I. The Present
Prayer from the Desert

We offer up, O Wisdom, our lucky finds. Elf owls pausing over their snake supper to sing a swoon of thanks, we offer, and clutches of tiny skulls, even their skinny ear holes.

On scaly knees, we offer up the earless and spiny lizards in our hooded sights, how their pursuits for glimmer and snog expose us and ring our bells. We too, O Purity, have rushed forward in gritty nakedness, wracking and ready.

These cries and whimpers from the hot sands, these searching fingers enriched by human scent, these oily inconstancies, our simple thirsts—we offer them up, O Sigh of Sighs! Consecrated by whimsy, we are shameless in tracing our curves, shameless in facing temptation, greedy for tender surrender.

We wish, we plead to offer up such luscious guilt, for we are guilty!

We are guilty, O Richest and Most Rosy, for the loads we carry and throb to, grinding our scabs smooth and shiny with raw succumb. Yea, yea, to be seen and smelled by those to whom we wish to return the favor, Your Grace, and be elevated. Yea, by such lessons may we obtain freedom from the honed pieties the groomed explicators wear. Bring your richness, O Grand Surprise, to our itch for brio, our need for the next brim, the breathless state, where we might learn imperturbe in the gleam of sweet disturb.

And thus, refreshed, we might turn from such sterling sample and make fresh bow to the common and the uncommon spirits, calling them holy,
holier than the breasts and poses found in the brightly lit reliquaries
of the moment. Which we are fain to caress and suck to fullness.
Now in this hour of the rattler and horny toad,
the shingleback skink and helldiver.

Among whose graces
we might root our resolve in plots so musical and in shares so bare
the world may, for an instant, burst into applause. For our yearnings
go round and round. As witness, Lo! Our hinges made slick,
heated by the rubbings of corporal unguents!
These hungers, stimulations,
and high consummations in chorus!
World with flow and hallelujah and amen.
Everybody say Flow now . . . say flow and amen.
II. Back Up
Spring Evenings

Growing up in Flint I turned the dirt with a spade in our family’s garden while my sister Gloria watched the baby and the baby, on bowed, rubbery legs, watched our dad roll his eyes and wink leaning on his rake. Mother was the one who got this going, at the back door wiping her hands on her apron and warning we didn’t have much time left—“Everything’s almost ready.” I love this homely scene

I can’t hold still. Fifty years later—that first garden long gone, Dad too, and last fall my sister, who looked up from her usual morning toast and coffee to say something funny was going on—I turn the dirt in the raised beds on my Idaho mountain: there’s Mother again wiping her hands, and there’s Dad, almost falling over, making the baby dance and laugh, though what I’m smiling at are Gloria’s last words working to keep something alive. Which is why we can’t just quit and go in right away, right? Why we can’t help helping ourselves to a little more, never mind that it’s so small we can only get lost in it.
Hungry

Bears cougars rattlesnakes man alive
people keep saying aren’t you
afraid living way out there no
close neighbors real friends
where do you shop on the spur
just go for a cuppa coffee look
what if you suffer an attack of
anything can happen my god
at your age it’s crazy—

Well
the other day I said whoa
stepping back to gaze in wonder
at how this sow pushed over
my compost box oh I understood
of course spring and all the surge
still I’d built that box myself
scraps of ancient planks squared off
clean and straight at the corners
nailed tight with spikes a big old
boy I was sorry to see lying there
behind the barn all messed apart
a long scar clawed across the black
sheet of plastic covering the top
or not covering anything now
except a patch of gray snow
bristling with pine and fir needles
how many moldy cheeses and pea
pods skins seeds and pots of coffee
grounds I’d given that box to mix
and cook and sweeten over the years!

Oh

she was hungry all right bear-
hungry after a good long sleep
and quite likely eating for three
those two babies back in the den
blind whining and wanting
their milk yes sir friends
sour is sweet things break
the yearning returns home
and abroad hungry is hungry.
Gizmo says leave a message so
this is for you, sweetheart,
who are not here to breathe
our mountain air and to see that pair
you love rubbing the plum
tree crazy, the doe
glancing back as if to tell
Mr. Big Snort to cork his his-
tronics and be grateful,
and how the yolky sun is running over
a soft gray sky, that shade of belly
a trout can flash flipping la-
di-da near my floating fly,
and how a little wind sallied
by, snatched up my
painter’s cap and posed it more
or less on the far eave’s edge
where this flighty humming-
bird, zooming in fits, wants to
figure its meaning, and so
here I am in the middle
of a rich philosophy, that
shimmering between
starting and truly starting and
feeling it and knowing
you would too, only you
are two times zones away
among level-headed Mid-
westerners maybe stopped mid-
stretch on their way up
to bed, saying my, my
children of Adam
would you look at that,
and I’m guessing it’s
the full moon because
later on she’ll be on
the loose out here, big
and brassy, prowling the Palouse,
the Clearwater, the Snake, and man
oh man the ruffling
she can produce tucking in
cowboys who like their covers just so
while covering all bets to discom-
bobulate at will—well,
I just wanted to say
seeing those deer
I missed you
and got carried away
though not far enough.
The Perfect Pitch

It's an egg. Hold it like an egg.
—Crash Davis

These soft Indian summer spells
on the mountain, no fires about
and therefore clear as joy clear out
to the Gospels, I gratefully slip on
my old Rawlings and slap, without heat,
a baseball in the pocket.
I hold it like an egg.
It's a relief from the game
I've been facing too many nights now,
when everything's on the line and I,
on the mound, tossing and turning
and toeing the rubber, lean down
for a sign I can only guess at.
I'm working, it seems, on curlicuing
back to the havoc I brought to all
those batters in my cocky, screwball-
throwing youth. *Duck, baby,
or die.*

On a muddy track
I am in fact passing from a higher
to a lower condition, developing
a blurry point of view—almost yolky—
with one eye, while the other
turns teary reading the story
I have been settling happily into, it seems,
forever, but for yet another character
I care about suddenly up and leaving
and leaving the page gray.
My hearing, however, a mercy, is homey
and close: a tiny cry recently led me to peek
inside my old work boot, where I discovered, all neatly
folded up, a little brown bat pup (*Myotis lucifugus*).
Its mother lives in my bedroom wall, inches from where I lay my head, and waits for me, night after night, to be still, to become serene with my surroundings, as she, fixing her webby sticks and furry ears just so, prepares to go prowl the timber.

I follow my own flights, gazing beyond the skylight at something I love (and hate the thought of losing)—the bright toss of worlds that freely gives and gives. Even when I can’t see such brilliance for the clouds, I can see the clouds, a gauzy moon, snow, can see and hear rain and sleet and be comforted.

I crouch and coo—catching now—calling for the perfect pitch.
A wonder lush, unraveling, and, end to end, unreasonable, not unlike my first real kiss. Allowing me to roll over and drift off... hugging that itch to hold on, holding out forever.