing letters from countries where she could hardly speak the language. Rubbing a smooth elbow. There is a half opened letter on the yellow tablecloth. Then she sleeps in the folds of her mother's quilt. Plenty of time later for those poems and letters. Awake, staring at the empty fireplace. A new dream, now a thought, and it wouldn't stop melting. Miles away from herself. Spiritual reality and earthly ideal. Where? Her feet were cold, there was no more wood money until the end of the month. Thinking abstract foolishness as she sat curled on the woven rug hugging her knees. She would try later to work on that bit of potential. Time to warm the self in smooth water.
Another morning. She slept in the smaller room now: the one with old photographs (since the nights were getting shorter). But this room too contained sentences of wet history. Rose wallpaper and dusty Latin books. Green bottles of drowned shells from the Aegean Sea. Can't miss a thing. In another life she had painted in this room. Evocations of bathers in forests perfumed with mysteries, Magdalenean warriors thrusting spears into the throbbing necks of bison, old feet of young women aching on the cold medieval floors of Spain. But images lose potency after their ritual. What were last night's dreams like? Some cold water on the face. Light the candles. Coffee, cream, and blue fruit on the back steps.
A cool linen dress, arms stretching to infinity. Gazing into the bottom of an empty glass. Marveling at the swirls of green ash that make up the passing of life. She had dreamt of the old summer house on the beach with Mom and Dad. The turquoise room and the waves whispering her to sleep. Drinking Italian wine, cracking red lobster, and walking until the wet sand of low tide was spattered with the reflection of a billion stars. A clear memory that hurt. Her eyes blinked. She had visited their graves under a full moon, kneeling on the dead leaves to pray. She had ignored the tiny caverns of others' perceptions and cultivated the endless pastures behind her eye. She floated over the backyard and landed gently in the forsythias to the waist. She could hear fire and dragons coming up from the cellar. So early in the day? This is a formidable beginning. The cat purrs in the flower bed. Make a choice and no peeking over the shoulder. Yes, fire always conquers. The house creaked again. There were bells traveling somewhere in the cool oxygen. Then there was so much quiet.
She didn't feel like moving. The fireplace seemed colder and blacker than yesterday. She continued to explore unfamiliar realms and discover laws underlying the complex nature of wood grain. So much existence. She couldn't get out of bed. A desperate thread of belief circled in her throat as she thought about broken words. She turned a white cup in her hands and sipped the rose-hip tea. Dropping her head to feel rhythm in the body. Arms bare again. Hands moving toward a pencil. Then leaving abruptly in a small horse carriage with black cushions. Her neck finally bathed in the warm rain as hair stuck to cool mouth and forehead. She closed her eyes and it became dusk again, desire crouching in the evening shadows. She was angry for having pursued this. Strewn copies in the dull fireplace. Light a match and watch the hungry flames smile wider and grin at the thought of their truly creative genius. Art and utility. She sat still, not moving until she absorbed the importance of such discovery. Her eyes were wide. The creature in her hunches and stares at a yellow spider. She raises her neck in anticipation of confrontation, but time seemed to move in a circular path. She remembered the letters home from southern islands where she had rolled in the dry sand under orange trees. In the evening, walking on terraces with joined fingers, astounded by sublime existence.
VI.

Now she understood that lyricism founded by accident was as far away as a climb up the hall steps, where, although hungry, she could rain like a fountain, art pouring forth like birds, running and laughing through the empty village streets, singing out of breath, speaking things she had never known before. Now it made no difference. She had lived it so many times. And now to record it as true illumination, to think of it, tired her an unusual amount. She started to believe again in work, in love, in sleep.
VII.

Without thinking another word she arose and went to wash her hands. She hung the thick towel on the white porcelain rack and walked to an old bureau in another room. She felt that she was watching herself in the shapeless darkening. She let her hair down in the mirror. Eyes fell free of emotion and fingers smoothed eyebrows. She reached in a drawer; ideas became blurred in the twilight. Later, sitting in a corner, she smoked: blue curls integrating themselves with the dust before clinging to the moonlight pouring through the Venetian blinds. She had never considered the importance of this word before. Holding a lover in violet alleys, breathing deeply in the golden evenings of an island city. There was the timetable of the total universe sitting on her heart, trying to leave life glowing, but unburned. She restrained herself and walked down the narrow stairs with a book.
For almost a minute she could hear a mouse run from hole to hole beneath the floor. She wanted the caresses of sound to bother her now. She wanted the superstition of sacred impulse to bother her now. It would be easy here. Clean arrays of facts and metaphors. Here she could risk coming into contact with the earth and sky. It would be so simple here, like the relationships of primitives: faces rising in slow motion toward the moon. Breathing quickens to a heavy candor. Fingers merge with hair in geometric motions. Thoughts wandering on the inside of the evening windowpanes. She looked through them for the first time. The rain started to fall outside on the empty garden path. The light of a slick boulevard in a distant country bathed her memory. She would remain like this until the next sun tore through the windows. It took this to reveal the patterns of a white night. Then long noises assured other moments. She could begin again. Hanging through an open window, smelling the midnight atmosphere. Then the sound of her breath engulfs the yard, the house, and the space all around the room.
Small animals crawl in and out
of your dream, sometimes slipping
through your slim fingers.

You, someone with a distant name,
smiled at me in the spring,
bearing worlds of flowers
in your words.

Later, you talk to your friends
in the street, wearing your favorite
shoes, and fingering
a silver brace of pistols.

You said you’d like to shoot
at the stars, watch them fall
to the bottom of the ocean,
and glow among the red coral.

But there is too much war,
you said, while violet rain
started to fall, clinging
to the space behind your ear.

In the smooth moonlight, you think
about walking down a quiet street.
You think about the cool energy
in your feet. Then disappear
into the dark air.
Coda

The vein
on the side
of my son's
pale temple.

A blue
river
of life.