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THE MIND CREATES
WHAT IT NEEDS

by

Matthew Corey Hawk

A Thesis

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the

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The Mind Creates What It Needs

Why is everything I see animal, animated, alive?
Upside-down elephant, cartwheeling head over heels;
nautilus, cracked, saucering 'cross the indigo sky;
bald eagle swooping down on unsuspecting anaconda.

Much more than cumulonimbus cloud cover,
stratospheric phosphorous, wisps of cotton candy,
here to decorate the azure heavens
with a Rorschach of natural delight.

It must be this, nothing more, nothing less:
the mind creates what it needs, out of fluff and air
to ease its worries, wipe out its despairing
at random assortments of a universe uncaring.

Our lives lack mystery and wonder
without these fanciful designs that deign
to descend on our dappled, daring minds,
perpetual motion machines of make-believe.

So I sigh and smile at the sight
of a puffin penguin strutting along;
twinned swans, necks entwined;
elfin otter floating on his back.

Imagined menagerie, inner zoo,
I set free the caged creatures,
let them bask in sunlight's warmth,
roam carefree 'cross the silken sky.

I, Icarus

*“Never regret thy fall,
O Icarus of the fearless flight
For the greatest tragedy of them all
Is never to feel the burning light.”
—Oscar Wilde*

I.

I feel the light, feed
my spirit, sinewy
with kaleidoscopic

wash of color, red, orange,
purple intermixed. I find ready
what I love selling:

this moment, in fewer,
syncopated
seconds.

II.

They tell me:

*Shape your everyday essential travel
with the promise of a new quality habitat
you turn into your home; into a place where you can catch
the breeze, impossibly green, sophisticating soft control effortlessly.*

III.

I wear a little sweet sunshine
under the backlit black spotlight.

I get my life and legacy prioritized
by remembering all the beautiful people

who, like me, followed their ambition
to its logical conclusion, an ascent

for savored sweetness, the thrill
of chasing the sun, of coming

too close to its scorching shine,
which sings my threadbare wings.

IV.

They tell me:

*Take heart!
Begin your benign beauty regimen,
taking guaranteed graceful style to heart.
Take heart!*

V.

Now I style myself on money,
cook and eat trash,
treasure filth.

Now I serve my head
on a silver platter
for all to see.

Now I sleep, save my otherwise
healthy, headless body
from certain decay.

Dreaming of Drowning

There's a manmade pond behind my mother's house, my childhood home. Twenty or so houses surround its shallow shores, rocks and pebbles in place of a sandy beach. Thick green moss twists beneath the boat docks, most of which lie empty. As a child, I had a recurring dream where I'd jumped in the pond and was in danger of being tangled up in the mossy weeds in the water. I thrashed around, tried to free myself from its slimy, scratchy clutches, but the more I struggled, the more ensnared I got. Eventually I'd surrender, stop fighting for my life, and sink below the surface, where briefly I'd see the bottom of the pond, with lost boat oars and scuttled paddleboats sunken. And then I'd realize I couldn't breathe, couldn't gasp for air, couldn't make it out alive. And just before I'd lose consciousness, I'd spring wide awake in my bed with a chortled, wet cough, as if I'd really been in the water, as if I'd nearly drowned, as if I'd lived out my nightmares of death, dying, and martyrdom.

Depression's Arrival

Everything I ever thought:
every shimmering, dark

memory of every tragedy
in a too-small box,

the flimsy cardboard shut
with the wrong kind of

tape, blue painter's tape,
kind of blue, a hue of huge

proportions, its ancient anvil
dropped on my skull, cracked

in two, stomped on by passing
train, its locomotion off-

kilter, swaying
with the strain.

The pain of too many passengers
weighing it down; the sound

of shrill screams reams my mind,
the paths it traces and winds, all

mine, all alone, never to be seen
by a friend or foe, the woe of what

lies below, beneath the surface,
sunken in a land of broken promises.

