my brother

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my brother

by

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THE TRAMP
(I)


I hit the streets of my little town. I found them lifeless. Boring. I walked right out. Never to return.

The country was open. Clean. Brown. Ditches were damp. Lush with head-high timothy grass. Not the best combination for sleeping. Nonetheless. As I lay there. I found solace in constellations I could not name. My friends. Apollo’s arrow is clear. The universe is a miracle. It must expand.

As I reached those many odd shelters. The food was sticky. Bland. Nearly colorless. Sugar and salt were once the apples of a pirate’s eye. Now I know why. Making oatmeal and corn casseroles. Off a shiny tin tray. Something I could stomach.

The cots were creaky. And so close together. Who likes a wool blanket on bare skin anyway? Grown men who have pissed their pants? Talk your ears off? Ask if I could really read. Can you really read boy? What’s it like? Do letters dance for you? Is that James Joyce dead or alive? I don’t know. I responded. Under poor light. Inside a Lutheran rec center. I wasn’t afraid to die. I just sat there and tried not to smell. That odor. It wasn’t that I was going to cry. From fumes. From fantasy. From the smell of piss.

I soon used my thumb. Go straight south young man. The sturdy farmer advised. Iowa winds in December can kill’ya. I’d get on the road now. He pointed a thick finger. It’s that away.

Down to Kansas. Across Oklahoma. Into Santa Fe. I stopped and finally breathed. Can I suck it thru my nose now? Is the coast clear? I would have to wait & see.

The lower Rockies were massive. Blue. I stood on highway 7. In a narrow valley. At 5 AM. Shivering. The pint of whiskey only made me giddy. The joint made me dreamy and dumb. I was looking for real Indians. Where have I come to? I felt dizzy. There was no traffic. I buried my thumb. All I could do was keep walking. I told Jackie.
When I snuck out of The Home For Boys. Really. I’m not on the run. Really. To this day. I wonder if Jackie believes me. For real.

It’s not so bad. Not having a home. Changing your name everyday with a straight face. Telling cute. Gum popping waitresses. With shiny crosses between their breasts. I believe in everything. Nothing is for losers. And all imaginable is the sum total of one. Like one round planet. One perfect peach. I was in search of that response. That one voice that spoke back.

It’s okay to tell a lie. I suppose. Because you have no name. Only a drifter’s face. Remember. Star fields collide in outer space.

Don’t look up. But I had to. I wanted to go west. And warm. Phoenix would suffice. The name was Greek. The earth was red. A bird erupted from ashes. That’s all made up. That’s okay. So am I.

I said hello to Travis. He pulled to the shoulder. His dog. I named Willy. And his black Ford pickup. Tipped his 10-gallon lid. Howdy. Didn’t say another word. Willy sitting middle. Licked my rosy cheek. Sun on my face at 5 PM. We must be going toward the desert. I was sure we were heading west. I was happy not to talk. I was listening. To the wind. Thru the window. I was fixated. On the road ahead.

Did I mention poor people pick up hitchhikers? Rich people have no time. I guess. For free rides. I wonder what it’s like to be scared. Of people. Or dark ideas. I thank God for not making me suspicious. Let alone a rich guy with no time. For people. Let alone. Dark ideas.

I smiled. Put my hand to my mouth. Starting to giggle. That old mangy cur was beginning to nibble.
A STALKER CHANGED HIS SCENE

Sinead’s Sam Scotch English Irish
Her son her father her brother
Her pale blue lover

These faces came to mind
As I watched her stroll toward that favorite corner market

Fruit-full in the front wicker bins
Green awnings shading a pink Indian summer
I’ve been here before

A sort of specialty shop: chocolates, teas, ribbons, sweet cakes
I see the jolly, bald, apron’d, fat man greet her now

He gives her a rub
She turns around

I’m not sure if she sees me
But I duck behind the black British taxi

She looks closer sensing a stare
I back away

I walk fast
So I never see her enter the fat man’s specialty shop
Where she would smell that mango
Brush the shoulder of her creamy white blouse
Glance at her silver watch
But this no time for her to catch on

