

This Bygone Route

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Abstract:
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This Bygone Route is a strange, vaguely autobiographical, archaeology of the grand and the intimate that presupposes the worlds we occupy— often taken for granted as banal, safe, assumed known— are fundamentally grounded upon substrata of numbing nostalgia and fractured empathy. My work weaves through natural and constructed spaces rendering these zones eerie, uncanny, strange, occupied by figures both human and animal that are unsettled and unsettling; a challenge to insulating narratives of control, routine, and safety. My poems are occasionally landmarked by familiar artifacts of analog *technostalgia*: telephone booths, answering machines, instant cameras and other such devices. These objects persist on the fringes of our contemporary moment as charming anachronisms but within these poems they are instilled with eerie prominence, ironically reactivated against the dulling energies of nostalgia and materialism. This Bygone Route is an implication, that the personal and collective histories we celebrate and revere are often rooted in the loam of our darker instincts, our most troubling tendencies, that what gives shape to our most precarious Now. This Bygone Route is a fragmentary map to unstable futures that we cannot expect or prepare for. Not exactly.

For Corinne and Rowan
My very best peeps. I love you.
How I got so lucky, I have no idea.

&

My profound thanks to Stephanie Bolster
for her generous guidance, rock-solid support, and infinite patience.

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Eclipse Year

keep the kids at home
I'll do the walking today

quest the coronal landscape
where we used to walk and where those walks led

for what's there that ages
but never seems to leave

Everlasting Gobstoppers telephone booths
the fundamental cling of narrative

which I've been assured is illusory
and should be chalked up to experiments with a new pen

but anything can be an ingredient
if you stir it in long enough

mealy-mouthed day-campers troubling the Métro
sure as furniture in the dark

uncles-in-law spilling from the Haraiki Pub
turned insubstantial by the sudden lack of context

a breed of budgerigar prone to tumours
falling to the steps of the Madre Dei Cristiani

some misplaced version of God
pulling it all together with eyes closed

Chambly

There's a bottle-green Chevy
ticking in the carport
and Debbie, with a Steinberg's bag
and a single flip flop on her left foot
(she lost the other at the gas station),
steps out
into the thickest part of eight pm
shouts, "Popsicles!"
and thrusts aloft
the sweaty, plastic sack.
Meanwhile,
against the tall, red fence
holding back the pool,
shadows off the house
cast her boys in crooked shapes

There's a brown stubby
sideways in the blue-grey grass
and Debbie drops the Steinberg's bag
when her flip-flopless right foot
(heel painted driveway black)
falls hard
upon the label.
"Fucknhell!" she shouts,
as boozy fragments
sidle to the bone.
Meanwhile,
a shard of glassy sunlight
escapes the setting house
and etches crooked boy-shapes
to the hard, red fence.

Mothership
(or Our Parents Were Young Once and Stupid)

The night is long-form and humid
but she's pure computer
super-cooling in the shallow end,
sipping vodka and Pepsi-Free
from a milk-glass mug,
a picture of St Joseph's on the side.

He's still in the house.
Looking for his shirt,
looking for his car keys,
coughing like he's caught something,
dry as a capless marker.

September circles the block again,
plotting re-entry vectors in the dark
but the kids don't know,
and the moon doesn't care

she's a starship now,
a real Delta-10.
Payload at full.

Okay.
All right.

Feel that Mother go.

Photograph, Age Three and a Half

Lookit you.

I've never seen a face so bright,
living with the sun in your eyes, kinda thing.
And Christ you were chubby back then
ya little stinker, ya.

That was the park by
the *ah-nuh-mow-moo-zee-yum*.
We had a picnic after a visit with the pollywogs,
the painted turtles, taxidermy birds—
you'd clap that they might take flight.

Just out of frame
some big kids showed up,
started chucking rocks at gulls
but you didn't know, not yet,
so I took your picture.

Little Murder

Under the backyard feeder,
two crows

unstitching a robin.

