

David Allen Sullivan

8 Poems

BOY BREAKS LIGHT BULB GLASS

A Golden Shovel version of Gwendolyn Brooks's Boy Breaking Glass

There's a raw kind of art
(self aware
that self harm severs tendons of faltering faith)
in this seven-year-old who's the première
practitioner of applying pressure when he wraps fingers round a filament
and sears barbarous shards and metal twists into the palm of his little hand.

Send me back! Throat-notes claw his mouth hole
to overturn this forced separation from mother-nation, this desecration.

He's packed with pleas and curses, cut by light,
salted by bordering school nights, carries frightened cargo.

*I'm not a blank
for you to fill in, an extension
of your fucked-up grief—each to
their own loneliness—losers! I'm fighting for revenge
on all you nobodies who know where I was and think I no longer belong there.*

The insanity of juice boxes and cups of chamomile tea,
as if that could calm the mad music of this minor.
Each of us an Other
to the other, battling the hurricane rains of his strange weather.

*Fuck you! You shit on mama's name,
keep sayin' she don't want me.*

I pin him down, pull glass from his bloody lobster claw, trash talk his hopes for a reunion luau.
Shards glint in this darkened dorm room where he kicks at liberty,
fueled by runaway hopes. He's no sloppy amalgamation,
no mistake—
he's a cliff-
face, a fallen hymn, a snarl, and I'm a busted, heatless son.

SPENT ROUNDS OF SOUNDLESS MOONS

Luna Maria Barivan, born/died January 2nd, 2004

1.

Each full moon I talk to her.
My ghost fish. My white lozenge.
Bullet hole in black velvet.

2.

Pill bottle full of goodbye moons.

3.

Months chart a slow wink
and release. Sea of white irises
on blue water paper.

4.

The round magnifying glass
the elder man with a thin river
of beard lowered over
the single grain of moon-white rice
clamped in tweezers
so he could draw a portrait
with a single-haired brush
outside Shanghai's history museum.

5.

What the hole in the head
said. What the hole in the heart
didn't dare voice.

5.

What coyote coughed up.

6.

What momma swallowed
every Sunday. The ones
she told me about later.
How many each grand-
mother had lost.

7.

Coconut macaroon
she'd treat herself to
when she thought
no one was looking.

8.

Tongue-slipped chip.
Eucharistic first moon's
stale cracker.

9.

Slapped onto the side
of a tannour oven.
Charring from white
to brown, bubbling up.
How many for her?

10.

When Emily Dickinson's lawyer
of a father complained
he'd been given the cracked plate
again, she hoisted it high
and dashed it at his feet.
Whatever did you do that for?
he objected. *To remind me
to never give it to you again.*

11.

O that begins Ovulation.

12.

The cervix opening being calipered.
Charted.

13.

Tapped needle tip.
Squeezed out drip
of a moon sliding in.

14.

Cigarette burn
in Naugahyde moon.

15.

White stone grave marker moon
in the Jewish cemetery.

16.

Curtain rod that's lost
its finial.

17.

Peanut butter and jelly
Ritz crackers
with bleed through
mini moons.

18.

Meth's eyeroll moon.

19.

LP with a crack-pop-
catch in that same groove.

20.

Shroom moon.

21.

Peyote-button moon.

22.

Heart beat-
less ultra-
sound moon.

23.

Bowl of whipped cream
eaten standing with the fridge door
open, cellophane seal pulled back,

fingering up an airy wet scoop.

24.

Bullet hole
of a sucking wound.

25.

Open-mouthed moon.

26.

Dwelling in
the absence of sound.

27.

How much had we inscribed
on the rice grain of that first
ultrasound, the swelling heart-
beat beckoning us back, pudgy
hands with froggy finger pads,
round black bean paste eyes
forming in that massive head
with turned up nose, and fishy
tail in its weekly diminishments.

28.

Just a rice grain on which we'd inscribed
our dreams and a name.

29.

Rice grain tweezered free
and dropped in a velvet-lined box
we shelved away somewhere.

30.

One day no sea surge back beat
accompanied the image, no
wiggles or kicks, just our
beautiful, full-formed child,
unmoving, in stasis, as if caught
in a jar. Specimen. When we saw her

in the flesh she was a blue moon body
no one celebrated. There was no dancing.

31.

Each month, like stutter step clockwork,
we talk again.

BOTTOMS UP

*Thanksgiving for every wrong move.
Poi Dog Pondering*

Days of patented patter, same old
same old tongues
blathering without bothering
to keep track if anyone's listening—
can't you hear our tinny voices ricochet
as if off the bottom of hollow metal trash cans?

We slip into tired skins
as if into foreign waters,
too hot,
too cold,
and those swimming
nearby speak strangely,
but we've been in these shells before,
been seen looking through these eye holes,
operating these marionette limbs.

Our skins fit too snugly,
leave no room for easy breathing,
only shallow gasps, as if the high altitude
of what looks like life had drained us.

We're like Uncle Bob with three shots
down who signals
for another round.
No eye rolls will hold him back,
and his liver protests this—
his third marriage—aches
with his coming collapse.

Yet even this awkwardness is a gift,
every addiction a reminder
that we only have one chance at this,
that the wake up calls are blaring inside all
our fallings,
our failings,
they're shouting that the material world

is only a vehicle for spirit,
that every obstruction is a launching pad,
that every enemy's a guru.

Get up off the floor of yourself.
Give yourself over to flying.

Your love's arms are open.
They've always been open.
They're soft body will cushion your crash.

And behind them's the earth,
with its spongy mosses, its fingerling roots,
its blind burrowing animals,
its pockets of overnight, dew-dipped mushrooms.

Without feeling that unease
you'd never feel for your friend.
Never have had the patience
to hold back their hair
when they puked.

