



Turning Tide

Bruce Schauble

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Yard Work

62 Croton Avenue

We are gathered together by the fire:
Father in his easy chair, hidden
behind the evening Herald,
Mother with her feet up on the hassock,
devoted to her Ellery Queen.
I sprawl on the rug, dividing myself
between *Treasure Island* and the flames
dancing orange and blue around
the branches of the summer's apple tree,
split and stacked over the andirons.

On my back, I scan the rough-cut beams
anchoring the ceiling like the ribs of a schooner.
The lamp above my mother's head sheds light
reflected in panes of blackened glass.
The clock on the mantle reads quarter to eight.
Soon, my mother will put aside her mystery,
my father will rise to lift another log onto the fire,
and I will be sent to bed. But now there is still time
for a few more pages. I draw closer to the hearth,
settle at my mother's feet, and begin again to read.

Sisters of Charity

Sister Mary Vincent was 80 years old
and wore rimless glasses to keep her aim
with the thimble she had attached to a string.

She was good with that thimble: she'd mount
it on her finger and let fly from fifteen feet:
thwack! She'd never miss. Well, anyway,

when Ermino Spadino, the janitor's son,
turned around in his seat to pick up the pencil
Carolyn Halstead had dropped on the floor,

she let loose with the thimble and then she swept
down upon him. In raising his arm to fend her off
he brushed her habit with his hand.

"How dare you hit a religious?!" she screamed,
and grabbing him by the hair, raised him
from his seat and dragged him to the blackboard,

against which she smashed his head again
and again until he could no longer stand,
Then hauled him back into his seat, let him drop

and strode back out to the front of the room.
Glaring at us, she straightened her rosary, took up
her catechism, and went right on with the lesson.

Station

The platform is quiet, the air
at dusk warm and thick. I stand
with my mother by the tracks,
listen for the distant rumble
of the train, look over the edge
into the pit, where the steel
rails glisten in a bed of coal,
cigarette butts, and crumpled pages
from the *Daily News*. No one
speaks. Then—we hear before
we see—it comes: a vibration
against the soles of the feet,
a rumble that becomes a roar,
a swath of yellow light as
the locomotive takes the last
curve, and then, in a rage
of swirling sound, bears down
upon us, wheels churning, sparks
flying. I jump back from the blast
of wind and dust. Hissing, screeching,
the train shudders to a halt.
Conductors in blue and gold
place stepstools on the platform,
then stand aside as the businessmen
step down from the train. We search
their faces as they stride past us
and into the night. And suddenly,
("There he is!") I see my father's face.
I run toward him. He reaches out.
I can almost feel his touch.

Yard Work

Spring arrives, clear and dry. Out back,
my father and I collect branches
and twigs, pile them on the brush heap.
Blown against the fence, our Christmas tree,
now brown and dry, trails tinsel as
we drag it over and toss it on top
of the pile. It's time. My father takes
newspaper and shoves it beneath
the twigs and leaves at the bottom.
"Stand back now, son," he tells me.
From his pockets he pulls a pack
of matches, tears one out. He bends
and strikes, then—cupping his hands
against the breeze—lights the fire.

First a curl of smoke, then orange fingers
fan upward. Upward! Leaping, the flames
catch and claw. The first lick touches the tree,
and with an enormous crackling *whoosh!*
it blazes, a yellow wall against the sky.
Lashed by the heat, I stumble back into
my father's arms. I stand stunned, shielding
my face, as black vapors stream skyward,
hissing; my eyes sting and tear. In seconds,
the tree is turned to black bones; the flames
subside. Cool air sweeps my face. Behind me,
my father stands. In silence we watch
the crumbling limbs burn slowly down to ash.

Widow's Peak

You sit at your office desk,
well-appointed: dark suit and vest,
French cuffs, gold links, silk tie.
Your fine dark hair, neatly trimmed,
is carefully parted and combed back,
accentuating the high forehead,
the widow's peak.

Your elbows rest lightly on the edge
of the desk. Your hands are full.
In the right, a ball pen, point
extended, ready should you need it.
In the left, a cigarette, momentarily
forgotten, smoke drifting off
toward the window.

Between your hands you stretch
the two stapled pages of a document
you have been reading, one of many
stacked at odd angles over your desk.
Page one has already been turned;
you hold before you the second page,
as yet unread.