I've never seen you so rapt.
You hiss,

Don't let the kids see!
and run the tips of your fingers
down the pane

while those crows—

iridescent, Mesozoic—

take turns inside
that robin's open breast.

Angel-Shaped Things

They found David,
third day on.
He'd frozen to death
hiding in the used tire bay
behind a service station
near his house.
Windshield-washer blue
was the rumour and also:
the cops broke off
three of his fingers
getting him out.
"And his penis!"
sniggered that one kid, Barry,
always licking a cold sore.
They had the janitor nail up
David's school picture—
cow-licked,
bow-tied—
in a special spot.
The principal
("The kids call me John.")
placed a wreath
big as a bus tire.
David got Top Boy that year.
Posthumous.
His mom got a two-foot trophy
with an angel on top.
"David ----- , 198-
For academic excellence and
invaluable contributions
to school life."
Rest of us got two minutes silence
to stare at our shoes.
Barry rocked back and forth on his,
until John took his elbow
and led him gently away.

Awake in a Dream of My Childhood Home

First thing stands out?
A penny.
Wide as a tractor wheel,
thin as air,
hanging on the wall over the bed.
Queen side out,
it whispers coarse secrets
and nursery stories
that smell like crayons
and tar.

Two magpies on the dresser,
mad-eyed and crooked
with cartoon whimsy,
pluck dark coins
from a rough hole
in the upturned gut
of a piggy bank,
swallow them whole
with cash register sounds.

I hear a box of cereal,
walk down through the shakes.
There's raccoons in the kitchen.
"Visiting from the attic." says one,
takes a hard swig from a milk bottle.
Others, small and scraggly,
pass around the free toy.
"Watch this," says the largest,
tugging my sleeve.
It's wearing a tiara.

It pulls a penny from my ear.
Flips it, eyeballs it, says,
"Always tails!"
then licks it, bites it,
announces,
"No school today, Slugger.
Weatherman says solar flares again!"

My lips are dry.
And the roof of my mouth
tastes like copper.

Any Given Tongue

Here's an example of a tongue
tagged and boxed
with all the other tongues
in various states of freshness
or trauma
or decay.

The latter you get with the really old ones:
ancient Egyptian, Babylonian, that sort of thing.
So this one, recently acquired by donation
is still shiny, slightly tacky to the touch,
with a white scar on the tip
where its former owner bit through it
falling off his bike when he was eleven.

They're developing techniques
using lasers and digital rendering
to recreate the last word spoken
by any given tongue.
It's very scientific and precision is key but
there's a fringe notion—
more a campfire story, really—
the lab techs share over drinks.
By night, they say, when the lab is dark and still,
to catch the faint click of a tongue's last word
all you need is a good ear
but that's unlikely,
we keep those at a lab upstate.

War Comix!

“War & Glory! Comix for Kids!” screamed the cover like a bomb and inside, heroic Captain Smith always came home without his legs. His devoted wife June, brave and lovely, warbled cheerfully over iced tea with the Ladies Auxiliary, “Half a man is better than no man at all!”

We laughed so hard our tears and spit ruined that flimsy book. We made up our own stories after that: June shooing woodpeckers from the Captain’s new legs, or standing by proudly as the Captain is fitted with shopping cart wheels. One time we imagined Captain Smith, just a proud head on a soft cushion, jaunty medals pinned above his ear, out for a simple picnic with June. He sipped lemonade through a straw and blew the ants away with staccato puffs of air from the corner of his mouth.

We just about died.

You Can't Imagine It

We rabbits trooped up,
silver at our backs,
doubts waiting.
I knew them all.

Distance fetched up red, steep.
A thousand metal lines
split the whole night apart.
This is men's work, all right.

At the charge,
we tore down, broke simply;
flat pieces of wood,
humming in the dark.