Yet it will ricochet up again, manic panic
presuming the subsuming of self and space,

the pace at which I rove and romp,
scrape and gape at the blood-red

sun setting in the west,
never to rise again.

My Dad is Dead

I can't lose you
anymore
than I already have.

I can't hear
your hearty voice
booming with laughter
like a drum beating time
in my head.

I can't see
your smiling face
dimpled and dappled
with finely flecked freckles
in my mind's eye.

I can't feel
your warm embrace
'round my cold shoulders;
and never will again.

You've become a story
I tell strangers
by way of introduction:

Hello.

My name is Matt.

My dad is dead.

Nice to meet you.

The Word and Its Meaning

Resurrecting a dead man is difficult
when nothing now remains of his work
in printed circulation. Only lodged in
Special Collections, archived in dusty
glue-streaked tomes can I find
the eye-poems of Kenneth Lawrence
Beaudoin, word collages that pop
with image and word intermixed,
color and shape, automatic accumulation
of ideas, accretion of ascendant radiance
where the word and its meaning are as far
apart as he and I are on opposite sides of Death
and Life.

Dissonance

Loud banging bounds down the hall.
Pounding doors, smashing glass, glistening
as its shards shower the threadbare carpet,
faded blue and grey. The dog barks, roiling
and snarling, baring its canines, clean and white.
Neighbors hurry by, heads lowered, ears covered,
choosing not to see or hear a man and woman
making a mess of their lives. She screams as loudly
as he shouts: the long, withdrawing, melancholy roar,
the death knell, deafening, ringing strong and true,
a clanging church bell calling us to come and pray
for a new heaven and a new earth, forgetting hell
and its real place in our world, where the one you love
and the one you hate are one and the same.

Emergency

The sirens sound below, screech
their shrill scream, distant as the shore
from sailors lost at sea. They wail
their plaintive cry as onlookers wonder

why? What has led to this emergency?
They stop and stare at misery's messengers,
ambulances white as hospital beds,
fire engines, ruby red, calling each to each.

We know they do not sing for us
yet. But we know we could be next,
prone upon a stretcher, pumped full
of foreign fluids by EMTs who hope
to bring us back to life long enough
to live once more, until we die again.

Self-Portrait in a Dirty Mirror with the Lights Off

Shadow shimmers — vibrates in the dark
the mirror dotted — pocked with stains — splashed
I see — only faintly — my ragged reflection

flared nostrils — thin rose-colored lips
gritted teeth — ground finely — after years
of cleaning — scrubbed sheen — shiny screen

kept from coming — undone — seams unraveled
my body — my mind — held together now
by thinnest thread — threatening to snap

at any moment — at any time — for any reason
and let it all — before I can stop — fall apart
into tiny pieces — sharp glass shards

I try not — to step on
cut open — my feet.

Death Came For You

Lying on your back, dad, with your hands
folded on your chest, tightly clenched,
as if you were hiding something,
you looked like you were made of wax;
frozen still, cold marble statue,
a meager tribute to what you once were.
Death came for you piece by piece.
Lungs collapsed like helium balloons
popped. Heartbeat forever silenced,
your secret love of life wheezing out.
Your kidneys failed to purify your poisoned blood.
Your heaving breaths grew fainter
and fainter, lumbered and labored,
until you were gone for good.

Behind the Scenes

Dear Lord, who fixes the stakes
so even the winners lose in the end;

with white wings and golden halos
hanging heavy on my heart; with harps

that play no music I can hear;
your deafness to my desperate cries

leaves me mute, morose, mystified.
The rage I found offstage

blinded me to the work behind
the scenes you did to enact

the change of scene I need,
the blind spots I myself

couldn't see, my vision blocked
by black auras of death and despair

you would remove, if only I asked
for the lullaby you alone can sing.

Moving

I.

