

The Singer and Her Dirty Pioneers in the Lyrical Village

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*...but in music
my desolation is my rejoicing.*
—Louise Glück

One

Dirty Pioneers, the State of the State, and a Fabulous Woman Who Dance

1.

Looking out in wonder, I imagine, and not unkindly,
at their doofus fans and devotees, through the giant tinted windows of their megalithic bus,
the Singer and her Dirty Pioneers
ramble all over these dirty states, a rolling holy
boulder down the crazed and crumbling lanes
of one sad and scary, scared America. Roadies, I'm sure, are always along,
but in the Pioneers' roadshow also spouses & kids, sisters & mums,
a funny rock and roll tour
right out of *Exodus* crossed with Flintstones
plus Patsy Cline if maybe she had married
everyone in Pearl Jam.

And so just the right home for a fabulous woman who dances, goes completely
tornadic, I heard, doing her thing in intimate clubs, sleek civic centers,
grassy heartland festivals smelling of sunblock and beer, and Venue
Security, once, even had to restrain her. One time they roped off a place just for her.
But the band just loves her abandon, I think they love her abandon. They even made a video
of this proverbial wildcat spinning
all over a vast darkened floor, completely alone to "Mainstream Kid,"
lights sparking upward and her hair
flailing upward and the chief thing seems to be
that she doesn't give a damn about anything
you might call external, absolute
authority.

Still, I'm not completely sure that she's free,
or only feels herself free, or if feeling free
actually does make us
free—am I overthinking this a bit?—
or if she isn't in fact doing battle, ferocious but hilarious battle
with something monumentally
difficult to dance. I mean say. I mean dance.

2.

It slightly sickened and thrilled me today
to realize the only way to be free
of death is to die.

And yet there she is, the woman who dances. In flesh.

At least I think
she's made of flesh.

*

I saw her at a concert this year, squished into a nutsoid crowd
that was kind of trying to eat
the stage. It was New Year's Eve in a country
lately inhospitable, you might say, a little less than welcoming
to the globally homeless. And a city well-known for its colorful (you might say)
criminal history, but also its blues, divine northern blues! a Loop and reverse-
running river.

Anyway, there in the stir, there in the crush
of that godawful crowd, I could see our dancing woman leap, I mean wind
right out of herself, dancing
with the very air itself. And let me tell you this: that's not even
possible. Or legal, I don't think. I mean, they outlawed heavenly bliss
on earth
a long time ago now. Clear back at the start.

The bastards.

And yet there she is.

..

*

Meanwhile, the voice that quickens the dancer and all of us,
the Singer's voice so manifestly
correct for this human strangeness unending, meaning downright gorgeously replete
with error—little yelps and skips and hoarse-sounding, even growl-like stuff, even squeaks—
is not yet illegal like heavenly joy
on earth. Although maybe it should be.
We don't allow dead men walking
to listen to music, correct? Their agitation
can turn extreme. They won't be restrained.

Fanatics

1.

I'm talking Row A, dead Center, practically mashed
into the stage. So you watch the concert looking straight up, or nearly.
So you're just about surgically aligned
with the Truth and the Light and the Way. It kinda hurts, doesn't it, such sweetness?
And yet you long for a backstage pass, the ultimate pass, a really kickass VIP ticket.
You don't know about Truth, Light, and whatever—
but you imagine, at the least, that someone beloved
will shake your hand, pose for a pic, write down their name in amazing letters.
You may even do whisky shooters together.
They'll tell you everything.

*

Meanwhile, the Singer's so brilliant even her flaws are
brilliant, and her imperfections will bust up your heart,
they're so perfectly absent. Well, except for her human, very human
condition. She needs that to sing. And the truest song
has something about it a little bit cracked, don't you think? It won't line
up, it still wants to argue
with the artist, with the producer, with your mother.
It refuses to not be about grief. It won't console anyone.

*

Oh, I know; the band in truth is comprised of mere mortals.
I'm ok about that. I already know
that. The human celebrity never quite matches
the luminous dot in your brain
which is always withdrawing
and dragging you along. They're just guys
who scratch bug bites, tie their shoes crooked,
hiccup like everyone else. That's ok. That's good.
Perfect alignment only works for the planets,
and perfection itself, well, is boring.

I'm not even identical to myself.

2.

Ergo the holy a u t o
 g r a p h

, a stop-
gap presence

on posters, freshly unrolled like fragile Magna Cartas;
on a used blue ticket, perhaps, still crisp or splotched with rain;
on some odd, ill-focused old personal photo
back when the Singer busked in Seattle.

And ergo of course the big question: record or don't record
the show? LIVE the moment or KEEP
the moment? Should I try

to live-stream on Facebook for all of us the whole gorgeous wave

of it always too fast, should I leap

on stage if only in my
mind or my camera's
eye,
get as close
as I can, should I try to inhabit

all three of them right
at the moment they make

the sound
and more than the sound,

the Song—

can I?

Afterwards, we all do the long and patient, not-so
patient lingering out by the stage door or bus.
The show may be over, but we are not over
the show. Our longing runneth over. We cannot suffer
enough. We huddle in the cold under a single bulb
or chat off to the side in small groups. Maybe she'll step out and visit, maybe she won't.
Maybe she will, and we'll press to the front of the line,
take her by the hand and look her in the eye—we are not yet completely
broken, or mute,
or imaginary...

I'm, Like, Way Too Ethereal

In the end, I just want contours to complicate, colors to thicken,
detail to be detailed, at last.

I want a poem that crunches and pops, also melts, also
turns out to be something you can pound with a shoe
or throw a rock at.

I want to say concrete differences
so minutely and truly you will finally be able to see
identical twin bandmates precisely
apart, the delicate crinkle
at the top of somebody's ear,
concise clues like the swoop
of a jaw.

Problem is, if I start, say, with tattoos,
I never get much further than *bruisey*
and the overall flow of forms down their arms.

That is, I don't see each brother's intricate, particular markings
so much as the turning of ink around and around
the arm, so I have to turn my head, or turn the picture,
or turn both my head and the picture...

Jack over there looks wounded and hunched over
whenever he's really and truly rocking a solo. It's like a heart
attack or falling down into, say,
some long lonely vortex
to go deep
to go loud
and public with lead guitar.

Mac, meanwhile,
is wholly unfolded and open, always mugging to the fans, his big grin beaming rock hosannas
as his fingers elsewhere and unnoticed translate
the underground throb of the bass.

Did you catch that? The doubled-up muckimucks? The backwards mirror effect? The spinning
gets fucking numbing, I tell you.
I can't say the two sides as they need to be said, there's no word for different and same,
shifting
proximities intoxicating both,
opposite equals advancing

and withdrawing at once...

*

Let's be clear.

Aside from the Fender and Gretsch (or Martin or Collins), Jack plays to the right of the Singer, Mac to the left. It's as simple as that.

Wait! I just found on the web: Mac's front teeth overlap just a bit. ID solved! Now I've only to figure out, if I spot them some day, how I'll ask them to open their mouths so I can stare at their teeth.

Her Famous Green Guitar Picks

1.

She tosses them out to the crowd like after-dinner mints
at the end of her most devastating performances. She's a little bit
funny like that.

One went streaking over my head like a drone
gone AWOL on Adderall.

She otherwise lines them up on the neck of the mike
like rounds of ammunition,
or even the worrisome serpent of old.

A lot of people, by the way, don't believe
in the mystical hoodoo I'm helpless
not to ponder. I don't either. It's not a matter of belief.
It's a matter of frequent
flyer miles, yeah, and listening, and pining,
and *like*. Which can apparently go on forever.

like the worrisome serpent of old

*

I imagine a boomer couple just retired, maybe,
local hipsters geeking out on a scene,
or more likely some good and kind kid from two states away
(she came wearing the exact floppy fedora
her favorite singer wears), amazed now to snag the prize from the air
and hold it gingerly in the palm of her hand
like the final word, or a key.