Get Home

On that some late-day, overcast
you wink in where the end of the battle began,
out by the house your grandfather built,
where he fed all those shocked men.
Watch them turn him out
with bayonet points and bandaged hands
for some wrongheaded notion of gold, or God,
or some untraceable sorcery lost in the skittish data
decompiling into a fevered aura
of homesickness and animal fear
from the strain of history.
Back older than an unbidden memory of Dad,
of him saying,
“Something’ll get ya,
one way or the other,”
quietly, over minute-steak and coffee,
with the canker sores to prove it.
And, when the science fiction abandons you
listen for...
for a telephone
is the best advice I can give you.
Or a locomotive,
and head for that.
Head for that,
that you might find
some line home.

Cancer Sonnet

How many dark coats have seen inside
this room from back of this bone-hard chair
but this isn't the time Dad
to talk economics or worry about
the neighbourhood strays that you fed
'til the ambulance came for the seizures
that cracked three four ribs and made blood
of your tongue and I just figured out
what palliative means and so who do we
call when they tell us it's time
and where do I look while you lie there
and moan and then start to turn yellow
and what do I say do we say
did we say was it ever enough?

Funeral Notes

When you died
there was a comic book stuffed in your back pocket
some joker tied your shoelaces together
the neighbors brought mac and cheese
I slipped your house key into my pocket
we drank ice water from playing card glasses
we locked up the old board game cabinet
I found a dime in the toe of my right shoe
the paperboy got stung by a bee
the buffet table was an old door
Grandpa put the Chinet in the dishwasher
the kids down the block held a go-cart procession
a mourning dove hit the patio door
the only photo of you we could find was your thumb
we played American Pie on a loop
the cat knocked over your shaving mirror
your pill bottles made great rattles for the nephews
a taxidermist left his card on my windshield
when you died.

Jar

The label says
Cocktail Onions.
We use it for
pocket change:
dimes, expired pennies;
the green ones
the kids find after winter.

It sits on a shelf
behind a photo of Dad
who died,
last January,
of cirrhosis.

And The Star Goes Up Last

I handed over forty-five dollars

and felled
this splendid fir

to die slowly,
adorned,

in our living room.

Sylvia

Enter slow with
a gift against the frost
for my fondest acquaintance in her house;

a birdcage
of a place.

Cover her
with a flannel sheet,
leave daylight chattering at the window.

where flies got in
on muggy summer nights,
cat-boys murdering them to the baseboards,

concealing the bodies
with spent pyjamas
and unpaired socks

until this house turned
shivering, exhausted,
unable to lift from the bed

undecided about how to exist
as something touchable, made of meals, heat.
A body even the cats couldn't hide.

Found Inside a Wall (Transcribed)

“Your fringes,
my center,
subject to observational effects,
Penelopean tendencies.

Asymmetry draws the
eye, you know.

Lopsided.
Unknowable.

Broadsided.
Unrowboatable.

Like
like the 1982 Spring Catalogue
stiffening under the porch
or an absent ex-husband
working overseas,
or the ghost
of his tub-drowned dog
pressed between the pages
of polite conversation.

But
that’s a secret story
peering through the drapes;
something vaguely mythic
to preoccupy
the neighborhood kids
whenever they are.”

Tidal

Been a real week.
Let's buy a boat.
Nothing fancy.
I know a guy. Longshoreman.
Don't know him well. Well enough.
Patched him up from a fall.
He told me,
"She's from Long Beach.
Hasn't been back in a long time—
 real tenuous country
 where even the most pragmatic oaths'll fail ya—
for. Ah. Say,"
and he gestures. Like this.
"*unaddressed phenomena.*"

Few months after that,
takes another spill. Strike two.
This time he says,
"Efflorescence is an instinct;
rascal dandelions,
cricket frequencies
that surpass the threshold of human hearing,
things like that.
So what a ship,
what she looks like?"
 and he squints at the eye chart,
 twisting a raffish ring 'round his index finger,
"makes no difference t'all. None.
Only that she'll rise."

Lachine Rapids

A neck of black ink
slips into seams
of froth, thunder.
Where the torrent boils,
vision drowns.

Darts of raucous silver
shout, swirl, spin
while fat bronze fish,
resistant as anchors,
stare down the dark.