Rainkissed cardboard boxes line the curb
already when I arrive. A worn mattress

flops as it floats down the stairs
on the backs of my frail friends

struggling under its heft and shape.
The tallest one ducks and stoops

under the doorframe, afraid to smack his skull.
As they make it down the last step,

the smallest one trips, slips,
loses control, can no longer hold

up his end of the bargain. The mattress
thuds to the ground, skids across

the front lawn, hurtles into the street
where it comes to rest in the middle

of the road. We go to get it, but suddenly,
a car's tires screech as it swerves

and smashes into a telephone pole
which, after wobbling back and forth,

topples over and falls on the roof
of the clapboard house next door.

We run inside, hide fast,
wait for what's next,

whether we're criminals,
murderers, or far worse.

II.

Whether we're criminals,
murderers, or far worse,

we watch and wait. But nothing
happens. No fist pounds

on our warped door, its frame
bloated from sunshine and rain.

No helicopter hovers overhead,
no police cruiser siren cries out.

The driver of the car hobbles out,
surveys the damage, huffs his rage,

yet cannot find the culprit. No neighbor
calls out *That's them! They did it!*

I sigh my relief, glad not to be
caught in our crime. But what if

we hurt someone? What if we crushed
a loving family with our mistake?

My friends do not share my guilt,
care not if they caused carnage.

They laugh at my worry, mock
my fears. *Chill out bro, everything*

will be alright. Still concerned,
I venture out into the street, scuttle

next door to see for myself what disaster
we caused, if anyone even noticed.

III.

No one seems to have noticed
the disaster we caused. I walk

up to the empty doorframe, startled
to find no door to knock on,

no windows for curtains or shutters.
Under the shadow of the fallen pole

I hurry into the house, call out
Is anybody home? and hear nothing

but my own echoing emptiness.
I can hardly see beyond my face,

thickest darkness, blackest night.
What once resided here, what horrors

once abounded? Why did no one
notice this abandoned house, vacant,

long left alone, with no one
to call it home? I should've seen

some way to fix it up, make it new.
These snaking thoughts - vipers - spread

bit by bit, bread crumbs and soft cheeses
passed from one life to the next

until our nested lairs lie vacant most
of the time - cardboard box-houses

collapsing in on themselves.

The Nature of Me

The live-oak tree, blanketed in Spanish moss
stretches across the lawn and into the soil,
where it takes root and grows a forest
of ferns, bushes, and fresh flowers,
cut from a cloth of evergreen
crushed, pressed, folded in half
and burrowed beneath the surface.
A verdant glen, a Garden of Eden,
growing deep within me.

The deserted beach, blown over
by salty ocean-breeze, cooling
the hot sands of a scoured shore.
Lingering on the strand, it builds
sand castles, soon to be washed away
by crashing whitecaps dancing on the surface,
destroying what others created:
green-growing oasis failing
to outlast the vast barrenness of being.

Dark storm clouds roll in,
ready to thunder and hail, blaze and rain
down on my threadbare shack, unsheltered
from the thundercloud about to burst.
For the live-oak will rot, the ferns die,
the beach catch fire, as the storm rages
and obliterates all that's left of me:
blasted stump, shriveled plant,
charred sands, all broken
beauty.

O, to delight once more in an oasis ageless,
seaside sanctuary to some trumped-up notion
of who I am, of what I want to be: husband,
father, teacher, writer; do not these overlapping
ambitions condition my indecision at revision
as I live my life, find a wife, beget children,
lecture students, publish books?

Perhaps instead
I should live as life leads me, rather than
push, pull, and prod the oxen and cattle onward

down the dusty, dirtied road, that winds back
and forth. I know not where it goes, but know
where it's been, and that should be enough
for me to stay on track, to embrace what is
and turn my back on all that might have been.

Funny-Pages First

When I was a child, I thought
all plump, puffy clouds came
from factory smokestacks
spewing cotton-candy grey-white
blobs, like snowflakes no two
the same. Each one looked like
something in a television cartoon,
characters cut-out from comic books.

Before he died, my father used to mail me
comicstrips he cut out of the newspaper.
Always read the funny-pages first!
he said with a chuckle. Life's too sad as
it is, to start with the grim doom and gloom
of the daily news. *So smile, though your heart
is aching, smile, even though it's breaking —*
apart, piece by piece.