You have just looked up with an indulgent
smile—someone has walked in with a camera.
(I wonder who it was, how it happened.)
It should have been a perfect picture;
but at the moment the shutter snapped,
your eyes closed. There must not have been time
for another.

Joyride

My sister's boyfriend had this car,
a '51 Ford—slate grey, fleshy and rounded,
with fat, heavy whitewall tires that rolled flat
the pebbles in our driveway.
He took me for a ride, once,
up on the Sawmill River Parkway;
made me sit in the back seat,
secure in plush velvet the color of ashes.

Out on the highway, he opened her up,
pushing 55, 60, 65. Through the open windows
the wind whipped my face and eyes,
trees and fenceposts blurred away,
and all we could see was the open
road racing to meet our wheels.
My blood and breath rose with the roar
of the engine, and leaning forward,
straining into the exhilaration of
speed and abandonment, I shouted
into his ear. *Faster!* I begged him,
Go faster! Easing his foot off
the pedal, he brought her back under
control, and laughed at me.
What's the matter, kid?
You in a hurry to die?

Altar Boy

Confirmation Day, and I must hold the crozier.
In cassock and surplice I stand at attention,
heavy golden staff in my hands, and watch
the bishop, clanking thurible against chain,
stride corpulently back and forth, back and forth
in front of the sweltering congregation. As he chants
the Latin prayers, blue smoke pours into air
already moist and thick. I take deep breaths
to try and clear my head. For a time, this seems
to work. Then the room rolls: what is this?
Leaning on the staff, I blink and sweat, I watch
in horror as the floor rises spinning to my face
and explodes.

Someone is calling my name.

A cool breeze grazes my forehead. I open my eyes
to sky, trees, concerned faces. *Are you okay, son?*
Here, drink this. Sipping water from the proffered cup
I find myself whole, sanctified, on the steps
outside the church.

Walking to School

Walking to school, he pauses to consider the ripples of water in the puddles at his feet, the undulating reflection of the clouds in the water, the leaves in sharp focus at the bottom as the wind ceases and the water comes clear; and then, hearing a rustle in front of him, he looks up to see two squirrels chasing each other across the street and up into one of the leafless maples at the corner, circling the trunk on the way up into the wide, skeletal branches outlined against the sky; and as his eye moves to the endless blue expanse of empty sky his mind whirls backward into memory and he is once again lying on his back on the moss on top of Kisco Mountain, hands behind his head, watching the sky and listening as Suzanne speaks to him about her childhood, her father's rages, her mother's tears, the inevitable divorce, her move to Kisco, where she—miraculously—has come to be his neighbor; and as he listens, he wants to turn to her, to hold her to him, to somehow save her from the pain of the past and the pain that is yet to come, but he does not have the words, and he does not reach out to her, and his failure at that moment is what makes him close his eyes to the sky and open them again to the street, where he is putting one foot in front of another on his way to school, where there will be other people, other girls, laughter and noise to fill the hollow he feels inside his chest as he turns into the schoolyard, hears the ringing of the bell, starts to trot, and then to run.

Presence

Incarnation

Naked, you float, water pulsing
at your sides. Lie back and fin
slowly against the waves, feel
the ripples roll over your skin.

High above, the silent stars
explode across the darkened skies.
You drift, and contemplate
life's ultimate uncertainties.

Around you, water swirls in fitful
currents over rock and sand,
whispering all you need to know
in language you can't understand.

Chess with Reice

He's humming to himself. Knuckles
to his nose, he rocks back and forth,
studies the board, green eyes darting
from side to side. Now he nibbles
a nail, reaches toward the rook, thinks
better of it, returns the hand
to his lap. He taps his foot, sighs,
squints, shrugs, begins again to hum.

Vocation

You have just come up from the cellar
with a basket full of clothes. The phone rings, surprise!
Who could it be? What news?
"You have just inherited a million dollars!"
Fantastic! What will you do with the money?
Hire a maid? Buy a yacht? Move to Rio de Janeiro?

Instead, it's Phyllis, your next door neighbor.
She wants to know if you can water her plants
next week while she's in the hospital;
she's having an artificial hip put in.
You say sure, you'd be happy to, and wish her luck.
You make a note on the calendar for Tuesday: Visit Phyllis.