To where I walked
Was thru the green pitch
Where I rendezvoused with Machine Gun Bill
Bill Vollmann the bitch

We proceeded to tilt some steel
I mean drink some ale
Forget our cares
Down at the old timers’ pub
*The Changing Dragon*
Off the dock, Greenwich Park
FORT SHERIDAN

The jungle at dawn
Rainy, misty, May, no memories

I think of nothing but the shadows
No reason to determine a past

We move on the creaky train
Becoming fixated on rusty lights
Through the not too distant fog
Between the green trees, green air
North of Chalippi

I halt briefly
Swallow my black-juice
Looking again thinking they’re gone

They are not
They are still
They are not fading
The trees are still

No wind pushes leaves
The foreign flags
Both yellow and blue
Flapless
It is still

I wonder
Will I see this light again?
Beams that offer solitude company?
How amber blazes through green fog?
How I witnessed Fort Sheridan?
A woman smokes. I believe it's French. A filterless cigarette. He may be eating roast beef. The man she's with. He speaks French. My glasses are off. It could be goulash or meatloaf. The waitress stops. Friendliness. I am D. Paul Clay sitting and wondering behind a black cap in Napa where it's sunny with German beer to cool. It's too early to drink the wines of the valley. As the French continues with her heavy smoke drifting over. My direction. Boy they talk fast. Now they know I'm observing them. Flick the green gator on my sport shirt. A distraction. She orders coffee. A word the same in English with a less pretty accent. Kaw-fay? Wouldn't you agree about the accent? There's a pause. No one talks. I start to think a young French girl might like the way a public schoolboy from London might talk. Better than the way she talks. It's modern. We get bored easily. The little French girl wants a change. She wants to move. She wants to revolve. Television shows her the whole thing. Switch the channel. Montreal. Again. Nepal. Again. Tel Aviv. Again. Dublin. Again. New York. You can't blame her. Yet. In the end. If you ask her. What she would die for. I bet she would take the French. If you couldn't change. But you can. Turn your head back on the woman who smokes. She wonders where I was. Since I wasn't looking at her. And her man. Won't ever know I was picturing an English lad talking so proper. You'd think he had a mouthful of marbles. I now gain sight in surrendering the unseen. Children cross the street in front of me. You too don't like the metaphysics? Don't let the cat out of the bag? Don't let the blind lead the blind? That's what I overheard. They go when the light says walk. The square-white-box lights up. I smile as they laugh. Four cute kids. One who carries a red dragon kite with a long black tail. It's a clean California street. You know. The kind in magazines. Shiny. It's almost too good to be true. How the French woman offers me a cigarette as I follow the black tail. Trailing from her hand. Startled. I accept. Thank you. It was a gesture of hello without my asking. It also got my attention. I will now smoke this thing. I don't smoke though. I will now. To be polite. Or stupid. Nonetheless. I can't both write. And smoke. At the same time. I must make a choice. Like the little French girl when put to the test. But don't get me wrong. I like the English too. Excuse me. Do you like it all?

That cigarette was awful. Awfully strong. It was a mistake. The only thing it provided was a small break. Two short spaces signifying a lapse. When I did that thing. To be polite. I'm not very smart. Trying to be nice. But that is all. Since my friend has returned from re-parking the van. Because of a two hour limit. Plus. That nice lady. And her man. Who was thirty years older than she. I bet. Are now gone. And I know one thing. It isn't polite to write. While your friend is here. Only wanting to relax. And exchange. A few ordinary words. Every now and then. Hey Chuck. Everything okay?
POSTMORTEM FINDS

I realized the man in the green tie
Was the man my mother loved

Funny she never gave indication
Let alone had an affair for thirteen years

It seemed unreal
She never said word one
Before dying afloat

It was true I never knew my mother
Or Mr. Cheater in the green tie

I trusted someone so long for nothing
I felt like dog kicked in side

We thought she was in the choir
But she wasn’t singing
It was Sundays at the Kennedy Hotel
Not “Praise the Lord” at St. James Church

