

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



## 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.