You hang up. The house is settled and quiet.
The sun streams in through the windows. You sit
for a moment, watching the walls and listening
for something that isn't there. After a few
moments, you give it up. You reach for the basket
and begin to fold the clothes.

Rock

You sit beside the lake, solid and warm
in morning sun. Weathered lichen softens
your sharpness into strength. In silence
you survey your several kingdoms: water,
earth, sky. I climb over, find on your face
a concave ledge: rough-cut easy chair
or throne. Together, then, we watch.

In shallows lit by sunlight, catfish
fingerlings glide and turn in the weeds.
Farther out, clouds and wind make of the
water's surface a curtained mirror, soft
and quick. Swallows skim the glass.
A snapping turtle pokes his nose up from
under, regards us for a moment, and dis-
appears. Fish are leaping up, going after
the dragonflies hovering helicopter-like
over the water. We hear splashes, but
we are never quick enough to see them
jump. It doesn't matter. Across the water,
a band of green: another place, another time.

Night

The day draws to a close. The shades of night
advance across the surface of the earth.
A blaze of light ignites the western sky,
while in the east the first emerging stars
hang blinking in the branches of the trees.
The sun has set. And now the darkness lies

in deepening pools among the hills. What lies
ahead? Will you wander restless through this night,
or lie becalmed beneath this canopy of trees
and wait for sleep or consolation? The earth
around your feet grows cold. You face the stars,
consider how to reach, beyond the blackened sky,

whatever answers may be there. The sky
will contend as willingly with prayers as lies.
What is it then you wish to know? The stars
wink at your indecision. Beyond the night
is silence; the only sound above the earth
the wind that riddles the branches of the trees

beneath which now you make your bed. The trees
are black and hard against the midnight sky,
holding its breath above the smothered earth.
You watch the sky, and think about the lies
you've told to bring you to this night,
this place, this bed of stone beneath the stars.

And what have been the consequences? The stars
will bear no witness against you. The trees
will not remark your lack of faith. The night
is blind to your transgressions. Even the sky
itself cannot from its distance tell lies
from truth; men wander from one end of the earth

to the other and leave no mark. The earth
remains, and your life passes. Even if the stars
could speak, what reason would there be? Your lies
are insignificant, as pitiful as the trees
whose swaying, creaking arms reach for the sky
and beg the distant sun for strength against the night.

So now, you sleep. The night descends. The earth
spins on. The eastern sky is empty. The silent stars
shine on the trees which mark the place your body lies.

Presence

- after reading Seamus Heaney's "Field of Vision"

If you gaze in one direction long enough—
it doesn't matter which, so long as you
do it patiently, reflectively—an inkling
of the mysterious begins to assert itself:
majesty of tree against sky, reaching
after itinerant sun with imperceptible in-
clination; painstaking progress of shadow
on clapboard; faintest touch of wind
stirring the golden elasticity of living
branch and bough. Enough, after all,
to do nothing more than breathe, bear
witness, be present to such clarity.

Against the Wind

- Coast Guard Station, Eastham, 1972

The wind has risen quickly. On the deck
of Eastham Light I stand and watch the gusts
manipulate the long grass on the dunes
and listen to the distant thudding surf
 beneath the blackening sky at six o'clock.

Above my head a seagull flies against
the crossfire of the wind. He beats and beats,
but barely holds his own. Somewhere upwind
is a place to rest, ride out the rising storm;
 red-eyed and heavy-armed he makes his way.

One stormy night in Hillsdale years ago
my brother came home drunk. He beat his fists
against locked doors; my mother stood her ground.
He gave it up, and blindly swung about,
 and inch by staggering inch into the wind,

found his way into the barn, and there he slept
until next morning, when I went to check
on how he was. At first he did not move,
—my heart went still—then slowly raised his head,
 refusing the temptation to fall back,

sat up, and smiled at me. "Hey champ,
you bring me breakfast?" So we begin again.
That night we sat together by the fire
playing chess. My mother read her romance;
 soon darkness smothered everything but sound.

I close my eyes. The wind whips round my head,
the first bullets of water hit my face.
I turn my collar up against the storm,
prepare to go inside. Down on the shore,
 wind-driven waves break on the distant rocks.