Boulders with ancient faces
steer the current,
use tree trunks, bicycle forks;
any tool will do
in the churn.

In a pool of green glass
broken by eddies that smile, fade,
that bird rises like a cork,
shakes off the undertow,
trophy wings open to the wind.

Humidex

Where you headed?
is the primal question,
inevitable and shamelessly human
mapped by duelling weeds,
clots of Christmas trees
steaming in the mundane heat
amped full of dioxides,
monoxides,
seedy afternoons
falling indefinitely slant
across the same slice of tile
at the Dollarama.

By now, we're well versed in scenes
of meteorological rigor,
onset natural selection
turbulent as children between destinations:
a diorama of piss bottles,
overpasses,
tanker shine
conspicuously aloof,
a thumb in God's eye,
business as usual.

Fetch

Your driver's eye briefly arrested
by a fault between the trees
tethering eastbound and west,
where the cops hang out
on the pinkish outskirts of a long weekend.
From the dimming periphery
the blissful ageless step flawless,
nip the lawmen's radar frequencies,
sip air from their cooling tires.
The dogs know something's up;
radios in their football heads
pick up whispered flavours of
beefy forearms,
the straggling lamb,
a glamour of acreages
where no masters will follow.
Until they do
(those dogs don't come cheap)
in an antic of guns, bones,
flickering laughter
at the level of artificial light,
a winking UFO
left back to summon the next shift.

Foxy

The satellites know where you parked
your neck muscles in sharp focus
broadcasting down and dirty

a whiff of you
a little too much like an allergy

you point out a bramble
of fleshy pink flowers
Chlamydias! you say

and laugh

resolute

a single shaft of sunlight
gracious and fox-like

gliding through this scene
one pang at a time

Oumuamua

Bare fenceposts
lean into where is an expired track
set tumbling by a collision in its system of origin,
reddish and unsteady
from prolonged exposure
to the general exuberance of Time.
Here between the growth of things
and a river not quite suitable for drinking
if the weighted scent of copper
is anything to go by,
red-winged blackbirds,
durable and eccentric,
turn sharply away
and upward to perihelion.
I am left alone to my trajectory
with a pack on my shoulder;
what seemed like a good idea,
until this bygone route
accelerates beyond the orbit of Mars
at a pace I'm not prepared to think about
or measure
even if I could.

Field Work

I wrote a mud poem.
Very much not a sonnet. Sonnets are gross.
I used upper case, for emphasis,
Because life is muddy, hard to see
This far from the road, here in the weeds.
Weeds no one cuts, in fields no one owns,
With an abundance of *Rodentia*,
You'd think,
But this has been a bad year for them.
I could have studied crows or tygers
But I like my garbage animals, the ones
Hardly anyone writes poems about.
Especially not sonnets. Never sonnets.
Sonnets are roadkill.

Flies and Gods

Spare a thought
maybe a prayer
for Ma Raccoon and her kits
or the restless porcupine
possessed by irrefutable forces
that demand to be heard
the engine the asphalt
the glare of a god
that goes all in
for the string stink of protein
dropped to the road with a snap

Flies and gods share a basic familiarity
out where 18-wheelers
hangnail the autoroute
out past the grease traps
and the charge of mercury vapour
where domesticity is blown to bits
in a heave of panicked prayer
to the rubber hum that answers
with the spade the scrape
the truck bed
that isn't soft at all

Acid Rain Day

We took the children to the zoo
on an acid rain day.
There was hardly anyone there.
Alexander, unsure,
frowned under his slicker.
I said, "Courage, Lion!
It hardly burns at all!"
He rallied,
Braveheart,
as his ice cream dripped and boiled
to the pockmarked, plastic bench.
Susan giggled at the parakeets,
such charming fellows,
bleached and huddled on their shining wire.
Another family, smiling wide,
all teeth and Polaroids,
pointed out gorillas—
shy gorillas—
sheltered in the lee of rusty boulders,
drenched coats
sloughing off their backs.
That was nice.
When the children got tired,
their little faces blotchy, oozing,
we fed the gentle ducks
wailing in their hissing stream.
"What jolly quacks!" we told our youngest
but he cried pink tears,
poor imp,
that dropped like pennies.
"Make a wish!" we said,
"or the water will carry your tears away
and turn the ocean bloody
with your sadness!"
He did,
good sport,
so we took a picture
and hobbled back to the car.

