

# 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.

## Calling from the Scaffold

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-  
trionics 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.