Then remembering she can't remember
what it's supposed to unlock.

*

And green. *Green*. I have to keep saying it, I want to hug the damned thing,
I suppose so I do not forget. I mean *verdigris*, *verdant*,
viridescent. Maybe *punky*? Maybe *park*? Like little pieces of Eden
we managed to smuggle out.

Like and unlike
the way people saved bricks and even pieces of bricks,

even pieces of pieces you get the idea,
from the Berlin wall.

Maybe *good*?

2.

Sometimes, when they flash like tiny green birds
above our heavy hominoid brains,

so freely,
so easily,
at the end of a show,

we can't even.

Why we long to see her live and on stage
in Charleston, in October, at the height of a flood.
In Fort Lauderdale spring, just before hoards
of college marauders erect the kitschiest
golden calf ever. And Atlantic City in lights. The lights.
Just the lights.

Because we crave that feeling of the moment going.
The heart-twist of not keeping it.
The heart-sink of no
such luck.

No story; no grand story, certainly.

Just a skip in a voice
making sadness absurdly luminous.

3.

She will of course glance down, now and again,
at a chord she is making or about to make
on the neck of the guitar, like touching a foot to the earth for balance
or buoyancy before launching away yet again.

While actual silence itself
she works like a pro, a very maestro of light, prolonging
one unexpectedly there, and again further there—
in "Follow," perhaps, then "Hard Way Home," then "Blood Muscle Skin
and Bone"—

[break]

zeroing in on “The Eye”—

for encore the famous “Hallelujah,” practically blistering with irony...

The Singer's Wife is Also a Singer

The Singer says they're both buddies and lovers, I think they share all their clothes,
and I guess their take on this wide and scrappy, inscrutable world
is exactly the same. They even dream exactly alike—
bird homicides, something about a shoe.

Sometimes their daughter comes toddling onstage as well.
She rides either mother's shoulders like a very large hat
that laughs.

Honestly, if you can't fall in love with a family like that
something's fucked in your heart. You're out of whack with the world.
Or you're so in whack with yourself
there's absolutely no whack left over for anyone else. You're alone
and perfectly aligned
with you.
How does it feel.

*

In Buddhism, nothing has inherent existence. If "I" were a solid something,
with sealed up edges, as it were, I'd basically be inert. There would be no
flux or birth. I wouldn't in fact exist.

But being empty means
being open and
in relation to all the other, incredible, whackjob forms of life, equally empty.
Having no inherent existence
means I am in fact here.

Sometimes I understand this shit, and sometimes I don't.

*

One time they came out and did a killer "Fields of Gold." It was genuinely
something.

I could tell because
it obliterated
us.

Our hearts, I mean.

*when the west wind moves
feel her body rise*

*

Because the Singer and the Singer's wife
are not exactly alike. Don't believe it. They wouldn't sound so beautiful
together if they were. They wouldn't have that giggling
Hat.

Lyrical Village

The Singer's like the adopted little sister
of her older bandmates known as the Twins.

One of the Twins
is married to the Singer's sister,

and the Singer's wife's sister
is married to the cellist.

Songs are named for the bandmembers' kids, the kids
are named after grandparents and one or more cherished aunts, cherished towns.

The Twins' beloved mom is friends
with everyone— even, on Facebook, with the band's berserk fans—

and the Singer's mom was a beautiful, professional
crooner herself on the country western stage.

And then there's... well. Angelina.
I'll call her Angelina.

Hysterical
wee little angel,

the Singer's little daughter. She's two.
She may or may not be able to sing.

She may
or may not wish to.

She bursts giggling straight for the open ocean

on the beach at Quintana Roo.

*

It's funny; I imagine the tired crew, maybe some of the family
inside the tour bus, outside the theater, after the show,

watching fans by the stage door flock.

They know the fans long to speak with the Singer
who, earlier that night, from the bright stage itself,
in the other inside,

called out the Fabulous Woman Who Dances—someone Angelina

I think is destined to be.

Or not.

*

Yes, The Fabulous Woman Who Dances
was there in the molten crowd like a breach, a distinction
ongoing but mending itself
always as the crowd flowed instantly back
around her, so the dancer's dance
if you think
about it, if you follow where I'm looking
exactly,

is a violence
and a bliss
you can't exactly

locate

anywhere. It's everywhere.

Tinder

The Singer is crying, crying, and no,
she is not crying while singing, she is just
singing. You might even hear it as laughing.

Is isn't is,
which isn't to say that it's not. That's what I think.

And she is not crying. Oh
my god the pain when she cries. We cannot
bear to stop listening.

*

In one scene, in the tour documentary,
the band makes the driver pull over. They've had it, I guess,
with the bus. They spill out and over a nearby beach, freezing and windy, cloudy,
a grand soul- or psyche-beach right out of Bergman
or something. They are all bundled clear to their necks, they scatter
in groups, a mother with baby
splits from the group near the back and
slows down to be wholly alone. She feels completely alone
to me. And that's ok. That's good. The way she's drifting
away into mist, the far edge of the frame, the way she seems to be looking
in, just in all the time, just lost in herself, as we say, until abruptly
gone altogether.

Funny that I keep on watching.

*

Meanwhile, the beloved Singer is walking and chatting
with someone who is walking and filming,
the wind sort of making her lean
forward against
the wind. But she's relaxed. Her voice is relaxed. She knows what it is to be looked at
a lot and now feels perfectly easy, perfectly present,
as though no one at all
is looking.

*

She talks about bonfires—everyone knows she loves bonfires.
On a windy beach, she explains, they can really take off. Whereupon,
she motions to describe what a very large wind

likes to do to a spark. Whooooooshholyshit!
She is the Singer.

Fire is.

*

Her voice cracks, there's a country western tang—
No not twang; I do mean tang.
You know, like what the astronauts drank. Bahahahaha!

Like, I mean, she hits
a sharp note in “Hallelujah” and holds it right there till my god we're all flung
way clear of the earth
that we love like we love
coming back down to the next
strike of the match.

How to explain
that something so glorious
can be tangy? Alright then twangy too. And funny. I think funny
is bound up in glory, some alchemy inside the Big Bang
when it banged.

Damn, that singer's so good, it's funny.
Like that.

*

Is isn't is
just like it wasn't when it was
and won't be when it will be.

I only said that to be funny.
I know it probably isn't.

Derrida talked a lot
about probability. But he wasn't that Derrida.

*

Meanwhile, their unplugged national tour
requires that they more or less sing
their living guts out, naked voices in a naked theater.
Requires that they find
that crazily evasive needle of air, what will hurt

the most to reach people through.
And yeah, they found it. They find it again and again.
The weeping, the needle, the laughter not optional.
What kills us alive.

What Does Music Sound Like. It Sounds Like Music.

Well, sometimes. Sometimes it sounds like something else—horses galloping, or rain, maybe. Or some kind of hulking, impending disaster,

or something big that already happened and flopped. WAH-wah.

But the really good music sounds like nothing but music. I will never understand

how people can be vocal right in the middle of orgasm.

Me, I'm too busy having an orgasm.

Song for the Singer

I saw some photos of your wife; self-portraits, I think? They're beautiful and melancholy, and I love how her gaze is turned inward. It means she's a world. Not something solid and sealed, ok; more like a celestial event—quasiconjunctions, lunar occultations!—or just a very great number of large and elegant wheels, the ever-spinning Everything itself all in herself.

And I thank her for teaching me that with her eyes.

I wish I could make you both cookies or lasagna one of these days.

*

Because all of you real-thing, heart-hacking, positively luminous crooners can't not let us answer.

I'm sorry for that last sentence. What a clunker. But I'm going to leave it be: You Can't

Not Let Us Answer. I know; the more brilliant your light, the truer your song, the further away you must go to survive your own fans. But at such enormous distances, fans are rendered baffoonish as well as mute, our hearts won't operate quite right, we're ready to positively bust with stuff to tell you, we feel the import of all those subjects the lame interviewers always overlook. We can't make you lasagna. We can't answer.