Citywild

When Summer's thick musk
settles on the city like a glaze
tourists and t-shirt vendors line up on Fifth,
backs to the courthouse, across from the park,
for the annual running of the air conditioners.
The city's largest herd,
industrial-type,
it scars the asphalt as it passes,
spraying bus shelters and rutting cabs
with territorial piss from last year's drip pans.

When the late-morning heat-shimmer
claims the raucous herd
only the cool gloom of the park remains.
It is home to shaggy flocks
of rowdy teenage boys,
an invasive species
deemed too unpredictable for easy culling.
They play dice under footbridges
and crumbling band-shells
for cigarettes and subway tokens.

They are leery, only,
of the park's small clans of heavy-set men;
round, ancient, tan as ginger-ale,
they lure pigeons made of newspaper and motor oil
with fistfuls of dusty orange popcorn.
By dusk, the park men slide silent into fetid ponds
to digest the day's catch as stenographers,
twitchy as mice, nose past,
back to humid hidey-holes
and the fussy rattle of oscillating fans.

Made by Robots

They make key-chains, our robots.
“A Celebration of Novelty-Driven Lifestyles”™
but for tourists, mainly.
Our gift shops, where we sell them, look like greenhouses.
Very “eco”. A marketing coup, I’m told.
Sales are hottest in the summer months.
They say MADE BY ROBOTS —
our key-chains I mean—
right on there in friendly letters.
It’s a selling point.
Very popular.
Asian markets are watching with interest.
Now our robots, they’re not very big;
tall as a man’s thumb, about.
Adorable though!
Little mechanical elves
with their little tools
and chained with care to their little benches
where they assemble our key-chains.
No unions, no contracts, no complaints.
Still,
very progressive, our operation. Ahead of the curve.
Our robots get fifteen—
no, ten—
ten minutes a day down-time.
Some play cards, the Foreman tells me. Haha!
At Christmas, we have them wear Santa hats
and one of our robots, at random,
gets to keep a key-chain that they’ve made.

Caboose

There's an old caboose at the lake.
Peeling in the heat,
sagging on a pair of short rails,
they use it as a tourist shack
with bathrooms and brochures.

We got home and my kid,
she drew a picture of a train:
wobbly boxcars, precarious tankers,
delicate stick-figures
enjoying a picnic nearby.

She anchored her train
to a tidy caboose.
Says there's little bed in there
where the engineer sleeps.
The brake wheel is a smiley face.

The caboose at the lake has
an old map of town on its side
marked with crude, black graffiti,
and a cigarette burn
where downtown used to be.

Telegraphy

Behind our campsite,
the one we get every year
(except in '96 when Brian had chemo)
and big enough for the kitchen tent,
there's a long strip of dark dirt
what used to be a rail line
where the odd, pocked spike still mushrooms
"but only after rain," observed Brian, our scientist,
every time.
Just beyond that,
at the butt-end of the lake,
shallow and brown,
thick, rusty fish suck on drowned telegraph poles.
All but one. Still standing.
"An arthritic finger
dialed into the firmament," Brian, our poet, declared.
He took notes:
*Hums like an overpass
when heat-lightning smothers the park.*
and
*When the lake laps its root
the water pulls back like a nettle-stung dog.*
and
*Sheds oily pinheads
that settle in the muck like cheap talk.*
By late August, that same muck
pushed up copper shoots,
wiry, tadpole headed.
They'd dry out slow in the sun
then vanish to God-knows-where by September,
around when we'd pack things up
and always
when Brian wasn't looking.