As for my dad
I guess he didn’t give a damn
Maybe he didn’t even know
I can’t ask him now

In the end there was nothing left of him
His lawyer asked me if he had cancer
He was worn to the bone by sixty
Brother Richard said he became anorexic
Jessica couldn’t stop shedding her tears
He was a wasted toothpick

Thirty-seven letters placed neatly in a box
Bound by a red ribbon inside our old attic home
Sweet little letters from Mr. Green Tie

What struck me as I read them
Sitting atop an old crate under bright light
Was how she loved his boat
His fifty-foot cabin cruiser named Gloria

My mom cared about a boat?
MY BROTHER

Born headstrong & healthy
Fair-haired & clear eyed

Could climb to a pine tree's top like a cat
Only spitting on me
Always afraid to handle higher branches

But he never did hit
Just joked from fifteen feet above
Shifting his head at the last second
Saliva stringing down
Laughing lightly
*Come higher, brother! There's an opening!*

He just joked about it
He was a good guy
Gay and sanguine
He liked his brother

Never had any doubts either
Never questioned
Or so it seemed
And more triples than me
Seeing his speed around second was equal to mine
His Pete Rose slide far better
Lifting dust at third
*Safe!* Sounds the umpire

I shouldn't deny his other strengths
A top student
The kind you say
*Doesn't have to try*
He could fly
His scores on universal tests soared ninety-nine

The night before the exam
When I was sound asleep by ten
He was up till two a.m. watching a Bogart film

I don't know how he did it
But he did
And without much effort
That’s what made me jealous
The lack of effort

Then he would tell me about Casablanca
That following morning
In a sharp & lucid sequence

Who is this guy?
Wasn’t I the storyteller?

I wasn’t
It was a joke
It is a joke
The joke is on you know who
And I’ll forever hear him
Say that again

When I was ten
He held a special meeting inside my sister’s room
Unlike the boys
Forced to share
She claimed her own space

It was a private space he found
So I knew the dialogue meant business
My brother spoke in declarations:

Never step on anthills
No one knows nothing
Nothing is laid in stone
Christ is most refined
Fairy tales are fairy tales
Some things are not real
Don’t get cute

Then he would ask me
What he told me

As I began a response
He put up his finger
A mere twelve years old
Reminding
You fool
You don’t have to tell me
What I told you
I already told you
No one knows nothing

He would smile & wink
Rotating the story 180 degrees
Or so its opposite
Same as the smile
Used in situations
When the obvious is too evident

He said this
Could not be learned
Then of course
He’d smile or wink
Confirming
It can be learned
Of course some people know things

My head spun
He like when he knew
He made my head spin

But he wasn’t mean
He was working harder than me
Ask Aunt Jill, uncle Joe
I tried to get out of everything
Science homework, math
Early morning nothingness
I only wanted to think about it
Sit there & think

Listen!
He yelled
I drifted off
Telling of my own story

Stop!
Where have you drifted?

All I remember
Is remembering to forget
His words
And mine
To be
Not to be

The dilemma was here
And to reach a for balance
Measure, mean
Nonsense by me
We all must agree
There is no end to this thing
And without end is without balance?

What then is choice?
I chose mine?
Which turns out to be
Both his & mine?

A convoluted story in fact
The story of his and mine

Enough of going around
And then around
There is conclusion
An outcome amid no end

*Wake up!*
That's enough!
He took my hand
In his
Which was rare
For me
For him
To take my hand in his
And say without hostility

*In your time of mortality*
*You will be an artist*
*It will be this way*

What about you?
As if to shrug a compliment
He gave me
Off
But tried to hide
What will you do?
Your vision out-weighs mine
He said nothing to this
He didn’t work like that
What was said was said
What was said he meant

These were his last words before closing our meeting
Making for the door as dad called our names to dinner

And at the table
He gave no indication to me or anyone else
What we had talked about
As if
It was never said

For what was said
My brother felt
Because it had to be said
Was somehow worse than being dead
MOTHER’S QUESTION

She went by Birdie
A name with no history
A tree with no nest
A derivative of fiction