Even if it feels like, before
long, there'll be nothing left of me; if I take
heart, have courage, what little I have left to
give, for what little time there's left to live, will
be more than enough to catch the cool breeze
that blows through my hair and brings a faint
smile to my face, as animated cloud-cover
rises overhead, shades me in shadows again
.

My Father's Watch

If we'd buried your gold wristwatch
with you, clinging tight to the rotting flesh
of your once-thick wrist, it would've slipped

off, fallen into the depths of your cold coffin,
chilled by winter's snow and ice, day after day
of early-spring's frost, whose freeze

cannot preserve the memory of you
like your gold wristwatch, its seconds
stopped, its hour and minute-hands stilled.

But since we replaced the battery
I now wear it on my own wrist,
keep time, like your memory, alive

second by second, as your watch marks
the minutes, hours, days, months, years.

Theory on Hoarding

Bronze buttons, red ribbon, bits of flair
I collect without reason. Copper-color
of riptide, rusted out scraps of steel,
crushed iron wheels, no longer round.

Last year's magazines, waterlogged pages,
Christmas cards and thank you notes
scattered across my bedroom floor.
This growing hoard reveals at least this much:

*attempts to collect all my lifelong joys
always fail to banish the Chaos within;
its flashing thunderbolts and driving rain
wash out my hope for a complete home.*

I cannot collect every item of meaning.
Mementos of mountaintop experiences
mean little in the deep valley of despair,
do little more than take up space.

My frightened hoard, lonely traveller,
wanders through foreign lands, unable
to read street signs in another tongue
which lead to back-alley dead ends

where none know what it's saying
and even I know not what it means.
Yet even then I continue still to hope
my hoard will once again find its way

if only I gather every glitzy, chintzy
tchotchke I happen to come across;
to capture, if only for a brief moment
the glory and beauty I long for.

Hawk Surveys His Beach House After His Father's Passing

I weep and wail and cannot fail to recall fond memories in this beachside home.
I reflect on my dead father, forever absent from this and every future home.

Like the hawk who feasts on crumpled carrion creatures, my father feasted
on love, laughter, and happily ever after, here and wherever we called home.

We played catch in the yard, lost the baseball in the brush, the crush of sunshine's
heat bronzed our bodies as we tossed the red-stitched orb in front of our home.

We swam in the pool, splashed and thrashed as he dunked and dipped our heads
beneath the chlorine-chilled water, chortling our laughter behind this home.

The cicadas' constant shrill drone, the ravens' call, the seagulls' screech,
bittersweet symphony surrounded our play as we built a home away from home.

But now that beachside house, beige wooden siding weathered by seaside gale,
creaks and groans under the weight of years, in danger of collapsing, this home.

No matter the season, no matter the reason, I used to flee my day-to-day life,
retreat and vacation here, with family and wife, this home away from home.

Like hurricane's swirling eye, my father's death spun us out of control, leveled
palm tree, oak tree, birch tree alike, left nothing left surrounding our home.

We prepare to sell this seaside retreat, for any price at all, no matter how small,
remove the stain of nostalgic reverie from this wrecked, broken idea of home.

If *home is where one starts from*, and where one ends, when one returns
to what once was that beginning, and now is the end, where is that home?

If I find nothing there, a leveled lot, a dusty bit laid bare with disrepair
should I build a pyramid, a tomb, and graveyard, where once stood our home?

For I, weary as a red-tailed hawk without a nest to land in; at least I still
have memories of my beloved dad, even though he'll never come home.

Birdcage

A gaudy, gilded cage
pens me in, keeps me
from falling out, masks
my view of the green

courtyard below. Prison-like,
its shallow reflecting pools
bubble and babble with faint
waterfall's murmur, its sun-

scorched grass yellow and brown,
its once flowering-trees, now darkest
green. As dogs walk and sunbathers
shine, I stare down from my caged perch

to dream of happier times, when I was free
to laugh and dream, without fear of disease,
of coming too close to the sick and infected
and thought most of where I'd next dine

or drink my fill with dear friends, and half-
acquaintances who wanted little more
than my company, which seemed
so ordinary then.