*Beneath the blackening sky at six o'clock
Red-eyed and heavy-armed he makes his way
Inch by staggering inch into the wind,
Refusing the temptation to fall back.
Soon darkness smothers everything but sound:
Wind-driven waves break on the distant rocks.*

Invitation

The wind brakes squealing against the rocks;
thickets shake and moan. Baked by the sun,
the mud at riverside shines against your smiles;

fish dart into shadowed pools. The snakes squirm
and roil; clouds roll like drums. Out on the water,
the song of the sky is wide and white and cold

as the mother of stars must be. Why wait
any longer? The crows are perched and watching
as you build the fire, but the tinder is heavy

and black as bones. Now butterflies begin to dance
above the burning sacrifice. The sun descends
as smoky fingers reach out, embrace the night.

Change



At Forty Nine

Wind blows across the mountain.
The wild goose draws near the tree,
Hoping for a flat branch.
Why is it so hard to find
a resting place, abide,
devoted and gentle, in peace?



Kazakhstan

Son: you seek the fire in the lake,
embers of revolution,
carry the heat to your heart.
Wrapped in the hide of a yellow cow,
You reinvent yourself,
Holding your hand into the blue flames.



Rope

The knot has become tangled
And now we snarl and look to blame
Tightening the cords that choke us.
It comes down again to this:
How to achieve a quiet heart,
Change our struggle to an embrace?



34

The Call of Stories

Why does the goat attack the hedge?
Does he think, deep in his goat-brain,
The hedge is an enemy?
Or is he just trying to get out?
And what lesson can we draw
From the fact that he gets stuck?



36

Injury

She walks lightly through the soft rain
Her fire contained in the cool smile
She sprinkles in all directions
But one. From that space, a set of eyes
Tries not to be drawn back into
That helpless, devouring pain.



54

Poker

Once a week on Friday
The outlaws gather for the game
The army blanket goes down
The chips come out, the universe
Scales itself down to these men,
This laughter, these falling cards.



Ceremonial

At the edge of the lake, a crowd
gathers to watch the priest light the fire.
The warriors attend closely
to the chant of this ancient man
whose voice calls forth thunder
from deep within the darkened earth.

On the sand, the canoes are poised
like sharpened arrows. A woman
brings her infant to the altar.
The priest raises his hands and prays.
Swords and spears shine in readiness.
There can be no turning back.



Embarkation

The wind drives over the water
carving blades of foam and mist
that slash us where we stand.
We have scooped out tree trunks
for boats and hardened our oars
in the fire. All is ready.

Look around. We will not see
this place again. Already the stones
are beginning to shift beneath
our feet. By tomorrow, this world
will be lost to us. Come, step into
the boat; let us be gone.

Dancing with Dylan

Antiphonal

Which words arise from under you?

Poker. Guitar. Finger. Blue.

When does the spirit come to call?

Hammer. Death. Candle. Crawl.

What's the most important thing?

Gold. Grass. Huddle. Spring.

Who's the one inside your head?

Blood. Song. Frantic. Bread.

What happens out there in the dark?

Neon. Snatch. Begonia. Spark.

How much more should I explain?

Earth. Wind. Sky. Rain.

Apparition

Driven forward by the passing of days, weeks,
and now, it appears, even years, the pilgrim
awakens once more to the touch of wind,
the sound of birdsong in the branches of the oak
above him. Dampness of leaves, taste of air,
scent of smoke from just beyond the distant barn.
His bones protest as he stands, stooped,
and brushes the leaves and dirt from his vestments,
runs his fingers through his hair. The sun just rising
over the hill ahead, fog in pockets over the field.
He reaches for the satchel and cane at his feet.
Turning his face to the light, he starts to walk.

Mendicant

I.

In your dream, boxes drift into one another,
squeeze all the oxygen out of what air there is.
No two can occupy the same space, but there
is not enough room to lay them end to end.
Eventually, you make choices: sunlight or
shadow, the parrots or the flamingos. It would
feel good to drive a convertible, but of course
they're not practical, never mind safe. You'd like
to find your way out from among these boxes,
but the walls keep moving around on you.

II.

The skin listens to the mirror and smiles
at the incongruity of light magic. Configurations
present themselves: rectangles now, green ones,
blue ones, cascading across the night sky—this one,
that one, this one. To whom can one speak of this?
What do you dream of when you dream alone?
The years fly by like blackbirds; you search the sky
for signs of an approaching storm. Nothing yet.

III.