Brother Jack coined it
His job works that way
Fiction works that way
Made easy as the doer
Intimates the real
When in fact it’s a lie

Did she teach me this?
I doubt it
She took the straight and narrow

After church she drove her black Buick to the symphony
Even if the winter light of that windless Sunday
Was gray and midwestern bleak
She went alone
My dad had no knowledge of Bruckner or Brahms
Nor did he want it

As long as I can remember
She was distant
Not her countenance or proximity
Her lack of understanding the infidel
Like the filthy wild animal
Like some very people I know

Instead, she was the believer
The incense, the redemption, the trinity
The little box of confession, the little beads of contrition
The yellow palms, the wine story, the baskets of silver fish
Nine yards in full

We talk not of fiction here
This mother’s to write real about
Especially when you’re considered a filthy one

In total it provided division
Something Mr. Polemic thrives upon
"How" my mother deliberated
"Did my own son turnout so filthy?"

Where did she go wrong?
*How did he become an animal?
*Doesn't he like the mystery?

The "hows" often haunted her
The self-criticism: *I've failed! My son's a heretic!

As if to say my course is abominable
Division and difference
Are not indispensable
The hunt, the hated, Prospero, the avid capitalist, the first profit
The incentive and the insistence
Are they not essential?

Later came her thoughts of "why"

"Why is," I told her
"Is God's work
He made you make me this animal
Filthy at that
Suspended in disbelief"

I'd like the to think the division could be comical
Where else can you find a daydreaming deadman, Karl Marx
A good mother, Stalin, Hitler, MLK
All in the same century?

I've smelled the incense burn, prayed to a Virgin
Been vigilant on his Rising Day
And still, my confusion equals her passion
Could I say: *we cancel each other out?

For me balance is in fact
Way out of whack

But did she really look straight up?
Into thin air? Into stars? Black sky?
Did she really know her son?
Am I gorged by disbelief?
Is Lucifer the Rhino and I the Stump?
She knew I liked theatre
I know I don’t like it here
That’s for sure
This is no theatre

I know what Shakespeare did
And this is no theatre
I know what Richard the Second realized
Ahhh, it’s nothing
That’s theatre!

So pleased was cruel Richard
But he was a shade too late
He killed a lot of strangers along the way
He lost track of his play, his poem, his road, his home
Richard was eased off the rails into nothing
That’s right – he finally came into the light
Just a shade too late

So why couldn’t mother see I love the curtain above all cards?
All mortals oversignified and tragically lame?

I won’t get sucked into life
Like the Lamb to the Lion
I’m bait – that’s for sure
But not hers

No, not in those days
In those day she called to ask
Would you like to come for dinner?
“Of course, mom, your cooking is delectable”

And so we sat happily together
Mother loving her wine
But as I commenced the dialogue
She began to raise her eyes
Who is this filthy animal of mine?
MOVEMENT

I trust this life
With my luck
And the fate
The time and the tempo
The meter and the draw
The lilac and the lily
The bitch and the snob
And of course
The hole in the door
She comes through
Onto you
To love you
For eternity evermore
Like Catullus the Roman
With kisses unbound
Certain of the act
Just by the sound
A dying voice
Going up and down
NO SYMPATHY

Jaco Pastorius  
And Christopher Marlowe  
Were both murdered outside a bar

They were both about thirty  
They were both about art  
They were both about death

One was a bass player  
That be Jaco
One was a poet  
That be Christopher

One lived through the Renaissance  
That be Marlowe
One lived in the 20th century  
That be Pastorius

One was stabbed to death  
As the London train was late  
That be the word man

The other was beaten to a pulp  
Barehanded by three men  
In Manhattan  
His instrument of no use

They were both the very best at what they did  
At least that is what they told them

And in the newspaper's report  
In each of the cases  
Their cause of death read

Fierce Vanity  
Heated Dignity  
Unquestioned Clarity

For that  
For them  
There is no sympathy
MY LOVER, EMILY DICKINSON, AGREES

Evening pushes on
Waves of the sea
Creep to ashore

Windows a crack
Hear the Atlantic
A black phone rings
I will not answer

I'd rather not
Have to say
I'm too lazy to record
A message for you

I'm resting
I'm alone

Yes, I'm resting
I'm alone

You see I'm resting?
Leave me alone!