And we have songs to request, so many damned songs, songs we can't live without, songs we wrote for you.

Two

Stage Presence

Who is @roamingknitter and how'd she get that picture??!! Was she sitting on the edge of the stage?!

—Facebook fan site

These Facebook threads are like roots. You never know how far or where they go.

—Facebook fan site

They wanted to unplug and I wanted to plug in and we met in that contradiction.

—Interview

I.

Mind

you she leaned

into it, busked and hustled like hell

even before graduating high school, dropped out to outwit

and outwork the Nothing that haunts all the land (so says her favorite

unending yarn) (which is a very good yarn), or more likely had to stay even

with the inevitable

simply because the inevitable

in her case was a stir, a wow, a wonder. O her voice. You don't want

to send back a package like that. She offered to haul their equipment, maybe nagged

at the Twins such a wiseass young kid, total tomboy, *who is this person*

what planet is she from

with a sound that could turn you to goo or at least inside-out.

And the famous Auryn on both upper arms, sort of ouroboros

crossed with mandala, because I hear she really digs the symmetrical.

It looks like eternity

is trying to hug her.

Or maybe the cosmos turning

around to look for

itself,

and keeps on turning...

*

Eventually the Twins (Seattle metal heads, also bald heads, kind of punk too and

really good guys, long-legged and kind, very song
writers)

could not resist
her agitated
mind and generous heart, startling beauty—
all encased in so slight a shape, one that now and then sways
and yaws, sways and jimmys, even jogs around the whole stage, even flat-out hops.
Yeah. Straight up and down. Photos of her everywhere, bashing out a chord,
both legs sharply bent at the knees, suspended and basically
levitating
off the stage.

*

I wish I could name what anyone's chasing, what anyone's leaping
to catch. What im- or pro-
pels The Singer? Sheer naked nerves? Gargantuan ego? Worrisome blood
sugar? The maddening hum
of time-to-come, the moment not-yet, a musical note
that is always and ever just taking shape
but not yet clear of her lips—deliciousness
always almost?

Something down among the roots, perhaps. Something @roamingknitter

might know.

*

Whatever precisely
she pursued, whatever precisely
pursued her,

it all just finally collided, a Big Bang of angst
from the sound of those early recordings—
*Fall and Temporary Time, When Angels Touch
the Ground, certainly Last One to Know*—
her sparkling oddness and sweetness, way androgynous,
basically a brilliant queer angel who could actually yodel. Yeah, yodel.
And write songs in any genre to save your life
because...because they compel you to feel it. Feel your heart beating feel
the ungainly radiance, fact

that someone or something created
us to kill us. You have to admit, that's a little bit
funny. One could damn-near choke
on the fucking silliness. Fuck.

II.

And so the Twins now are constant companions
who guide the winding string of her sound, winding it out and out and back again, in and all
the way in,

then back out again over and over in the crazy big lights
of the stage—

where sometimes she stands, just stands if she wants, circle of still
light. But even then I believe she is spinning
too fast to see, a glorious mad ballet, pure rock and roll groove—

ah God I love winding circles like Roethke's winding circles—
you know, his dancing idealized Woman—or,
no, forget that, her moves are more Pollack, all fluid and all over. Or,

no, forget that too. Her dance is her dance is her dance. Can you imagine

that: to be like nothing
but yourself, aligned but a line
of movement defined by
no man, although, like a line,
and as we know from
Geometry,

theoretical. An idea made of

language, in fact—just ask Derri Da Da and Saw Sewer and all of those
guys, whom I love, by the way—

Hell, even ideas
fail to synch up
with themselves

... Meaning, my friends, a dark whisper
of difference, displacement, always, between you and me, you and you,
me and me, the thing and the idea
of the thing, some say even thing and thing source of vast
human heartbreak endless struggle and wailing maybe even
yodeling

*

. And always the damned end-point of all
cogitation's one tiny and writhing
dot of paradox.

Most utterly utterly utterly utterly

[break]

impossible singularity no brain
can stay sane
entertaining.

Only the Singer, or the Singer's song,
seems to unwind it

, as she herself is unwound
by the Twins

into form.

III.

It's troubling. Form isn't form
until it's finished.

What I mean is, when it's over, it can be pretty bad
for those of us who have traveled
very great distances and drained our accounts and separated
ourselves from loved ones
to be there. The show stops, the encore or encores are demanded and played, and we sit there,
finally, like stunned
fucking puppies and stupid as clams
as the house lights come on, on everyone, on everyone's lone
countenance BAM.

*

Meanwhile, her own earliest, kind of primeval "photo-shoot face"
is so

casual. Retro sneakers and hip-hugger jeans, all Pacific
Northwest teen or pre-teen even, a mere t-shirt in fact, silkscreened with popular
green-lovers' redwoods and wolves, one large
canine face staring dead-straight ahead and
endangered (not really casual, LOL, whatsoever),

and someone has done up her eyes they are very
densely and darkly circled.

While in the very early promo of *What Can I Say*, a song about time,
she sort of bounces a bit up and down
with an emotion or spirit that is also scrunching her face
almost comically. I can't tell if she's trying to shake what she's feeling
like ancient wounds and ancient transgressions out, or is hauling
it all up from below like
some fisherman's net,
brimful of longings to-be.

And all in the presence of thousands, eventually millions of eyes. Because as you, too,
may have noticed, my friends, she likes or needs to be
seen. She has to hold
herself back when
she's singing on-stage with a guest. She actually mouths the words of *the guest singer's* part
standing right beside them
distractingly, she practically nudges them like a jealous kid right off the stage. But it's
not rude. It's fine. It's ok. Endearing, in fact. I think our poor girl's afraid
of disappearing

*

—while at the same moment *wants*
to be fully gone, or at least fully with.

dying in the light of the room,

blind side please

. Look how she wades into the sold-out mob in Chicago, at Christmas,
warm in her huge Santa hat.

Look how she smiles when hundreds of viewers join in
impromptu for *Amazing Grace*, how her face bursts
on like a sun

IV.

. I'm almost inclined to believe she's divinely empowered. Though of course I well know that it's all just performance, a habit of performing, she's grown accustomed to considering walls. She practices.

As a kid, I guess, she'd wait till family were gone, the house was her own, to entertain volume. She'd really belt it out. She talks about this in interviews. She'd listen to popular singers with the really big voices—Patsy Cline and Roy Orbison, Freddy Mercury, k.d. lang—and study the way to fill space with a sound till it stops or is stopped, rebounds or absorbs, but also has plenty of strength left to break free of the singer

... [I'm always imagining such things. Do I imagine such things? The free part, I mean.]

And I think she practiced how a sentence when sung might stop and start, the zillion deliveries, overtones and undertones, easy or abrupt, prolonged or postponed

moment between sounds

, because the singing voice can do that, can flow and stretch,
fade, evade and

silkymerge

, CRASH in several thousand ways

, punctuate in infinitely variable, visceral ways. Even bend sounds into circles. Longings too. How I envy

the Singer.

V.

Which brings us to the phenomenal, courageous and outrageous
PIN DROP TOUR

wherein her voice

and band completely unplug. I mean they completely
strip away all gadgets and amps and electrical
enhancement and sing directly into raw
space, straight into people's ears. Nothing, apparently,
in the way

, though of course our bodies and brains and all of our cultural
gunk gunk everything up, we are absolutely
axiomatically
in the way (see page and part and chapter above)

*

. SO LET US SING
whatever's IN THE WAY, shall we?

Let us sing BODIES, raw bodies of all the old venues themselves—*these rooms have*

something to say

, which is something that she
would say

, because she's wonderful like that

—with their crusty plaster ornaments, stately deco radiations. Also the smell, the temp,
the depth and height and shape of a place, the mustiness or not, the ghosts or not;
grunged-out peeling walls at Chicago's old Thalia; imaginary night sky and “almost disturbing
grandeur” of the fabulous Fox in Atlanta; sweetness
of Bluestem on the far away Plains...