Solar Flare

I flew too high, too close
to the sun, its shine too bright,
even for my own brilliance,
its radiance redundant, unnecessary
because unwanted. It has its own almost
perpetual source of energy, enlivened
by its internal combustion. It has no use
for my extra fuel, my added flame
burning with memories of simpler times
when my dad was alive and my grief was dead.
But now that comforting light has surged,
flared; its scalding rays addle my brain,
scorch what's left of my mangled mind,
until no more sorrowful memories remain.

Look Homeward, Angel

*Which of us is not forever a stranger and alone?
-Thomas Wolfe*

Fallen angel
halo cracked

golden air
shine dulled

wings broken
feathers scattered.

Clouded in cold
pale moonlight,

his might gone
crowned no longer

regal no more
dreams dashed

life lost, the cost
of death's wages:

sin. The grim whim
of the Creator, Maker

took him away
from the only

home he ever had
family he ever knew

an empty seat
at the table

depressed side
of the king-sized bed

parking spot
in the narrow garage

never to be filled
with his black Cadillac

bought and sold by
some stranger, who

never knew what it meant
to drive the long road home.

A Note Against Self-Slaughter

Liminal space, gap between high
and low, vestige of vertigo, I feel as I fall
through the cracks of my mind. A black crow

hovers over my head, cawing with cackling laughter.
His shrill shriek creeks, croaks as it coats my ears with lead
and mercury, heavy, hot, soon to scorch and sink my mind

down to the depths below, sunken valley full of broken dreams,
half-remembered visions of a time when I saw a way forward, out
of this deep depression, which now surrounds me completely.

Here, as this carrion crow's melancholic mania mauls my mind
in this in-between land, I sit with my head in my hands,
sigh, start to make a list, plot out ways to make my end:

gun.

knife.

rope.

jump.

drown.

burn.

Any would do, any would get the job done, a silent suicide,
perhaps made to look like an accident, like I did not mean
to take my own life, snuff it out, flickering candle flamed out,

smoke swirled, merged with stale air. But I refuse to entertain
these morbid self-slaughter thoughts for long. I feel better
for writing them down, looking them over, bidding them *adieu*.

The Lake

Steely lake
— *still glass* —
reflects sun, clotted
clouds. Slowly

they swell
with child.
Serene scene,
unknown tomb

I watch over
as I wonder:
how soon
shall this

too pass?
Darkly
fades burnt-
out sun, so I

see the still
lake — *yes* —
clearly
no longer.

And How Does That Make You Feel?

I ask myself as I finish writing
a letter to my future self, an exercise
my balding therapist assigned
at our last session. He stacked

his stubby fingers together
like a crumbling church steeple
as he started to say, for what seemed
like the seventieth time:

And how does that make you feel?
as if each time he asked, as he stroked
his grey-white beard, he heard a little
less of what I had to say, even though

he still looked, with his nodding bobble-
head and furrowed, wrinkled brow,
like he was still listening. I still listen
to myself as I write these lines to myself,

as directed, the day before I return to see
my therapist who, I'm sure, after I've told him
I've written this letter to my future self, in which
I celebrate myself, and say: *every single time*

*I start to think there's nothing left to live for, I think
of everything I love about this life, and that love itself
is enough:* he will, for the seventy-first time,
stroke his grey-white beard,

nod his bobble-head,
and furrow his wrinkled brow
before he asks me once again
And how does that make you feel?

This Is How It Makes Me Feel

when you ask me the same barbed questions
over and over again: your prying into my personal

life with a rusted, iron crowbar smashes
the windows of my house. With your searing

critiques, you batter my bruised, bloated heart.
When you say my time is up, and you'll see me

on the same overstuffed couch next week, when
we'll go another ten rounds in the ring, we'll see

who still stands when the timer sounds
and the session ends, only for the day.