Yet I'm not alone
I'm not fooling anybody
But the tradeoff is
I'm gone

My lover, Emily Dickinson, agrees
I KNOW WHY I'M HERE

Four farmers mingle in the midway
Eating their meat off a wooden stick
Man! That grease looks tasty!

Those sugared drinks are a country boy's delight
Cotton candy so fluffy pink tickles the little girl's nose
Tami walks in a sleazy halter with a grape snow cone

I ask
What am I doing here

As they shuffle under a faky blue light
August excitement swells with heat
Sweat rolling down off their temples
Not fully blocked by the baseball caps they wear
Hats not promoting the Giants or the Cubs
But farm machines & seed companies they love

That one, he's Gary, paper thin mustache
Reveals John Deere above the brim
That one Pioneer Hybrid
Old Kenny loves Dale Earnhardt
T-shirt & ball cap to boot

That one is quite fat
Topped in Iowa Beef Steaks
His ass is sweating like a river
Not to mention his wife Darlene
I mean Darlene
Who's bigger than
He is big
And he's big!

I won't admit seeing perspiration
Drench a thin vertical down the backside
Of her tight Levi's
But why so tight Darlene
There is no answer

So what am I doing here
The noise is continuous
It clamors steel whining & iron clamps grinding
The motion goes round-and-around
I watch the Ferris wheel turn 360 after 360
It never seems to stop
And I haven't even moved

When I do change direction
I spot a young girl holding a stuffed bear
Father leads *damn-proud-boy*
Knowing full-well he rung that bottle
Three in a row with a plastic red ring
*We have a winner!*

His daughter's bright devotion
Was walking with the life-sized trophy

I ask a third time why I'm here

I drop to one knee
My camera is no use
It's much quicker than that
I feel some space ripple
And the sound of the sea
It's lonely when it stops
I want to come back
I can't take it for long
That being gone

The scene had changed
An old man with overalls
Makes a meandering waltz of confidence
Burning a rich tobacco
Blowing smoke I can smell
Right past my nose

I catch his attention
He winks a perfect *one one-thousand*
And the old farmer walks on

I don't ask anymore
I know why I'm here
WHO I SAW IN HELL

(I)

First I spotted Marvin Bell
Though not here long
A true dead man he was
As well as a man of true words
Why then, I wondered, was he down here?

Next I saw Charles Darwin
The one and only *Six days of creation are a joke*
He was vomiting severely
It was green mostly
He’d eaten hallucinogens allegedly

Of course Freud was visible
Still screaming his blasphemy
Strapped tight in a tub of ice
We all knew why he was here
*Sex crazed freak!*
*Unbelieving bastard!*

In the rear was Oscar Wilde
He was looking horrible
Syphilis was his and deathly thin he was
White where he was not the color of Darwin’s puke
An expression of joy was nowhere found
This once handsome Irishman had gone down
– One too many times

Then I noticed Socrates
All trumped up with confidence
Stuffing legs of lamb into his big fat mouth
Listening to his listener
Like his listener was a dumbshit jackass
Smirking at every interjection
So for this Greek’s infinite conviction
He was forced to hear *All Idiots At Once*
Without fail
And not for a day
Nor a week
Forever
Around the dark damp corner
Was Senor Umberto Eco
A raving Italian lunatic, pirate, womanizer, wordmaker
He was sentenced to this dungeon
On nine counts of malicious laughter
As he hung upside down
Licking a stick of fire
The only thing known to cool that razor sharp tongue

Frank Conroy was also on the scene
Drunk as always like a farmboy’s bitch
Playing pool as if to win
But he only pretended to care
Just to increase his wares
And for this deception
He was sent to hell block forty-one
Where he joined good old John Donne
TELL ME YOU ARE A WINNER

