Smoke Rises
(January 2013)
After She Called

no poem can capture the smoke
cedar scented, it rises
in a thin gray string, twisting
and I take a bit with my cupped hands
before I do what I am
compelled to do
this raw night before the storm

may it rise
to touch the Mystery
as he feels it

may it rise
to touch the Mystery
as I call it

may it touch
the Mystery
as it rises
Thundersnow

the whiteout obscures
the thunderbolts that flew
above cold chaos

when the one who knew
arrived with wolves and ravens
to lead the battle

even snow blindness
and blizzard winds could not blot
unearthly rumbles
DeKalb County

many shades of grey
black earth dusted cornstubble
the red barns stand out

A Soft Touch

Gliding beneath clouds
To a smooth landing
Welcomed at the gate
By a moist comfort
As hazy night falls
Long day nearly done
You May Take It

And she said,
"You may take the river birch as your symbol.
Study it with care.
You will see how it shows its grace in youth,
But as it ages, strengthens, darkens,
It always shows signs of its youthful grace.
And should it appear to fail,
It may spring again, threefold, from its base."
When It’s Good and Dark

Hey there, wait up...
1 heard from a friend of a friend
That you’ve got ways to spirit me across the border.
His sharp ears perked up with that last word.
He stopped and turned and stared me down.

So tell me, Sir, what do you charge?
Is the journey long?
What should I bring?

Too many questions, eh?
I’ll meet you here tomorrow night.
It’s a new moon.
Raising Cane

dreaded field plummed
perched above the still canal
ephemeral fire

flames over water
noisy birds in quick descent
catching all they can

heaven over fire
grey billows meeting tall clouds
then the rains begin
News from Mali

Needed rains fell hard;
The dark air was full of too much electricity,
Rolling thunder for half an hour.

When it quieted, finally,
I found myself in a nearly empty room
Filled with tall round tables and high chairs.

There was someone there:
One heavy-set man,
Who told me to dine at the Restaurant Timbuktu,
Recommending their French cuisine.

The radio came on abruptly,
Ending our chat
With the news of its recapture.
Tunkan (for Molly)

She found it in the creek.
When she picked it up
And held it tight,
Its wet surface
Could not hide its power.
She knew right away
And dried it off.

The flow polished it smooth
For who knows how long.
A thin bright band
On its wide end
Hinted toward something more.
She knew right away
And kept it safe.
Too Many Trophy Photos

I understand liking to hunt.
(It's in my blood.)
And know full well about wanting to succeed.
But taking a life is a most serious matter
To be approached through ritual and reverence.
And of those two, reverence is key.
Without it, what are we?

A Curse

Where will these breadcrumb trails of words lead?
Were they intended to take us back to before our wanderings in the woods?
If so, there are so many choices
And so many hungry crows,
Observant.
Know that if you backtrack now
You will find some crumbs but miss others,
Or wait a bit, and come to know that Thomas Wolfe is always right in the end.
Antelope Freeway

That night on 1-5 when we approached the Antelope Freeway,
Something was clearly amiss.
We seemed to be getting closer all the time,
But still missed the exit.
And the antelope were nowhere to be seen.

The traffic was light that night.
Yet even full out in the passing lane,
We couldn’t catch them.
Or had we unknowingly passed them by
In our past lives?
Sleepless in Seattle (circa 1985)

Everything was damp;
Ground and cloud came together.
Black was the uncolor on the street corners
That he wandered as he found himself
Sleepless in Seattle.

He didn’t know they wanted to do him in.
Too trusting a soul, he had his plan
And was going to stick to it,
Come hell or raised bridges.

But they knew better (or worse) and acted.
He kept his wits about ’im in the mist,
Thanks to a Greek café
That served the thickest coffee at all hours
And such rich galaktoboureko
That it got him past their flying arrows and gothic piercings,
And back onto that plane heading for home,
Just in the nick of time.
Her Ovens

The artists come to New York City’s bright lights
For inspiration, stimulation and mutual support;
The least likely sheep flocked together.
Does their craft suffer from all the distractions?

The Master Baker escaped that island.
She slipped out the gate and then ran west
To the land of wheat,
More alone but more together.

Sweet smoke now rises from her ovens
Where new rewards emerge hot each morning
As the Main Street lights flicker out.
Emerging into Reality

Dear Old Abe
Wants to live out
The rest of his days
With his buddy
The bear.
And there I am
Making soap bubbles.
Just as it was
About to emerge,
I came out
The other side...
Made It His Own

Walking down the aisles
in the grocery store
past the melting lemon drops,
those rhythms and chords
won’t stop ringing out
as he sings his dreamy epitaph,
bittersweet...

We know where to find him - yes -
his voice flies us there, somewhere,
over Judy’s rainbow, somewhere,
way up high...
Dreams of Summers Past

If my wishes had wings,
They would hover near sunset
Above white petunias
Waiting patiently for you to come along,
Admiring the velvet petals,
The fragrance of nightfall,
And the elusive flight of hawk moths.

Four More Questions

Is sleep lost ever found?

Does bad news know to stop at three?

When the wildfire spreads on a day of uncertain winds,
can all the firebreaks be rechecked?

And what good things can be made from the ashes?
Chesapeake (for Phil)

Caffeine and Whiskey,
dark and bright,
fly over the bay at night,
dreaming of bluebills taking flight
into a pink sky

Slicing the air way up high,
the scent of dead crabs and oyster beds
would be missed by the pilot,
who flies by sight,
but for Caffeine and Whiskey,
dark and bright
Djarum Filters

Why do I have such a craving for a kretek?
Her little brown pack's nowhere to be found.
I've looked in all the drawers,
But they're gone,
Gone, all burned away.

This lovely vanilla votive is reassuring,
But cannot substitute
For sharing the sharp, cutting sweetness of cloves.
Place to Rest

warm pink granite slab
a windblown bluestem ridgetop
last the nighthawk’s bed

In Jennings, Kansas (pop. 146) Last Monday Night

a bountiful copacetic deliverance
escaping from great hardship
illuminated Jennings, Kansas
last Monday night
only people questioning
rights suppressed
took up vibrant windsongs