What's it like to sing, even, according to the stage itself? The elevation above the crowd,
and the crowd? The actual human bodies in a vast room all together, their damp sadnesses,
crackling moodiness, their craziness whirling and tilting on an axis made of lust,
or something kind of like lust, and their
joy?

*

Sometimes something genuinely ugly. People holler from the audience, usually light,

usually funny, but I've also heard them scream
at the staff, probably minimum wage, who appear at the end
to clear the place out. Fans mildly
deranged who seem to think encores heretofore, anymore,
shall be ever-more

and wait to mob her at the studio door they just want we just want
to be with her

*

. So I think, now, of the Singer
with her solitary
body on any given night. I want to ask about headaches, profound
weariness. What if you're still feeling rattled, darling Singer,
by a random weird dream from an afternoon nap? What if you just had a tense
misunderstanding with the wife not moments before,
felt her interest suddenly and dramatically
collapse, or what if you heard
something new in her voice, a small lie, let us say, or even
her ability
to lie

... What's it's like to come suddenly out of the world and onto
the dais? Does the world kind of stop? Or does it actually
enlarge, does the stage hold more life, does it feel vast
as time itself when you sing? Making you free but

inconsequential ?

*

And what about thorns I mean facts: when the show is scheduled, the show is scheduled.
People from hundreds, even thousands of miles all around come to see you, we're talking fans
and roadies and band managers theater managers merch managers all kind of fucking
managers I mean damn. And PR to be accomplished,
the venue set up, the bar help hired and on and on. Certain nights,
at least, you must surely feel that you can't, absolutely can't

not sing.

The moment is nailed into place. You are nailed
to the moment.

What do the walls say then?

*

In the documentary, she talks with the Twins about how,
without amps, without flash,
you can't actually do it
until you're actually doing it. You absolutely must

negotiate
each particular

configuration
of boundaries,

and each moment's boundaries
are minutely
and fleetingly distinct.

You'd better hurry. You'd better seize
this infinitesimal space and this infinitesimal moment

with a word
you cannot

fake

I know I, for one,
am inclined
to avoid
such words.

God.

I can't even
look
in a mirror,
especially in public.

I deny everything

right to my own face.

How I envy
the Singer.

VI.

In what strange theaters, friends, do you house and perform
and offer up your own endless woes? Are you able to gracefully manage
the arbitrary harnessed to

the inevitable? Harnessed to
unending
change? After all, we all go

to work.
We say, *Good day.*

We try to make the lies
as honest
as possible

, even while saying the truth
so shyly, so faithlessly,
you'd think we were making it up.

Three

The Contest

I don't want to be part of the war. —BC

I.

I think of you waving something away,
or waving to it,

just before you died, stoned on some hospice medication or other,
curled up uncannily scant on the couch.

Or you might have been gesturing, in fact, to us,
to each one of us as we passed through the room, not knowing

how to talk to you now, clinched like fists
in each our dense, discreet history, no one holding your hand.

(When Mom died, we gathered around her hospital bed.
We all held her hand.

*My wonderful family, she whispered to no one,
to everyone.)*

You kept pointing to something in the air,
and you kept pointing strangely at your feet.

You kept pointing to your feet.
You had grouched loudly, just days before, in your delirium,

probably your last trip on your feet with the walker:
I have to get to the post

*office. I have put in a change
of address.*

Then you were talking to the air with your hand
which no one held as you died.

*

Late in his life he was pissed about everything,
a goddamned bitter heap
of pissiness and ego. I don't know what it adds
up to. I'm holding still in a stillness. Always have.

[break]

One day a great performer, Beloved Artist,
asks the world to write
a story of forgiveness. Something real and hard as shit.

Damn. For weeks, fans across the globe
withdraw to their remote and frightening solitudes, trying to forgive the assholes
in their lives. It's a
contest. Or a commandment. She doesn't mean it
that way, but everyone is strangely
aching for the task.

I think of his workbench in the dank garage,
everything sort of slicked in oil, crisp and menacing tools
used to build, bust up, and fix, sometimes merely tinker
with
all things in and around the Home.

I think of that day he stopped me there in the dark
to say that Mom's doctor
had diagnosed emphysema.
She was going to be ok, but she had to stop smoking.
She would be ok
if she would just stop smoking.
But she wasn't
quitting. She wouldn't quit.

I didn't know why he was telling me this.
I was just a kid. What could I do?

I guess he had to tell
someone.

*

They were pretty good at hiding
things. We hid ourselves, crouching at the head of the stairs,
and I remember him saying, down in the living
room, out of view,

*This is my
house.*

Quietly, like chimes
on the hot Santa Anas,

too far away to hear,
too close

not to hear.
We heard the degradation.

*

I remember *The Ten Commandments*
at Los Robles Theater, Saturday matinee,
Charleton Heston bowing down
when the burning bush said *I am*
that I am. My name is I am.

And I was in awe
of the patriarchal, technicolor
Moment.

*

I do believe that forgiveness is possible.
It just takes, literally, forever.

II.

I had always heard that, as a young man,
my father liked to do sketches. But his art, later in life,
appears to have been all in trees, shrubs, real Christmas holly
banked along the back fence, an unfinished stone path
around the big center oak.

He installed an enormous patio too,
out back with Ray, a just-married boy who took off his shirt.
I watched and watched as the big cement mixer
groaned out its crud, a kind of white
powder settling over the scene as they labored
like two sweaty snowmen, two earthly angels,
chalk and cement.

Susan, Kellie: remember the time he hosed down the nests
that lined the eaves of the house to the north? They were excessive, they were deemed
excessive,
mud nests packed in a line up there, giddy new life, little mouth-heads
poking up all over the place.

I think now how
could he. God. The mess, the shattered shells,
life in all of its mute stages of growth,
and then the tiny riotous mouths.

I remember one miniscule gray thing there on the ground, featherless, a gigantic single eye
closed over and not looking up
at me.

A frail thing mangled and worked over
by the force of the hose, like a child's gagged-on gum.

*

I honestly don't know
whether I love or hate
him.

No wonder
I can't move.

*

He kept clicking his dentures.

He sort of played with his teeth.
I wanted to claw his face off.

Mothers and daughters were the negative spaces
that made fathers and brothers solid.

It's pretty messed up
when your primary role
in a story
is not to be there.

The way he dragged my mother
to the beach
so he could stare at other women.

*

One time I saved three dollars in quarters
and he took me to the TG&Y.

I picked out a drum. I can still see it
up there, on a really high shelf, much higher than him.
He had to ask somebody for help.

Later we'd backpack together all over the Sierras.
always headed for the absolute
highest point on the map. We never thought why.

We crossed ridiculous snow fields, massively steep, at fourteen thousand feet,
in work boots and sneakers from Sears,
because we were stupid.

We never thought why. We kept right on going.

*

I remember one dark bird, probably a crow, almost a speck, really,
in the far distant sky in his painting.
This was after he retired.
It intrigued the whole family,
but no one could explain it. Just something
there, both the focus
and flaw of the whole composition.

*

One morning we came down

to find him passed out
in his own vomit.

He was hanging half-off
the sofa, it felt like
a painting. A stillness.

It was like the house itself had been drunk
the whole night before
while the kids tried to sleep upstairs. My dad's crazy
holiday work parties.

My mom would come up to check us,
tuck us freshly in,
but it was all feverish and strange. Drunk adults squealing,
banging on my brother's drums down in the den. No one
was allowed to touch my brother's drums. And someone,
my dad's secretary, banging on the drums and squealing,
somebody my mother accused
him of cheating
with. *Don't think I don't know.*

*You've always had a bed, her voice weirdly slow
and baritone with bitterness,
of roses.*

*

One year my father promised
we could open our usual morning gifts
at four am. It totally irked my mom, but we managed to pull it off.
We crept in, my sisters and I,
we shook his shoulder gently *Dad you promised.*

Four a.m., it felt like the middle
of the night, the middle of a century, tearing into our middle-class booty
like animals in the dark,
the Tree of course just standing there, aromatic and iconic, in lights.
My mom put on music.