Alongside the shore, a canoe sparkles
in the sun. Its music is to your ears
the song of life itself. No horse more swift
than this yearning, no single moment
it does not color even your recreations.
You smell the salt air, hear the breakers
just off the point. You think perhaps
there is still time, but you do not move.
The sun slides behind clouds piled against
the horizon like the mountains of a faroff land.

IV.

Tonight the streets are alive, they seem to respire and glide as you walk along the beach at the ocean's edge. Why choose to walk alone on such a night? The sun has fallen into the water. The horizon blazes orange and red. The shadows lengthen beneath the banyan trees, cars glide by, radios thumping. In the park someone is playing slack-key guitar; the notes tease you, drifting in and out on the air like the scent of plumeria.

V.

You awake from a dream. The window squeezes the morning light. The memory of the dream lingers in scattered pieces: something about Mother, something about a canoe. You yearn to return to that dream, but the day is upon you. The sun is rising over the mountain, already the streets are filling with traffic, the birds are singing outside the window, the new day awaits whatever you can bring to make it real.

VI.

At the mouth of the cave, Siddhartha watches the sun rise, the sun set. He feels the wind on his shoulders, the sunlight on his brow. Yesterday was no different; tomorrow is tomorrow. It will come soon enough. He does not concern himself with what it will bring. He is where he is. and nowhere else. When he dreams the dream of boxes, they are empty and benign.

Dancing with Dylan at the Brockton Mall

"Oh, mama, can this really be the end..."

At Central Music, guitars glow golden
under track lights, amps—silver framed
in black— in a sturdy circle stand sentry,
keeping the crowd at the edge of the shadow
from storming the floor as Dylan, smiling
in leather vest and porkpie hat, reaches
for my hand, leads me out under the lights,
brings his bearded cheek next to mine,
whispers into my ear: *Let's dance*. The band
strikes up a rhumba and we glide onto
the showroom floor. This and nothing more.

Later, in the parking lot, my car is gone.
I stagger up and among the rows and rows
of other people's cars, waving my arms, tears
streaming down my cheeks as I picture my wife
and son at the table, embarked on another
silent dinner beside my empty plate. I wander
into in a field, waist-high in meadow grass,
stumble down into a stand of apple trees,
black branches thrown like withered arms
against a lowering sky. How have I arrived
in this place? How will I ever get back?

Plangent Dreaming, Baby

Plangent dreaming, baby,
this time not of you, but
of rain-sodden Manoa streets,
Long's Drug glistening
like Christmas, hiss of cars
muscling by like insects,
exoskeletons apulse,
thump of rock fading
to black patter as they pass
in the night. Faint voices
from behind the Safeway,
and then, for a moment
—this moment—nothing at all
but breath and blood,
while, just over there,
Tantalus sleeps, dreaming
perhaps of lava rushing
raw and reckless all the way
through Waikiki—buildings
ablaze, streets buckling—
and rolling triumphant
into the welcoming waves.
Or maybe He doesn't sleep,
but merely watches, waits
for you and me to meet—
if not tonight, no matter—
to make love, to melt, to age,
to disappear like all the others
who have danced to their deaths
at the edge of His dream.

Sunday Morning

Waking up, you lift your head
and look at the clock: 5:45.
Outside the window, old rain.
You sigh, roll over, pull the covers
up around your neck, bury
your head back into the pillow,
and drift back into your dream:

You lie on a beach in Honolulu,
drenched in warm sun. The ocean
glistens green below your blanket,
the scent of plumeria hangs in the air.
Your plane leaves for the mainland
in one hour; you are trying to decide
whether or not to be on it. The sun
beats down, the waves roll in
and spend themselves on the sand.

Lying there, you picture yourself
looking out the window of the plane
as it arcs into the sky. Far below,
the island shrinks into the mist
and disappears. There is nothing left
to see but clouds. This flight
will take hours. You close your eyes
and try to sleep; you're on your way
back home.

Extrapolations

1

it begins in wonder, a nagging
at the back of the brain,
a dark area crowding in at the edge
of the chart, demanding... something,
a response, a second look

2

the attraction of amusements:
crosswords, shooting baskets, skimming
the newspaper—time to be spent where
nothing is at stake except the accumulating
guilt which will eventually drive one
(a careful pronoun) back to work

3

the alternate zones that reside within
and around the reality zone: the selves one posits
and plays out in one's mind; the reluctant
discipline of putting down these toys
in order to inhabit one's own life

4

just yesterday I felt it again, that longing
for one of two things; to have another life,
or to be better at living this one—even
right here, right now, I sit behind a shade
blocking out the Sunday afternoon sun
in order to be here, writing this...