You Can Come Too

Every year, once a year,
September sometime,
when the kids are in school
and the olds take back the mall,
I drive to the beach.
Way out. Where no one is.
By myself.
Gotta be raining though. Wet.
Tsk tsk
Tsk tsk
scold the wipers;
a sound I enjoy.
Scissors too.
I like the sound
of scissors but that's
a story for another time.
I turn on the radio
with a few dirty words
 (just my little joke)
and the records they spin
aren't records at all, I think,
but real musicians,
all lined up to play
those little egg-carton rooms
that only seem private,
and for a little payola,
a little blow,
some get two songs an hour.
Tsk tsk. Tsk tsk.
I park, walk down to the beach.
The hard beach. No sand.
Just smooth stones
that applaud the incoming tide.
I tug the zipper on my K-Way,
pull the hood,
take a slow walk
by myself.
But
for a little payola,
a little blow,
maybe next time
you can come too.
Tsk tsk. Tsk tsk.

Anyway, the Goat

So, I'm looking at the goat and I wonder,

"How does it bend its legs like that?"

They're all backwards, underneath itself.

Goats are *weird*. Ever see a goat's eye?

Like a lizard. So weird.

Anyway, it's tied up in the rain

and it's bleating, and I'm thinking,

"A cow would make more sense, plot-wise."

The old guy was all, "We spared no expense."

Clearly not; a cow costs more than a goat. *Has* to.

Did you know cows lie down when it rains?

Anyway. *So* unbelievable.

I've seen this thing maybe twenty times or so

and every bloody time I think,

"Where did that glass of water come from, anyway?"

Who brought that?

It's just sitting on the dashboard.

Not even a cup holder.

How am I supposed to believe this?

Anyway, the Tyrannosaur shows up
and eats the goat, finally.

The lawyer, too.

It ate a dog in the sequel, but whatever.

Cat Diary

The cat keeps staring at the corner.
Just sits there.
He's been like that forever.
In that corner
in the bedroom.
He just stares.
There's a word Staci likes:
Uncanny.
I can't touch him
or talk to him 'cause
it freaks him out
and his tail fills the room.
His head's cocked,
like he's hearing something.
I put my ear to the wall
but can't hear anything
except my pulse in my head.
Sounds like footsteps,
sounds like.
I can't sleep there.
Not when he's like that.
Freaks me out.
The streetlight comes
through the window
and his eyes glow.
Casts shadows, too.
Big ones
across the ceiling,
down the walls
so I sleep on the sofa.

I called her up.
Staci, I mean,
with an I,
like a stripper.
She's in Tampa again
Some poetry thing.
A conference maybe?
I don't believe in that shit.
You should see the cat, I tell her.
I'm in Tampa, she says.
He's doing this thing, I say
What? Like a trick?
No. No. He just stares at the wall,

in the corner, near the bed.
Cats do that, she said.
I hear coughing.
Is someone with you?
No.
He's been like that
since you left.
Two weeks.
He just stares at the wall.
I can hear her breath
like panting.
Hello?
Yeah, look, I have to go.
But the cat.
I don't know. Try the vet.
But.
There's a workshop soon,
she almost whispered.
That must be some
fucking conference, I told her.
She hung up.

A buddy of mine, he said,
Could be a mouse in the wall.
Oh yeah?
Yeah, cats have amazing ears.
Hear stuff through walls,
no problem.
They hear four times better than us,
he said. I thought,
That is a very specific number.
I hope it's a mouse, he said.
Why? I said.
There are worse things than mice
to have in your walls.

I got up this morning
and the cat was dead.
I left it for awhile
then put it in a
garbage bag,
threw it in the bin.
Heavier than you'd think.
I haven't heard from Staci
so fuck her, I guess.
Some poet probably did.

I'm back sleeping
in the bedroom again.
The sofa hurt my back.
Put a plant in the corner.
I sleep better now
but it's weird.
Just before I drift off
I swear I hear the doorbell
or someone knocking
but, like, from a long way off.
I never check.

That plant is starting to
freak me out.