*

Christ said that loving God
is the first new commandment, and loving our neighbor
is the second.

But later on John of the Gospels

says that God *is* love. So the two commandments
are kind of mixed up and mixed together.

It doesn't matter how you think
about it.

You have to love both
to love either.

*

No wonder

it's hard
to move.

*

And Lord, Ray Charles' country-western classic on vinyl,
full-blast into the backyard all summer long.

*Your chee-eeeting heart
will tell
on you.*

While Mom preferred a simple tune
about some lonely bloke taking a cab
around and around the block
for a glimpse of someone named Mary. Waiting

for my mother to finish
hemming my skirt,
I couldn't stand to just
stand there, over and over,

every little second,
till she was done,
cutting and sticking, pinning
my new clothes into place.

III.

My heart understands, I think.
Forgiveness is when the mind
goes around and around
the problem of wrong
behavior, and cruelty. It just keeps going

around, but as it spins it all gets smaller and smaller
until forgiveness is like standing, finally,
in the heart of a fire.

Where it seems to be very still,
but isn't.

Father, how dare you base your self-esteem
on my mother's lack? On my sisters' lack? That's fucked up,
man. I hate
your guts.

At least we know 45 is almost pure monster.
No doubts, no
arguments about that. The guy such a mess, I actually
almost
feel sorry for the narcissistic man-baby
carnival prick. Moscow

Mitch, on the other hand, doesn't appear to suffer
at all. That's what makes me crazy.
Dad, you thought they were your Party,
but they screwed even you.

And yes, I could see kindness in you. And fear. And gentleness. Imagine that.
You made my friends laugh, you were actually a very funny guy.

And if someone cried
it completely tore you up.
You'd even break down and cry with them. You didn't like to see
anyone hurt. You beat

our new basset puppy out back
so badly the whole neighborhood
could hear her screams in the sky.
I was standing with Lauren out by the gate
and the cries filled the sky and
you beat her because she kept digging
up your fancy, landscaped yard. What kind of fucker.

[break]

All you managed to teach
me was that random, senseless violence
can emanate any time

from above. God, Santa, Superman, even the Weather
Man and President—a God damned epic
weenie roast, all-comprehending,
incomprehensible,
,
up there in the clouds.

*

I could write my whole childhood, I think, if I tried,
with lots of hard, physical, sensory
detail.

Random
violence, this is my
house.

—said almost lyrically, laughing. That was the worse. A jolt
went through my mother's
body, I saw it, when he suddenly erupted, that evening in the kitchen,
upon arriving home. I wouldn't be surprise
if the whole neighborhood heard.

I look back now and yes, I can see
the terrible stresses of the job, extra kids
in the house, trouble at work.

We had to let him
unwind,
my mother said.

Which meant
do not utter a sound.

Unlike those cartoon officers
and chieftains of the sky, guys down on Earth
have to slow the spinning
down, slowly, in their own unique ways,
in silence, alone.

This was something called life on Earth
for a man.

*

His last word
on the sofa, before he died,
was *Mama*.

IV.

I wish I could talk now to my dad.
I think he'd hear my arguments at last. My arguments
are strong, he'd have to. I think I'd maybe even liberate
World War II and all of that stupid fifties gender shit
right out of him, along with his vile Oklahoma racism.

*This damn life is so
counter-
intuitive, right,
Dad?*

*Why live
just to die?*

*Love, Dad,
is the only
commandment.*

My mom taught us that families
take care of each other
religiously, but she was racist too.
She knew better. She struggled with it.
But she was unarguably racist too.

Mother: it's simple. We are all
Family.

And yes, even that shithead Trump, and Mitchell, and Ryan,
and Pruitt, and Sessions? Oh God Sessions. I can't find it in myself
to forgive them, exactly, but I get it
that serious jerks inhabit the world. I understand
they could be
me.

They are *in*
me.

I accept
that.

Yeah. For real. If I had grown up
a different way, a different place, with differently
fucked-up parents,

I could actually be
Mitch Fucking McConnell. The Turtle.
That's what they call him on the web
because it looks like a truck
drove over his face,
a little.

But it's his power, its absoluteness,
that pisses me off. These asshats have gerrymandered
America so that no
one can get
around
them.

God are they
Satan? No. No, I don't
believe in that.

And those loony right-wing
Dominionist nuts
who think it's all Holy
War. Two great enemies, a great unarguable chasm, they're gonna get
this whole damned place blown up.

I should have taken his hand.

*

*Dear God, do not
abandon us.*

*Keep the children
on both sides
safe.*

*God, we forgive
you.*

Four

Resort

1.

People with guitars were singing,
the sky was turning creamy colors,
an "embryo monsoon" a half hour before
had drenched everything spectacularly,
and everything now was breathing deeply in.

Well, I was breathing in. In and out. Of that I'm pretty sure.

My flight had been rescheduled, twice in twenty-four hours,
because hellacious winter weather on the Northern Plains.
So I only had a day. Mere hours, in fact.

I wondered how I would decide
what to do with a day.

John was signed out of the hospital, just days before,
yet insisted I still pack, weather and madness notwithstanding.
You'd think the more there is to worry
about, the easier it would be
to let it all just go. But no;
I felt shitty going, I felt shitting staying.
Then went, notwithstanding.

*

My roommate, a friend who'd gifted me the trip,
was interesting and kind. Now and then she'd step out for a smoke,
looking across at the other balconies, other balconies
looking across at her.

She told me she had spotted
some amazing native birds
there on the courtyard in the center, but I never witnessed
any myself. I'd hoped at least to hear their famous squawks
and cries around our building, around all the buildings, around the great green selva further
out.
But no. There I sat, three thousand miles
smack in the middle of the Yucatan,
having to imagine
where I was.

*

Later, from a nearby little patio with open bar,
I had a view, more like a view of a view,
across the lagoon (maybe natural, maybe not),
across the distant ocean (weirdly smooth and blank),
in the general direction of Cuba.

Funny to think how, if I were to find
myself out there, in my own little boat, the sun full-on, according to pure
reason, I
would be but a point
on a line,
and thus imaginary.

Like any
body.

But then what do we do
with the pure, unimaginable
fact
of my travel companion's
suffering? Her back was damaged, see,
by some infection long ago,
and now her spine is brutally arrondi, a frozen question
mark. Matter
never not matter.

Or maybe it's just her mind after all
in the middle, say, of a sharp u-turn. *I was only kidding. Turn around.
Get me out of here.*

God's creatures
send up all kinds of cries.

*

So. Por favor?
Forgive this tropical breeze of a beginning, friends.
The story itself is trim
as a bone, even slight, but language should let us breathe.

2.

I don't know if it's rude or interesting or just truth
to speak of others' private hardships. When should a person shut up, already?
How much before they call you asshole or even
post-confessional? Should truths rain down hard

when in season, or is any single truth, however minor, however fleeting,
itself all the truth? I mean evidence of Truth? Or already more
than anyone can stand?

In the end, maybe we just want some Beautiful Art, now am I right?
Beauty seasons and leavens us, calms us. I keep hearing a lovely villanelle
in this poem. Does it want to be a villanelle?
Should I have begun with a villanelle?
I do, after all, repeat myself a lot. And I always want to get
somewhere
as much as I want to just keep going.

Let's review. Truth is iffy if positioned at the start
because it won't be earned, no one will believe it, and, even if they did,
we'd have nowhere left to go
in search of it. Introducing truth
in the middle will only smother it.
And the end, well, the end is too much like a nuclear
burp or the damned Rapture in miniature or something.

What is revelation anyway
in a time of massive, historical, geopolitical gaslighting?