For once and for all, I want to be free
to explore my feelings with a friendly

guide, leading me along the winding, rocky
path that leads on to a fuller understanding

of what makes me *me*, how best I can live
a life worth living, worth loving, worth wanting.

My Wife's Hair

I find my wife's hair
all around our home.
It gets tangled between
my toes as I walk along

and sticks to my slender fingers
when I sit on the plush couch.
My coarse hair surely falls out
as frequently as her fine hair,

but her hairs are longer,
brownier, curlier, easier
to see than mine. Spindly,
sinewy, her hairs could trip me

with their leathery, webbed net.
Before, when I found my wife's
hair scattered across our house,
I'd throw her hair away, trash scraps,

get rid of her hair as soon
as I could, clotted little
cotton wads of wispy,
withering twine. But now

that we grow old, I save my wife's
hair, preserve each stray strand,
pressed between the lined pages
of my worn notebook, keepsakes

we squirreled away for a time
when no amount of love
will keep our memories intact,
with nothing left to have and to hold.

Lava Lamp

All my eight-year old niece wants
for her birthday this year: a lava lamp.
This warms my heart; it warms my heart
that a 70s fad that I, too, found groovy
in the early 2000s is now, in 2021, hip
again, in the mind of a child at least.
In the mind of a child, in a world
where screens sedate their souls
and stunt their growth, it's encouraging
to see a child still able to wonder,
dream, see beauty in random bursts
of color and light bubbling from the belly
of the bulb, the lamp's orange-yellow glow
mimicking the twilight sunset, whose aura
radiates just as randomly and romantically
day after day, as the years roll by, and the child
grows up to leave childish things behind.

Faith Without Explanation

Mid-March, spring in full bloom in the Mid-South, blue skies
pocked by occasional puffed-up white clouds; they skirt
in front of the sun for fleeting, momentary minutes.

Pink tulips bathe in marvelous light as bluebirds cry out with the question
that is on everyone's mind: what more is there than *this*?
Is life amiss with the risk of death and damnation?

To one who has faith, no explanation is necessary
wrote Aquinas, but if I have no faith, or had faith once
but lost it along the way? On the walk down the path, my step

lightened as I took the rock out of my pocket,
tossed it over my shoulder, heard it fall with gentle *thud* as it joined
the other stones on the way, just another rock in the pile.

Not the explanation itself, then, must I have faith in; my ability
to demonstrate, through proofs and theorems, as Anselm, *that than which*
a greater cannot be thought; no, that is not where salvation lies.

Mid-March in the Mid-South, and the only explanation
of faith I find comes in the form of birdsongs,
sunshine, cool breeze's breath of life inflating

the punctured lungs of salvation, whose rasping
wheeze lumbers as it labors to speak the words
I know will give me comfort, if only for a moment.

Our Chaser Tore So, Apollos

*a loose phonetic translation of the original German text of
Rainer Maria Rilke's "Archaic Torso of Apollo"*

We're canned and nicked, unerring ore testing our hope.
Daring danger falls, bereft. Afterwards, we tour our sins,
so glued to the notched candelabra that our indemnity
must show itself, aching shroud.

Such hail with glancing blow cools our dears,
bruised there, in the ditch bleeding, drying,
lent by cool, tender lake-elms. Gayily the hens
suit the hermits, who decry the young.

Sons, stern, dicier, stained and curt;
they hunt the sheltered, dark tiger,
its stars flipped by its robed tiers.

Brought out, nicked up, the all-sinning rain
oscillates, its starry eyes see something interstellar.
In its seat, the dew must dine as it labors onward.

The Race

Dime-sized raindrops race
down my window-panes,
fogged by ice and mist

intermixed. I stare
unblinking, place bets
on which will first

fall to ground. The wind
whips through the birch-tree
branches. I hear them sway,

groan under pressure. Driving gale,
whose force knows no limits;
this is the kind of day

I wish I didn't have to
enter, didn't have to rise,
brew coffee, cook breakfast,

shower, shave, go about my life
which wholly lacks
the playful bliss I seek.