5

green things beginning to stick up
out of the ground again, out of the mud
the crocus, out of the leaves the grass:
within the cycle the spiral, within
the spiral the flower, within the flower
the scent of spring, green things beginning

6

another question: what is it
that needs to be said? if silence
is to be broken, should not the words
serve some purpose? and in this case,
what necessity, what urge, what
justification can there be?

7

of what I have to say, I dare not speak
of what I have to do, nothing need be said
of what remains of my days in this life
I no longer feel certain to judge,
only to attend patiently, await developments...

8

out of the morning, a song arises
alive with purpose we pump ourselves
across the threshold of the day into
our lives; until, at the end of the day,
we come home, make dinner, water the garden;
out of the evening, a song descends

9

rain the color of blood drives
down from the blackened sky,
sirens in the smoking streets
screech back blue notes crushing
even the tattered remnants of hope

10

if this is a question (if you have
a question) and you want an an-
swer (and why would you not?)
there can be little amusement in
turning this into anything else
no matter what you might wish it to be

Et Cetera

The abridged version would sound something like this: forty-two is the soft white underbelly of twenty-one, and who knows where we go

from there. Pick your metaphor: a funnel, a tunnel, a five-o'clock shadow, a long slow ride into the setting sun. Each day an imperfect

replica of the last, or, seen from another angle, an angel, replacing nothing. Literally, a movement: earth become heart become earth again. Time

is transparent but still demands its pound of flesh. You are dimly aware of this but choose to ignore it, except at odd intervals, most often

late at night, when you loiter before nodding off, waiting to see if something of significance might perhaps yet show up so that you can let go

of this day and steel yourself for the next. What are you waiting for, exactly? Why hold out for something more, something better, something

other than what is already here? Tick, tock, tick. You already know how the story ends. It seems pointless to try to change it. And yet,

and yet, here we are, you and I, participants in this ceremony of hope: I speak, you listen, we watch to see if the tree will bear fruit,

if the check will arrive in the mail, if these words will find their ideal shape and perhaps carve the line that will rescue for us this moment, and others.

Turning Tide

The Third Movement

Begins with the breezes:
 beneath the darkening sky,
 the veiled moon

radiating silver luminescence,
 casting blue shadows
 under the banyans,

the sand sparkling like glass
 needles, the waves breaking
 insistently over the rocks,

salt spray exploding into moon-
 flowers against the stars.
 Is it then not better to dance?

Turning Tide

The sea is dark. The moon hangs white above the clouds
and lights his way into the night. He stands on deck,
watching the black water roll beneath his prow.
There's nothing here to see he has not seen till now.
The air moves like a hand across his brow.
The engine throbs. The sound fades in his wake.

The night is empty as a shroud. The water shines
in silence; the moon rolls bright across his prow.
There's nothing here to see he has not seen till now.
He stands on deck. The air moves like a hand
across his brow. The moon sails white above the clouds.
He watches the black water roll beneath the prow.

Seven Sailboats

One

Flies before the wind
heads into the sun. Salt spray
streams over the bow.

Two

Sails only at night,
cruises the dark havens,
seeks smoldering shadows.

Three

Always on time, sticks
to the channel, carries
the children and the mail.

Four

Sails with the fleet,
mingles in the festival,
omnipresent, transparent.

Five

Takes on all comers,
tacks into the current,
dares the tide to rise.

Six

Bobs softly at the pier,
polished and trim. Landsmen
come aboard for cocktails.

Seven

Haunts the horizon,
always on the edge of sight,
cruises bitter waters alone.

At Sea

The working of the waves has begun to unravel the ropes that hold his raft together. Three months he has been adrift on this empty sea, and his eyes have grown weak from searching the horizon for any sign of land. The days at least provide the work of sustenance: snaring angelfish and drying them on the broader logs, shielding them from the scavenger birds which arrive unbidden from that place to which he has been unable to return and swoop at him, eyes ablaze and screaming. The sun beats down relentless, and he shades his head beneath the canopy he has fashioned from wood scrapings. But at night there is nothing he can do, and the raft twists and creaks on the water as he sits rocking under the faint light of the stars, muttering what lines he can remember from Dickinson and Frost over and over again as if in prayer and scanning the sky for any sight of the moon who has hidden herself behind banks of dark, impenetrable clouds. The night is cold and long and when at last he sleeps even his dreams are haunted by the slap of the waves, the crying of the gulls, and visions of finding his way home.