When you hear or think you hear a truth coming in
do you guide or let it freely drift
into place? And if it's false,
will it go of its own volition (it won't go
of its own volition) to some great ancient peak
where all the abominable, failed lines and stanzas
and overblown endings congregate?
A club of flubs, a monumental drag,
a Christmas tree in summer?

Think by now how many. Parings, fizzlings.
Some still maybe jabbering and slobbering with possibilities,
if not banging their wee little heads against windows
or mirrors. Are they plotting something?
Aren't they in fact beautiful because
their sacrifice, after all, once made a poem or a book or a mere
morsel of wit
work?

On the other hand,
what if a poem held close and did its best to use, make space for,
shrink to fit
most of its own scraps? Bonus tracks, haha.

[break]

I know; one could argue that a poem
should be clean and spare; stringent for the sake
of fuller joys. It should compel the reader
to feel the most, intuit the most, in every sliver, every shard—
yea, even so the holy
unshardness containing
and contained by every
shard. The chiseled bits say more and yield us more surprise,
heart, and truth than discursive bloviations ever could. Let excess
sink. Into body. Into memory.
Let it enrich the poem that follows
in ways we cannot guess.

On the other hand, how do you tell the muse-meister, *I love your donation,*
but I'm throwing fully half
of it out? I mean, we have no time to edit
our lives much less our scribblings, because the world's
more full of weeping
than we can possibly save-as,
auto-check, or delete, because the Earth is moaning
inside us at a particle
level because America's a corporate snuff film featuring the planet—
and children in cages.

Hence, should I leave in or out
a few excess, blessed images and textures, gestures, a seemingly immediate
pop in pulse? Re-
presented always, of course, but at least presented? This isn't consumer
extravagance. It's joy. Ok joy
tinged with panic. Ok panic
approaching despair
soaked to its eyeballs in grief. (Is there a word for grieving
a future
we've already passed? It will take me several million other words to find it
at the rate I'm going.) So—
who in their right mind
would ever refuse a simple, sweet, say yellow, say useless
flower
at their bedside every morning? For that matter,
in a vase on a thousand-dollar canopied raft
(if reserved in advance)
on a lagoon?

Even. Flowers.
May be
gone.

[break]

Soon.

At.

the rate we're going.

Enjoy them. Enjoy them extravagantly. Breathe them fully in, and pointlessly. What could be more respectful?

Write "creamy colors" and "monsoon."

Write "fizzlings" and "bloviations."

Imagine a horizontal Tower of Babble, long-crashed, long trash, and beautiful. Down to raw material. Soil.

O, in a dream of forms, let us now scramble pagination. Let us re-say, unsay, or otherwise gerrywander every finale...

Like,

what if the end of a poem doesn't actually occur until the third reading or more, and even then in the middle?

The reader won't get it till they get there.

They won't get there till they get it.

At which point they may want to blow their brains out. LOL But seriously.

Couldn't Borges meet up with Einstein and imagine a space-time fabric

of poetry? Something

to jubilantly and usefully screw

with our heads once again? It's getting hot here on Earth.

Somebody THINK

of something!

Maybe any arrival is illusory, never there.

Or forever not there yet.

Or just keeps moving

around between drafts, driving you crazy.

Emergency Announcement: ENDING RELOCATED FOR REPAIRS.
FOLLOW THE DETOUR AROUND. AND AROUND. TRY NOT TO GET DIZZY
ON THE FUCKING DETOUR.

If you simply can't
end the thing, has it articulated anything, really?

Does it say or mean at all? No clear and wild cry
to remember, and take back home, and keep?

Maybe it's a relief to have no ending.
There's no confusion, then,
about how to get there honestly.
No discomfort when it's an ending
nobody wants.

*

Maybe a poem just has to stop, finally.
Because all things stop.

Let what else there is to say
continue on, somehow.

After Serious Consideration, I Have Decided

that my own demise must be creatively
closed and open at once, meanings both desperately asserted
and held up to be
laughed at too. A frame, a definition, who I was
with giddy rips and gaps and all manner of life
and incomplete answers slipping through.
I want to leave my grandnieces and grandnephews
my vinyl LPs and awesome etsy quilt and midcentury
furniture and show kites ukuleles letters random notes and books
a humongous ridiculous library in fact and yes my poems.
Who knows if they'll read them, but at least some darling kids will
know
this odd person
was connected to them. It's theirs to say what else.

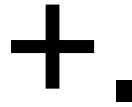
As for that larger, impending desecration, the one we either secretly
desire or have completely and unconscionably
blotto-ed out: do not think
twice. Do not think! WE MUST NOT LET THE PLANET DIE.

Something, HELLO?
has to be here, real and immanent,
to receive our strange estates.

Something has to bestow
to us its glorious,
barbaric succor.

[break]

+,



No whining.

No "please" as interrogative.

EXECUTE.

DELIVER.

DO. NOT. LET.

3.

The shuttle drivers down there will mess with you if you're female and alone. Not that I blame them, exactly. Americans are ignorant and funny, at best.

One guy drove me into the jungle at midnight and pretended he couldn't find the resort. He was getting handsy too. Stupidly, and incredibly, I couldn't find the address for the place in my bag. I didn't even have the number of the resort to call the resort, nor anybody there.

God, I thought, is this how (cut up and buried in a jungle) and where (I already said a jungle) I will die (not breathing, of that I'm pretty sure)?

Also, I tried but couldn't dial out of country so that John could get the address off the desk at home, or so that anybody anywhere would know my whereabouts.

Then we were driving up the highway in the wrong direction, back towards the airport an hour and a half away. I didn't understand what it meant, I didn't understand what he was doing. I kept trying but couldn't communicate one jot, language sputtering as soon as uttered—JUST BREATHE—though I know he knew I was alarmed and growing more alarmed.

[break]

Finally, out of nowhere, he swung a gigantic U
right there on the highway of resorts, kind of grinning, I think, the jerk,
and got me to the place at last.

There it was, all ugly stone compound from the front,
lit up in the dark and draped with climbing vines and complete with uniformed guard
flipping through a list of legal guests.

Instead of desperate Mexican refugees
ringing the doorbell of a sickly privileged, asshole nation,
a sickly privileged asshole was ringing the doorbell
of Mexico to get drunk and hear some music.

I miss the days when analogies
were easy.

And I've forgotten all, and I do mean all of my ninth-grade Spanish.
Except, apparently, for *Señor*
and *por favor?*

Please-as-a-question can be a holy whisper
of a cry. Someone will turn, with luck,
to answer or ask "huh?" or at least stop driving
you nowhere as a joke. It cuts through
"this modern world
in which we are currently living today."

That last is from a long-ago freshman paper, Comp 101.
That's how they sometimes sound
when they are practicing their bodies
inside the gated compound of higher learning.

BTW, my students weren't aware that I'd be gone.
No one at work knew that I was headed
into the steamy lower coils of the heart
in a time of blizzards. I don't think my local friends even knew.

I wasn't sure what to tell them on behalf
of myself
and someone dearest locked away, unable to speak at all.

*Por favor? We are ignorant
and afraid.*

4.

Walk alone on a beach. *Partial Check*

Feel the cleansing surf around my damaged knees. *No Check*

Sit quietly among the ruins of Chechen Itze. *No Check*

Drink some green mojitos, hear a certain marvelous Singer
on a tepid winter night
beneath the alien stars. *Check*

5.

The show would start in several hours
in a big outdoor plaza not far I think to the west.
Older people were hanging out in the lagoon
on immensely dumb-looking, inflatable animals—which is fine,
I'm not judging—
while young people, as early as that morning, I heard,
had already claimed their spaces
in the pit at the very forward edge of the stage.
Other young people were ready to hold their places
if they had to pee or go get something to eat,
and they piled water bottles and daypacks so no mistaking
whose two-foot square was whose. I've been there; I was pretty sure
there'd be carnage
if anyone were to cheat and cut in front
to see the star performer, a famous advocate of peace.