To listen to their skein
unwind the night.

And here they are again,
having gone out while you slept in,
with a fistful of bagged bagels in one hand,
a plastic tub of whipped cream cheese in the other,
and they even remembered to keep the onion ones
separate.

NETWORK OF NOTES

The earliest known instrument is a bone flute, made and played about 43,000 years ago.

Jennifer Walsh, Live Science

I've fashioned a flute from Father's femur,
collected, post-autopsy (bone density still
high enough for flesh he'd grown flush with—
pleasure's last holdout: eating): peace
to his hungry ghost.

I soaked it in a tub
of bleach for a week then scrubbed it raw,
clamped it in a vice's metal teeth, bored out
the marrow-chamber from either end, in-
creasing drill size bit by bit until I saw
clean
through. Drilled side holes with a teensy
bit—knife-widened them so thinning walls
wouldn't split. Slotted a reed on the angle
to modulate air flow. Took breaks, fitted fingers
over hollows and sorrowed out bleats and shrills
until new sounds were found.

I lift this bit of him
to my lips and blow through the empty tunnel.
It isn't pretty—a shirring wind—reminds me
of those who put down teaching the recorder.
Don't they know what's simply made can still
ring true?

In every culture bodies have been buried
with bone flutes nestled beside them, and from them
we can glean the likely size of their hands.
From this one I'm learning how to listen—
not for beauty—but for notes that knit me
to my unbeing.

SALT PRUNING

occurs

when saline mist,
kicked up by surf slap,
attacks the trees—
beats them back.

Pines grow away
from what eats at them,
appear swept back,
fleeing shore winds

as if they'd prayed
their way into sculpted
treeness to escape
something.

Each of us runs from
what subdued us—
or tried to. We flee
what can't hurt us

anymore, harm our-
selves by anchoring on
safe-seeming shores.

But salinated winds
still have at us, so
we turn away
from what crusts
and salts our sea-sides,

and hide our green-
needle hands,
but winds flap them,
as if advertising drowning,
freezing *goodbyes*—
or perhaps *hellos*?

Hell's the flipside
of heaven, the letting go
of one form to calcify
into another, a ces-
sation of growing.

We breathe out our last
breath and come to rest.

But hands still stretch,
and stories we tell our-
selves can undergo a sea-
change.

Salt that shears
can be a catalyst for re-
arranging ourselves into
something other, some-
thing rich and strange.

MIS(S)(T)ING

What didn't take was taken
a little extra blood-loss
that shook toilet water
tightened fist that couldn't grip
the bank it latched onto
like a breast 's lip slippage
in that interior river running into
the ocean's tidal reach
a shell game's *fort-da*
put your ear here
hear the in- side ocean
snore? son- ogram's white
noise is a wave that waves one way
go go gone no come-back
everyone asks after it
we dare to ask that the next one
stick let this one remain name-
less

SILENCE'S TIGHT FIST

Taste nectar in the winds,
breathe in the grimed reek
of slurried asphalt that'll turn
into the new street.

Red
maple leaves are tagged
to their scuffed sidewalk
shadow-selves.

This assault
on my senses overloads,
nostrils flare at every grate
and pretzel vendor,

but
I'm sensing what's beyond,
or beneath—what stimulants
only hint at.

I hear my son's
dreams of stopped pipelines
and unionizing workers,

enter
the army tent we shared on
northern Minnesota tribal lands.
Twenty below,

sag shadowing us
with overnight snow we hefted
off with cold hands.

I hear
the crunch and stilled stretch
of whiteness as we walked
in each other's boot steps.

After,
I propped mine by the fire
to thaw out, and soles de-
tached from uppers.

Druggie
punch of super glue stink
married them again.

I heard

his belief sing that a new world
is imminent and necessary,
as he added logs to the fire
that made a star-shape

 where it
pushed back hard-pack the night
we stayed up beside it on watch.

The cop's headlights flooded
the camp for hours as they blasted
AC/DC and Supertramp.

 Taysa,
one of the indigenous elders,
said: *It's important to fight
the fight you're given,*
 *but you'll be
remembered most for being kind
to kids and animals—and yes,
even to those who think
they're our enemies.*

 Fire's here,
breaking down, sending sparks
that shake awake the stars.

 I stop
and look down. Someone's etched
words into the asphalt while
it was still warm: *You're not
alone.*

BEACHCOMBING

When rough granules rub us wrong,
we cast off our sneakers and socks
and gambol unencumbered across
Fern Grotto's bone-white sands.

No one's about, so we shout: *Hello?*
then remove our swimsuits too.

We toss the hooks of our names over
our shoulders. You call me *Flotsam*,
I dub you *Lightning Whelk*. Seaweed,
draped over your hair, mermaid's
you. I don eye shells. We could choose
to walk on water or up this steeple
of rock. Anything's possible. Love
alters landscapes, undoes the rules
of physics. We've entered a Chagall
where cliffs and trees are beings,
and the couple's happily levitating.

This up-welling of love loosens us,
let's us become what our bones long
to sing. Love of every seaweed tangle
and rough outcrop loosens them too:

the gentlest earthquake that lets us know
things are to be seen, but also seen through.

Nothing's bound by these five senses,
they're portals that open onto other
ways of being, becoming—the way
this abalone dances with the sun,
glossy and smooth as sweat on skin.

We close our eyes to see. Retract hands
to be caressed. We fling disc-like stones
where the wave breaks and flattens.
Each one springs off surface tension

and sails out of sight, or plunks! then
sinks so suddenly we double over
with delight. Either way, this day's
momentous by being nothing much.

Just my hand finding a home in yours.

Just this moment telescoping out
to alter every second chance
we thought we'd blown. We're here.
The world's singing. All we have to do
is attend, be willing to be transformed.