Dear J,

This bus stinks of people.
One of them might even be eating a raw onion.
This whole experience is gross
and puts me profoundly off
just about...everyone, really,
despite the obvious metaphor
one could draw between people and onions.

There's a guy across the aisle cradling a chicken salad wrapped in a range target
and he won't
stop talking
to the window
about
the injustice
of it all.

I don't know what to make of anything anymore
but then again
I've been reading Ashbery.

The last time we spoke
we discovered we each owned
a copy of the same obscure book.
Later that night I got to wondering
how many other copies might be out there
waiting to be destroyed by fire
or bad endings to lopsided affairs.

I return to this thought often
but haven't read that book since.

There's a police cruiser passing on the shoulder
and I've been on this bus too long
thinking I'm gross too,
after all this time.

The Audacity of Infrastructure

I am a city block,
a fusty aqueduct,
an idling overpass
haloed by that don't-sit-so-close glow
as we near the end of our broadcast day.
And tonight's top story, for those just tuning in:
A portal opens just off the Décarie during the morning rush
swallowing a daycare centre, a stand of telegraph poles,
a persistence of birds,

birds bred to meet the insoluble demands
of the lonely, the aged.
Birds set loose for outliving their keepers,
that cry "Pretty! Pretty!"
from insurmountable cables
and shitwhite streetlamps.

But look up.
Look wayyy up
and I'll call Rusty

for one last spin
across and again the Old Champlain
in the dawn, in the dew, through
that old Back-In-My-Day dream
'cause by this time next year
there won't be a view of the old town from here

just orange cones and shocked concrete
pulverized to fertilizer
by some passing leviathan;
a thing they'll maybe only know
by some truly vintage tooth
or the sun falling
just so
into a footprint full of water.

The Whale Itself

"The 52-Hertz Whale is a unique whale that calls at a characteristic frequency of 52 Hz, a much higher frequency than the vocalizations of most whales. It appears to be the only individual with this call, and it has been described as the world's loneliest whale."

-Bill Norrington
University of California, Santa Barbara

"Obviously, he's able to eat and live and cruise around. Is he successful reproductively? I haven't the vaguest idea. Nobody can answer those questions. Is he lonely? I hate to attach human emotions like that. Do whales get lonely? I don't know. I don't even want to touch that topic."

-Mary Ann Daher
Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution

I hear you.
Your vulgar broadcasts
twitch at my peripherals.

Your pangs of despair,
your guttural appeals,
literal as pollution

plastic.

A curdled sheen of anguish
smeared across the surface of things.

You project loneliness
yet you are innumerable.

You shit where you eat;
maybe that's why you're so sad.

Here, in the liquid dark,
where the only true weather
is the steady fall of the dead
in motes,
my frequencies are jubilant:

salty limericks,
Ordovician shanties,
ebullient aspersions against dry land.
What did you expect?

I'm no mascot,
no kindred spirit.

I am nerve and saltwater.

I am invisible.

Render me if you must.

I can't stop you.

But do so, at least,

with the audacity

of Dürer's Rhinoceros.

Don Cherry Says He's Sorry

How many millions of years
of pure geologic effort, blasted
to pebbles during Coach's Corner.
Highway's coming through
about a kilometer off.
Windows rattle, fields roil,
and a thousand, panicked Canada Geese
hustle for someplace less dynamic to stand.
Pissed off, too. I'd be;
those fields are a good spot
for a rest and a shit and bit of a chat.

I listen for them
to pass over the house,
migration engines
settling into euphonic rhythm
but Don Cherry won't shut up.
So, I shut the TV
and wish those geese well
as he shrinks to a paltry white dot.

Main Event Horizon

The ultimate heel
in search of an origin story
but a scissor hold you wouldn't believe.
Hangnailing the ring
with that velour flourish,
a sensational claim to the belt
in false colour.
The crowd is *ensorcelled*—
not a word you'd expect from the announcers table
but it lands like a folding chair across the back.
Wilful velocity
gnashing, gnathic fury,
a relativistic cage match
antagonizing the cluster as a whole
and the stellar medium goes wild!
The serpentine weave,
the fundamental drop,
the ineffable thrill of a finishing move
you can't even see

Force Majeure

The cannery got its roof peeled off.
The night watchman bore the brunt.
His car is fine;
don't make 'em like that anymore.