Yesterday a Scotch and soda tasted terrific
Today it tastes awful

Tell me you are a winner

Last week the divine seemed plausible
This afternoon it is ridiculous

Tell me you are a winner

In the sixties peace was cool
At four p.m. war is cooler

Tell me you are a winner

Next Friday you’ll fly to Las Vegas
Tomorrow you’ll ask yourself why

On Easter Sunday you played the pretty boy
New Year’s Day you’re a jackass

Tell me you are a winner

At age sixteen your poetry was unmistakable
At seventy the drivel is rolling

Tell me you are a winner

At twenty-five Shakespeare seemed trite
On your deathbed you realize no one compares

Tell me you are a winner
A REFRESHING DRINK WITH CEIL

Riding double on her Harley Triple Cat
Into the confines of the National Park
Stopping by the tracks
We trek down the slope to Horseshoe Lake
Watching a mother moose forage
In the shallows of the cold lake bottom
Her young calf lingering on the prehistoric edge
Of moss strewn firs

On the bank a hundred yards away
Slugging down bottles of Irish Stout
Sucking in plum tobacco
Matanuska gold

Noonday mosquitoes are swarming
Spinning balls by the dozens
One after the other in my face
I kill three in one swat to my thigh
They even bit at my ears
And that constant buzz!

All the while the moose and her baby
Are in no great hurry
They handle this condition

Is there one place they must be?
Are they already there?

The following day
Alone on a bench wedged into the steep hillside
I scan in the direction of Horseshoe Lake
This time a quarter mile across the river

I spot same moose and her calf
It must be
As they cautiously approach the swift Nenana
Intent upon that icy drink

Frightened and fragile
The calf lifts its head in my direction
I quickly think of Ceil
And wonder
Will she remember me?
A TEMPTING FIND

This morning I found a gun
A handy little luger sport
Nine millimeters across the barrel
   Inside a barn

Black and sleek in my palm
It shone in the noonday sun
I loaded the six chambers
Though it takes only one

The day soon sunk into night
I walked home thru barren fields
   No tall yellow corn
   No stars in the sky

There is nothing more I can do
Nothing more I want to do

I have seen the orange glow and black gun
Shine for the last time

   I rocked in my rocker
   Thought to my self
   Where I might go
   Believing only in the dust

   The hungry dogs howled
   Cats screeched
   Birds stopped singing
   A hot breeze filled my nose

   I put the barrel into my mouth
   Spoke a garbled fuck you
   And waited

   Waited more before pulling it out
   Throwing it down
   The gun skidding across the wooden planks
   And somehow, someway
   For some reason
   Rocked on
MAYBE THAT’S JUST ENOUGH

 Certain times I believe
 In a spirit, a gut feeling, a fixation of
 The big image, omnipotence
 A consciousness that pulls connections tight
 Something in the sky, the air
 A force setting the earth astride

 I was in Matanuska
 The green valley of Alaska

 Walking alone on a desolate road
 Round red-orange dropping dusk
 The day had been spotless
 Caribbean skies of blue
 Sixty degrees north latitude
 Seventeen below zero
 Drinking in mountain air
 Snowy white all the way around
 My face numb and rubbery

 There was no traffic this Christmas day
 As I proceeded west at a languid pace

 I didn’t feel anxious
 I felt a rare presence
 And words dribbled out

      Maybe he did see the bush ablaze
      Maybe it wasn’t a sandbar he walked upon
      A sandbar?
      Maybe he did arrive on a white horse
      Maybe it’s true
      True?
      Not because I want it
      Because it is

 I continued down the open road home
 A feeling of acceptance stuck
 Where upon sitting in my tiny cabin
 A little bench and yellow lamplight
 Russian novels to my right
 Stoking the stove with birch logs
 I said aloud
That doesn't happen often
Without a doubt
I believe in possibility
A myth not a myth
But real history

Maybe that's good
Maybe that's just enough
DEAD SQUIRREL

Can’t stand the sight of road kill
    Makes my stomach heave
Some think I’m a softy
    Shouldn’t a real man handle blood and guts
With ease?