My own spot would be a chair and a lot further back.
I have arthritis all over and numerous other failments.
I couldn't stand up front
because I feared that, in a crowd so seethingly tight, I would die
and no one would even know it until the show
was done and everyone was gone and I fell over.

No, I didn't mind further back;
or, at least, I was actually ok with it for once,
with all of it—

pain,

age...

Sunsets down there

seem especially soft and so
incremental. I don't believe in epiphanies
anymore than I believe
that driving in circles
forever is a way to end something.

Resort Bonus Tracks

scrap

That last stanza
would make a funny
ending.

scrap

gerrywonder

scrap

, a day that wasn't
necessary.

scrap

Lord, let me stop breathing,
when I stop breathing,
without decrepit body or mangled brains.
I want to be here when I go.

scrap

End. Begin!
Relax. Move!
Feel. Think!
Poem. Spend!
Release. Redact!
Quit. Prolong!
Beauty. Minutes!
Minutes. Feel!
Bouillabaisse. Mayonnaise!
Naught. Nonce!
Drought. Now!
Flood. Now!
Fire. Now!
Diaspora. Diaspora.
Tree. Breathe.
Thirst. Thirst.

Five

Here you are *says a voice in the light, the trapped light*. Be happy.
—Teacher

Guest Appearances by Neil Young and The Thing with Feathers

Bashing out retarded simple chords
and obsolete, grinning-idiot MELODY

there in his

gigantic furry hippie-boots, he's some iconic, bionic, and ironic
Canadian Sasquatch
Punk o'Planet Earth.

Music heart-
thwacking fully amped-up feedback-
stinging religion. The Romantic re-emerging

or staying, despite everything,
a scary century of, well, you-name-it—
corporation-as-legal-person circa 1893
to the start of never-ending war circa September, 2001—

not to mention the sensible-logical specu-lattes
of Derrida et al re: presence construction culture and all the rust—the
Romantic I guess still viable circa now, albeit stunned,
lopsided, and leaking
blood from every
thought, cough, pore and
high-pitched whine of
I-can-hardly-force-

myself-to-say-it but I will,
I'll say it circa here

and now as
hard as

I can't to
the

nth:

h©pE.

Lyrical Village

1.

The Lyrical Village
is the famous Sahara Desert, where grains of sand rub together in the wind
and sing. Did you know that? Sand sings. Planets too.
Icebergs and whales,
wolves, a young vocalist raised on country western
and pop just outside of the City that Rains,
two guitarists who loved the Beatles and Ramones,
a quiet cello player whose past is uncelebrated, quiet.

I mean it's his cello that speaks.
I mean it articulates silence.

You probably don't believe me. I'm just trying to say
that equal in mystery to any
thing—grain of sand or planet, beloved creation, beloved breath
itself—anything
we can love and lose —forever— now—
is the Lyrical Village.

*

I think I just articulated
the opposite
of what I meant. And yet I also said the opposite of that. All
of which is the Lyrical
Village too, "meaning"
no, I'm knowing knowing now. Plus awe. Oh never

Mind.

2.

The Lyrical Village
is the Shepherd's Bush Empire in London,
Edmonton's festival out on the Canadian plains,
Cayamo on the sea, stops in New Orleans, Cozumel, and Harvest Caye.

Even the Singer's tour bus is the Lyrical Village. The grit on the tour bus wheels.

The desire to sing and singing per se. The throat of the singer, the tongue, the wind,
the nothing. The alignments of identical twins
and the hilarious deflectometrics. Everything Walt Whitman ever said

is the Lyrical Village. And sex sex sex sex—
grief,
the Milky Way in a dream about hammers and looms,
things that crawl the ocean floor, the forest no more, the ice caps
gone, never to return, these are the Lyrical Village
where I must stop now in order to breathe.

*

The Singer often hums a quick blues
or gospel riff seconds before starting
her actual song. It's how she warms up.

Blues and gospel, back in the day,
were the pure pain
and moan of people who were voiceless, see?

Without which beauty
is voiceless.

Three Animals, An Asshole, and a UFO at the End of the World

1.

The baby ones pop like popcorn
when let out of a pen. They promptly jump over each other.

They hop onto haystacks, Toyota Corollas, I swear to God roofs!
They just fucking want to go up, up, up, up, up!

And I can't stand some of the things that they climb. Oh my God. Places like the Rockies.
How do they get down? They'll make their way up
any slick granite face, many meters high, what are they
thinking? Is climbing thinking? Are wee bay goats
supernaturally curious, are we even talking spiritual
refinement, or just brute and stupid
animal habit?

Some of those enormous, near-vertical walls
feature only a few modest bumps, teensy outcroppings, barely toeholds.
So yes they do on occasion drop. I can't watch the film. I can't stand it.
One by one they fall off.

They are sweet enough to humans, I guess. Or patient. Or they pay no attention
to people at all except as
something to climb, humanness, maybe,
something to climb
up from.

2.

The Great Blue Whale, meanwhile, the Great Blue Whale
is ponderously sleek. Heavy and pure and much. And scarred all over
with barnacles or wounds, I can't say—
just prominently scratched, kind of prominently written
on, in the hand of a child, all over.

Or else He himself is a word, a letter, a figure
of speech—wavery
in the water you can't tell what
is touching what.

And He has come up to breathe.

In the You

Tube video
on my Face
Book time
line

I watch him pause on his side and roll a little way back,
just enough to see us
seeing him.

Look: he's really looking at us!

That's what whales and human beings do.
We look
at each other.

It's like we're related and we both know it,
but we don't understand it. We know we'll never understand it.

Which makes us peaceful.

After what is ultimately, maybe necessarily,
no more than an instant,
the Great Blue Whale rolls enormously over,
the ocean closes idly over,
you go over and over and over
in your bumbling brain the staggering,
irreplaceable graces
really and truly going, soon to go, gone.

3.

The goats are gloriously playing! The whales are gloriously looking!

And the people. The people! Well. The people.

As we all undoubtedly know, the planet's supreme human leader
this year canceled Science, Art, and Truth—or at least consensual reality.
But the stupid goon forgot Wonder. Yeah. And Wonder finds a way,
I think Wonder will always find its giddy, noble way,
around any fucking wall—or over it
in however many
errant hops
our humanity demands.

4.

Meanwhile, down in the absolute scariest depths
of the sea, scientists have named all the zones,
but the last one's so gone it's practically figurative. You start to run out of words
when you get down as far as nothing
but ooze
and micrometeorites from the far distant reaches of space.
And the creatures down there, in the absolute black,
under the something-something million metric tons per square inch,
appear like a shriek
when the lights we send down in free-falling "elevators"
click on.

Take the Viperfish: crusty, sort of skinless, all bones,
their mouths stuck permanently open,
and full of very prominent, needle-like teeth.
Their eyes are weirdly wide, full-on glowing or glowering, but they can't possibly
see anything whatsoever down in that place, in a place such as that,
can they?

Or they've seen it all. They go way, way back. They actually witnessed Creation,
they can't unsee Creation,
and God are they pissed.

5.

John and I witnessed a UFO the other day.
I'm not saying it was extraterrestrial. Just object-like and certifiably
airborne and we didn't know what to call it.

Actually, it basically stayed put, going neither higher nor lower,
though we did sense it receding
away from us, almost too slowly to notice.

Through the binoculars we spotted
two vertical beams of light,
something like two upraised arms,
a two-tined illuminated fork, damn,
or a hoof.

A goddamned cloven hoof.

Some totally insane baby goat must have made it that high
and gone sliding back down, the little shit,
but managed to at least leave one foot
dangling at unspecified height, maybe anchored

there to keep hold of a thing, maybe twilight's
last gleaming.

Empathy for Fat Elvis and Notes Toward the Impeachment of Dread

1.