Now our entire success
and increased earning potential
is largely dependent on a hollow boat
churning this block of water.

Ferry engines shudder,
people heel their cigarettes,
start their cars,
avoid eye-contact with their neighbors.

A black-capped gull
slides from the rail.

An anchor-chain
rattles below deck.

Space remaining outbound is limited.
Contemplate a tense exit.

Tickets. Tickets please.

Milk Run

“The government
is stable, the
natives
friendly.”

gargles the radio
as the wipers work stubbled fields
into gritty-grey paste.

On back from the Co-Op.
Had a voucher:
evaporated milk, two for one.
Hardly ever see that.

Almost home.

Tires screech,
the windshield goes bulls-eyed.
Hooves, shit,
pupils drowning in skim milk
fall quivering to the shoulder.
The aerial is frantic.

Rear-view figures
draped in greasy skins,
energy drink logos,
unfold from lopsided shacks.
The radio raises its voice,
“LIMIT ONE PER CITIZEN.”
The car comes to its senses,
tears away,
milk cans duking it out in the trunk.

From the Bureau of Anomalous Natural Phenomena

The Night
which had solidified
hard as petrosilex
corrugated on its surface
with a slight salty odour
plunged vertically
burying itself in the firmament
to a depth of three feet

The Early Morning
at rest six inches below that
cleaner
but smaller weaker
was injured
with a sharp fracture and
more or less torn
did not keep very long

It seems to me sufficient
the Night
the specific character of it
witnessed
well authenticated by several people
in whose candor and honesty I have complete confidence
be collected at first opportunity
and given exhibition at the Dime Museum.

Who Killed Cock Robin

Inscrutable spires

plunged deep into his chest

and Cock Robin

with a smile upon his lips

whispered

of the FBI

the CIA

the Man

tall and rigid

on a grey

and darkling plain

Pharol's Nest

the sloping Heath in brittle yellow
here a once-pit a haphazard
study of petrified
beams torsos of
trees willn't grow

the Sky is scored glass
is glaucous roiling
at the edge but Silent

stumbling scraps of grown-over Animal
blind pulses of sudden mice

the site Manifests a
n'ctitating bulb of sable ice preserved
by the underside of things
the smothering Weed

the corrupt Nest that gave its only warning

Ragnarök

The University has received multiple witness reports
of a large black dog fighting a deer in the north-east lot

ice damming of the St. Francis River Bridge
is causing water levels to rise across campus

the campus cops say
be vigilant
walk in pairs
do not approach river banks and wildlife
let the groundskeepers do their work

threatening work
clearing antlers and aggressive ice

what no one else expects
or prepares for

disproportionate wolves
creeping the grounds
and the heat death of the universe

Inside After

We could write beautiful things about
the middle of the night in our place
after the collapse, but it's so dark.
Dark like the inside of a drawer with
a false bottom where one
might conceivably keep their
homemade pornography or
a bottle of migraine pills or
a gun-shaped hole in space
that swallows meaning whole
or words,
unpoetical words,
pragmatical words,
words kept on hand for
unrealized mythic potential
peristaltic wormhole
ballpoint sunscreen
ontological theropod
to name the few
we haven't burned for hope.
So what now, now what, so
no VCR glare,
no refrigerator moan,
the answering machine resists interrogation
for want of a voice, then,
Shit, Jackie says, hey.
Hey there's a deer in the yard.
(We were expecting rats perfectly honest.)
A deer looking in, looking
for a meal, looking
to lay blame because
whose idea were industrial parks anyway?
Anyhow, now its back-end shows
that bolide flare so let's
we'd better
here just let's
climb into this drawer,
pull the room in behind us
and go write beautiful someplace else.

Hidden Track

The time machine broke down;
I'm beside myself!