I’d like to think it’s about caring
    Knowing full-well
What a shame such an accident caused

Flat dead squished from its hide
    I must care
If I didn’t
    My stomach wouldn’t heave
Would it?

The gold fur
    Tar-stained
Sadness

It was this sorrow that got me reflecting

When I was a boy
I sang about a dead squirrel who came back to life
    Played possum really
Just pretending he was finished
    I couldn’t handle the truth

It went like this:

Dead squirrel on the side of the road
Dude picked him up and took him to the vet
Vet said he couldn’t do anything about it
    Threw him in the dungeon
Snuck out the back door and said
    Boom! Boom!

Wrote that as a boy
When I was about five
When I traveled far
With my big brothers, big sister
    And parents
In a big old wagon

It cured the boredom and monotony of the road
The singing that is
    The caring
WHAT A LITTLE COKE CAN DO

Two kids on a summer’s day
Crying inside an old station wagon
Outside the Safeway grocery store
Oakland, California

They are cute as dolls
But not fake

I get closer to see
As they bawl their eyes out
Stopping to say
Through the slightly cracked window
You real men want some coke?

They cease weeping
One looks to the other
I’m sure they’re brothers

They resume with tears
They don’t trust me
So I say again
Come on, guys
Wouldn’t you like a little coke?

This time they brighten up
Sending me to the source
Delivering the coins
Slapping the sign
And not one
But two
Shiny red Cokes appear

I bring the sodas back
To big brown eyes of disbelief

As for now
The two of them have quit crying
Inside an old wagon
Outside the Safeway
Oakland
CHICAGO ART INSTITUTE

Atop the west facing steps at rush hour
I admire a young couple with their small child

This baby amuses many
Including its grandparents
As it yawns and smiles in a little sailor’s suit

There must be a private showing
Since an 18th century marching band
Clad in the festive color of British red
Pipe and snare above their white knickers
Black patent leathers

They form two lines of four facing one another
As a trail of guests looking illustrious
File between them in a well-timed musical procession
Into the stone museum
Now closed to an ordinary public

Guys like me and fifty or so others
Who linger about on the outside

I wonder
Is it the occasion when the elite views a Goya?
The possibility of a Renoir?
*Two Sisters Sitting on the Terrace?*
A long landscape gaze on a big Turner?
Or the naked modern photographs
Hanging black-and-white on the walls of the basement?

Have you been inside this khaki colored building?
Its façade of lion carvings?

In other directions
An attractive woman of thirty-three stands column-side
Born with the soft pale complexion of a Scandinavian
Finely fitted in a pink blouse and navy slacks
She snaps and clicks photographs of those lucky enough to enter

I've now persuaded myself to inquire
Who these dignitaries might be
Maybe they are patrons
True philanthropists
Even artists themselves?

Though that quickly
I’ve changed my mind again
Not wanting to bother the pretty blond with the Nikon

Instead
I make my way down the steps
Getting a closer look at the baby boy
Still being adored by all
GHOST TALK

Combustion and fire exhausting words and thinking in the new direction of lyrical perfection a balance of stability taste and pleasure where contact is made not pulling or pushing the listener simply glowing in some strange invisible fashion without message without substance but not without hope and most certainly not without you.
OSCEOLA

Midnight at the station
Nothing is around
Platform 1
Except the rare blowing wrapper
And a teenage couple
Getting all lovey-dovey
Curl[ed together on hard cement

I am alone
The stationmaster is fast asleep
A big moon is low and alive
It is also amber
Like the overhead lights
Shedding fossil resin colors
From tall steel poles

A warm summer air
Is in perfect south breeze
I listen through a headset
Keeping all rhymes at ease

It's drama music
A kind of undone music
Music of the next
Music of no past
The let's try for a while
To make it up as we go along
Kind of music
I hear jazz

I see the moving lights
A bright one centered middle
It being most pronounced
Here comes Crazy Horse
Here comes the train

I look to the moon
Just shy of a billion stars
I look to the young couple
Snuggled into one brownish-yellow ball
I look back west to the approaching glow

It's now I realize
Without a doubt
Southern Iowa
America
Is a lovely place tonight