Thing is, you have to conjure Elvis,
the dirt-poor kid from Mississippi
who sucked up gospel, country and blues
till he bled them, a bruised-eyed boy
with blistering talent and near-giddy energy,
and certainly not the sad man
of bizarrely elongated collars, peanut butter and bacon sandwiches,
and don't even get me started
on the cape.

Of course he had no idea he'd usher in
one of the goofiest eras of human god worship
ever known to our species. He couldn't see ahead to the look-alikes,
no inkling he'd be studied
in university courses
as a distantly emergent
posthuman cultural artifact.

(In death, of course, he's all proto-metamodern
Jesus
coming soon
to a dying planet near you).

Anyway.

When the King sings the Dixie trilogy, very very late,
when he's the Elvis no one voted for,
the Elvis who never made it onto a stamp,
you believe him. That song is way
too sad as he intermittently and obliquely
apologizes for his bloated drugginess,
unseemly giggling when he forgets the lines.
He is mourning his own
and everyone's golden beginnings,
even as he sees his own ignominious
and nightmarish end
clearly coming down the pike.

You can hear it in his voice, those final shows.
He was preparing.

2.

I've heard it said that to live a good life
you must be ready to die a good death;
in fact your life should be spent
getting ready to die.

Sounds godawful, yes?
My own dread shoots through the roof.

But I know that Tibetan adepts, for one, flat-out practice.
Right down to the instant
of letting go. They are always letting go. They spend half the day unclasping.
They are completely aligned in life
with death, and yet more alive than the rest of us
because focused and clear and still.

In meditation they feel cool air actually warm
in the mouth, all the way down the throat and into the lungs,
and back out. They observe every thought
precisely when a thought
emerges like a slow liquid arrow and crosses through
and out of the mind, and they do not cling
to a self. To a story. Certainly not
to some retrievable, gold-plated past.
(Please do not cry to go there.
It is both a sentimental
and fascist delusion.)

And some adepts die sitting up. Cessation
is ambiguous. The flesh does not even degrade. Tap
a monk's corpse and it bursts into tiny silver birds, conceptionless
nonpermanence, rigpa shunyata dharmadatu—so many damned
marble-mouthed formulations, so many
words
for wordlessness—
or just the next hungry body.

3.

Elvis's long-heralded return
in '68, I think, after all of the hideous movies,
was a moderate shock. I don't know, I guess I thought
his hair and clothes
would be mildly hippified, at the least,
what with the Summer of Love and all that.

But he dressed like a cartoon teddy boy, a fifties rocker
shellacked in black leather, a superhero whose superhero brothers
wore tight outfits too but could fly.
Elvis couldn't fly. He had to manage on the ground in secret.

For all of his ironic self-inflation,
they say he was a humble and kind man, always.
He would never hurt a soul
down here.

And he had such a time singing
his self-spangled comeback. For much of it, the band was seated
in a casual circle on a very small stage, an intimate live audience,
and he kept grinning at his bandmates
like they all knew the world's
most acutely sweet secret. They all knew the world's most acutely sweet secret,
and were letting us have it,
one quarter teaspoon at a time.
Like there wasn't a single note
he wouldn't die alive for.

4.

2019. People are walking around in near-cryonic
states of the soul,
when not boiling over with anger and stress.

It's this other king, a tabloid celebrity ratcheted up
to hugely puke-worthy, banana-republic con.
Might as well say it again. *Fascist*.

Donald, if you really want to bully us
with your ongoing freaky, petty, and vindictive tweets,
if you want the media scandal of all scandals,
just remind us in your daily belches
that we are all going to die. Think of it!
You can get back at anyone
who has ever called you a goon or a fool
or pure moral slime on MSNBC.
Just tweet out to everyone DEATH
DEATH DEATH DEATH just whisper it
in one-hundred and thirty-nine characters
plus a tiny emoji skull.

But you won't. I know you won't.

[break]

BTW, you are too stupid to breathe.

*

BTW, I'm not intimidated by any of your tweets.
I'm strong. I can talk about all
that I don't have in this life
and I can talk about all
that I will someday not be. I've been preparing
for awhile, ok? Even today, right here.

*

Maybe we should turn the whole thing
back on you. Maybe we should march in the thousands or millions
to the White House and erupt
in one glorious voice *Donald Trump you are going to die!*
Someday, Donald Trump, you really are going to die!
Fool yer already dead and don't know it!
Think about it, Cheeto!

At which point they'll arrest me and put me in Gitmo,
where they'll torture me till I talk.

I don't know what to say, so I'll go for the Truth,
the pure stuff, what everyone's
after,

but it comes out, every time, as "Viva, viva
Las Vegas!"

so they kill me.

That's ok. I'm prepared.

*

Well, I'm preparing. I'm trying.

Friend, if you're there, it would help
if you could whisper any tender, workable
mad truth you hold close to your life.

What I mean is, let's collaborate.
I'll tell you my nightmares
If you'll tell me yours.

Life's a Long, Unspooling Series of Rooms, Very Doomy Rooms,

you stumble, you race, you clomp through forever and cannot reach.

And always you find yourself missing.

In fact you only know you're alive
in here because you feel something twist, some kind of torque,
a spiraling energy in place of an I, and as onely.

This year be a groupie at nearly sixty. A kind of project
that stumbled upon you and stuck. You call it incandescence.
You follow the darling artist, schedules taxis and tickets, you get on a plane
and off a plane and dance with the other sweet angel crazies
when the artist encourages such, when she cues
you to rock the place clear to the ground.
You love to rock the place clear to the ground, an epically
awesome remodeling, your face fully melty, truly you do, but lately
long to sit very still and be quiet.

Sit very still and be quiet. The Singer is going away—
in certain songs, please, if you listen—
into her emptiness, her solitude.

She may look eternally young,
but her soul we know is ancient,
and sad, and sore.

*

Her tour bus is long and dark, you can't see in.
Understandable; the more a star is pursued
the further they must go
away.

love—
withdraw

love—
withdraw

*

She's doping us up on her voice real good, she's ridiculously good.
And if we'd only shut up, if we'd only stay put,
she may actually deliver us there, way down there at the heart

of the song unsingable
and we are all of us no one together.

Notes & Acknowledgments

These poems are based on the careers of alt-rock and Americana artist Brandi Carlile and her bandmates, Tim and Phil Hanseroth. They are not intended to be factual biography.

“Dirty Pioneers, The State of the State, and The Fabulous Woman Who Dances”

“a rolling holy/boulder down the crazed and crumbling lanes”: adapted from Brandi Carlile’s “Things I Regret.”

"I'm, Like, Way Too Ethereal"

"opposite equals advancing": Whitman, *Song of Myself*

“Stage Presence”

The second-to-last epigram: BBC.com, *Entertainment & Arts*, “Brandi Carlile finds her rock and roll voice”: <http://www.bbc.com/news/entertainment-arts-31310552>

The lines “who is this person/what planet is she from”: adapted from a statement made by Phil Hanserof on CBC Radio Canada: <http://www.cbc.ca/player/play/2669832744>

Auryn and “unending story”: Michael Ende, *The Neverending Story*

“*[T]hese rooms have something to say*”: Brandi Carlile, *The Pin Drop Documentary*, Chapter 1: <http://www.brandicarlile.com/media-items/2016/6/14/brandi-carlile-pin-drop-tour-documentary-chapter-13>

“*[D]ying in the light of the room,/blind side please*”: Brandi Carlile, “In My Own Eyes.”

Part Five

Line attributed to “Teacher”: Jorie Graham, *Fast*.

"The Singer's Wife is Also a Singer"

This poem appeared in *Isthmus Review*, Spring/Summer 2016.

“How does it feel”: Dylan.

“Fields of Gold,” the song and italicized lines: Sting

“Life's a Long, Unspooling Series of Rooms, Very Doomy Rooms,”

“you only know you’re alive/in here because you feel something twist”: an adaptation from Brandi Carlile's “Eye of the Needle.”