

## APPROACHING SEVENTY

1. Sit and watch the memory disappear  
romance disappear the probability  
of new adventures disappear

well isn't it beautiful  
when the sun goes down  
don't we all want to be where we can watch it

redde  
sink to a spark  
disappear



Your friend goes to Sri Lanka and works  
for a human rights organization  
in the middle of a civil war

where she too might be disappeared any time  
and another friend goes to retreats  
sits miserably waiting for ecstasy and ecstasy

actually comes, so many others  
so many serial monogamists seeking love  
some open doorway some wild furious breath



Please, I thought, when I first saw the paintings  
de Kooning did when Alzheimer's had taken him  
into its arms and he could do nothing

but paint, purely paint, transparent, please let me  
make beauty like that, sometime, like an infant  
that can only cry

and suckle, and shit, and sleep,  
boneless, unaware, happy,  
brush in hand no ego there he went



A field of cerise another of lime  
a big curve slashes across canvas  
then another and here it is the lucidity

each of us secretly longs for  
as if everything belonging to the other world  
that we forget at birth is finally flooding

back to the man like a cold hissing tide  
combers unrolling while he waits on the shore  
of the sandy canvas brush in hand it comes



So come on, gorgeous, get yourself over  
to the shore with the sleeping gulls  
—does the tide rise or doesn't it

and are you or are you not willing  
to rise from sleep, yes, in the dark, and patiently  
go outside and wait for it

and do you know what is meant by patience  
do you know what is meant by going outside  
do you know what is meant by the tide



2. Now go dance  
with the skeletons  
feed them word meat be their slave

that worm there is hungry  
that rubied iridescent beetle that fly  
making a path through some sour dirt

you hairy impertinent bag of water  
what do you know  
about hunger



You hairy impertinent bag of water  
says the fly buzzing on my windowsill  
late in the fall about to die

tumbling over in its agony  
leave me alone for God's sake  
leave me my pitiful dignity

The day is azure and breezy there outside  
yet I cannot look away from the anguished fly  
on the sooty windowsill



Buzz buzz: what if you feel like tepid dishwater,  
like a rusty Dodge, the fly says, you are still  
a member of the privileged species

the killer species  
that uses its intelligence to be  
the world's butcher and poisoner

A toxic cloud floats by, alabaster and rose  
go watch the salt seas rise and the earth crack  
eager to return your insult



So here you are with your meaningless choices  
this way and that hesitating, fearful  
should you tell the truth to your daughters

should you forgive your husband how boring  
shouldn't you spend more time  
trying to heal the world

if you would only recognize  
you are no more than this fly  
or that cloud



Everything would change, you would find yourself  
illuminated from within like a paper lantern  
carried by a whore in a Paris street fair

or like a dragon kite you would fly in a high wind  
and be pulled back to earth by a string  
in a child's hands, or you would be cactus

blooming blood-orange in sand, or monsoon charging across  
a grateful subcontinent, or lava plunging  
over old cinders to the seething sea



3. Espresso bubbles, I shout  
*Breakfast in a minute* up the stairs  
he comes down robed, we have  
  
coffee, toast, cherry tomatoes, cheese,  
fish, juice, almond pastry, the *Herald*  
*Tribune* then the long busy day then evening  
  
in the tub after a smoke I remark  
economics doesn't interest me  
the three things I care about are individual  
  
human lives, then art and beauty  
then politics and cultural history and mythology  
I'm thinking: apart from the personal stuff  
  
on the other side of the tub my rational man  
says truth then fun then honor, by honor he means  
both reputation and doing what is right  
  
head to foot we recline in the warm steam  
while I remember a few summers ago  
the tangy peachy cool night air  
  
that blew in through the bathroom window  
as we stood in the tub looking out  
side by side trying to locate the comet  
  
with the double tail, ah there it was  
off to northwest over the neighbors' charcoal trees  
difficult to see, like the lightest pencil touch

STREAM-ENTERING

Though reluctant  
when his mother insists  
    on joining the sangha

the Buddha admits  
*women too are capable*  
    of stream-entering

Reading these words  
it is not that suddenly  
    I enter the stream

it is more that I become  
aware of its coolness and of  
    myself pleasantly wading

then the sea appears  
heaving between continents  
    grey, horizonless

death-cold currents  
day and night, and I  
    would be a drop

## INSOMNIA

But it's really fear you want to talk about  
and cannot find the words  
so you jeer at yourself

you call yourself a coward  
you wake at 2 a.m. thinking *failure*,  
*fool*, unable to sleep, *unable to sleep*

buzzing away on your mattress with two pillows  
and a quilt, *they call them comforters*,  
*which implies that comfort can be bought*

*and paid for, to help with the fear, the failure*  
your two walnut chests of drawers snicker, the bookshelves mourn  
the art on the walls pities you, the man himself beside you

asleep smelling like mushrooms and moss is a comfort  
but never enough, never, the ceiling fixture lightless  
velvet drapes hiding the window

traffic noise like a vicious animal  
on the loose somewhere out there—  
you brag to friends you won't mind death only dying

what a liar you are—  
all the other fears, of rejection, of physical pain,  
of losing your mind, of losing your eyes,

they are all part of *this!*  
Pawprints of *this!* Hair snarls in your comb  
this glowing clock the single light in the room

## LYMPHOMA

I come from visiting my once-blonde  
friend in hospital with non-Hodgkin's  
lymphoma the chemo is working

we chat about other women's husbands  
suffering from Parkinson's  
we laugh cry hug we feel a little lucky

down the hall an attendant rolls a gurney  
yellowish old man skull glares  
from under a blanket

now how in hell do I get out  
can't find elevator or stairs  
despite red neon EXIT signs everywhere