Thirteen Ways of Thinking about Silence

Moment when the wind ceases

At the top of the cliff at the quarry, the held breath before the dive

Just after you shut the lights, exit the classroom, and the door clicks shut
behind you

The outwardness of thought

A cloud passing over the face of the summer sun

Between the symphony's final chord and the beginning of the applause

Breeze over the surface of the lake

Reading room at the university library, late afternoon light streaming through
the mullioned windows onto the burnished mahogany tables

Snow at three a.m.

Answer to an unarticulated question

Voice of a shadow

A kiss

Out Front

The forecast: snow, beginning as squalls, increasing in intensity throughout the night. Six to eight inches

by morning, continuing into the late afternoon: total accumulations well over a foot. You watch

out the window as the cars slide by in the dark, their headlights at first yellow but now white and jittery

as the snowflakes jump and swirl like tiny moths in their tunnels of light. From your window you can see

only the tips of the grass now; soon nothing will show. You pull from the closet wool socks, boots, knit cap,

hooded sweatshirt, parka, insulated gloves. It takes a full five minutes to get dressed. You belt your jacket

tight at the waist, open the kitchen door, step out into the night. Beneath the streetlight the snow

streams down, the only sound the almost inaudible feathery held breath of hundreds, thousands, millions

of snowflakes settling simultaneously over the lawn, the sidewalks, the branches of the trees which loom

overhead like shadows in a dream. The night air nibbles at your skin with teeth like glass. The blood

has left your cheeks; your fingers sting. The shovel is where you left it by the door. Shaking off the snow,

you start scraping the porch and steps. The slush beneath the powder is beginning to freeze. If you don't clear the drive

now, before the ice sets, you'll be walking on ruts and ridges for weeks. You bend over, push the blade forward until

the snow bunches up and folds over itself, then lift the handle and toss the snow off to the left, where it lands

with a soft watery thump. Stepping back and to the left, you go through the motions again: push, lift, toss, step;

push, lift, toss. The work has its rhythm, your muscles
respond. The driveway emerges black under your blade

as you move across and forward, forward and across.
When you pause to look back, the path you have cut

is already disappearing behind you, lost in new snow.
The flakes are turning into pellets now; falling faster,

they bounce as they hit the back of your hood and jacket.
Your body warms inside its cocoon of cotton and feathers.

Now you are another creature, something of the night,
something of the storm. It no longer seems strange to be

out in the dark. Your feet and arms and back know what
to do. As you shuffle along, your breath turns white in front

of your face. The sleet falls from the night sky unrelenting,
its thin hiss a whisper from the darkness, the life to come.

St. Helena

Hands clasped behind his back, he stands
scowling before the open window. The sky
is black; the air thick with the threat

of rain. In the harbor below highmasted ships
huddle and rock in the face of the storm howling
in from the east. He stares out unseeing,

his mind skimming over fields of ruin, ruin:
staff splintered, forces in disarray, his dreams
of winning back what had been his flown

like the leaves now blowing over the stone sill
invisible before him. In the distant pounding waves
he hears marching feet, in gusts of wind

the muffled sounds of his men falling
to their knees and collapsing in the mud
in front of him. The salt spray from the sea

streams down his face and drips to the floor;
he feels it as blood draining from the wounds
which have left him scarred and insensible

where he stands. Behind him, a door slams.
Coming to, he pulls the window shut,
retreats and settles himself into the chair

by the hearth. Dying flames caress the coals
as they throb, shudder, and dissolve into ash.
He stares, fighting sleep. The crackle and hiss

of the fire lull him at last. He closes his eyes,
pulls the blanket up around his shoulders,
surrenders to the dreams he knows by heart.

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The six-line poems in the "Change" section are based on coin oracles conducted as prescribed in the *I-Ching*. Each individual line contains same number of syllables (6, 7, 8, or 9) as the number generated in the toss of the coins.