For now, there's only one thing
for me to do; only one thing for me
to see: just these

raindrops, racing down
my window, washing
away my fear of failure,

the red-orange fire within me aglow
burning up all my fossil-fuel hopes.
And yet, the blaze gives me cause

to renew my remaining energy
which will reignite the spark
if only I breathe life into it.

Fathers and Sons

Sitting by the pool in the backyard
of their Texas ranch house, my father-
in-law slips up and calls me *son*.

We all pause, let the word hang
in the air for a minute, lonely red balloon
blowing in the breeze, and wait to see
if I can string together three little letters
to mouth the word *dad*.

But I can't.

Great man though he is, father to my wife
grandfather to her niece, I can't call him
dad while my own father's ashes sit
one thousand miles away, five states north of here,
undisturbed in a silent tomb, mausoleum
masquerading as a museum piece, as if
the dusty remains of my dead dad
could mark the milestones that march
along, come and gone since he died
too soon; before I met my wife,
or my brother got married, or I'd learned
everything I needed to learn from him.

And now, as I sit here with my father-
in-law at his Texas ranch house,
and he calls me family, and I struggle
to respond in kind, I'm left wondering:

if family are those we cannot choose
but love still, then why can't I say
this word to a man I respect, love,
even; whose daughter I've married,
who's treated me like a son,
who's been like a father to me?

He reminds me too much, perhaps,
of the father I had, and lost,
and long for still. Forever frozen
in a past I can only access
in memories grown stale
from years of conjuring them up

over and over, again and again,
until the spell wanes,
the curse is broken,
and the magic fades away.

Pasce Oves Meas

*“Peter said, ‘Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you.’
Jesus said, ‘Feed my sheep.’”*

-John 21:17

Amidst the sun and mist, the darkling clouds cover
the horror of sheep shorn; mother separated from child
as the final trumpet trills its shrill sound. The left-behind
wander and roam around the pen, now and then wonder
why their flock is thinned, skinned, herded from within
by a shepherd whose care causes their despair.
And yet, lest they forget who begat whom in the womb,
and what is the source and summit of their faith in a god
they cannot see; they must admit, from time to time,
that the blood of their lambs washes away the grime
of the sinful and sorrowful, who tomorrow
will forget to remember the ultimate sacrifice, paid
and laid at the foot of the cross, at the edge of the tomb,
as empty as their hearts now are, an open wound.

Another Year

You died the day before
your birthday, and every
year since, and every
year going forward,
I'm sure I'll always
want you to blow out
the candles, to mark
another year of life,
another year of love,
another year of light
illuminating the darkness
that now stretches day
after day, year after year.

It's punctuated by every
occasion, every milestone
you're not here. My brother's
wedding, my own, the birth
of your grandchildren.
And also in little graces
sprinkled throughout:
a cool, foggy mist
on an early fall morn;
the winning run scored by your favorite
baseball team, the Detroit Tigers,
in the bottom of the ninth inning;
the last slice of chocolate cake
the day after your birthday.

All these little blessings
you cannot enjoy
stretch out before me,
islands in the stream
of years rushing by,
constant reminder,
not of the death

you forever suffer,
but the life, in dying,
you left behind.

Pelicans Feeding

A mirror cracked, black, its bits
blown, glass shards shrapnelled,
melded with green carpet, death

trap, suicide wrap, we better get
out while we're young, wild,
and free. All my friends

are wasted, all my friends
cut, copied, pasted from one
life onto another and an *other*.

The only brother I have, the only
parent left, my mother; they smother
the sound of silence, the violence

of my wing as it smashes the glass
hung above the edge of the table,
its cloth once snow white, now blood

pocked, strawberry-blonde. We flock
around each other, peck and prick
the slick crack that forms in the center

of our hearts, feed each other fresh blood
flowing from the open wound
we thought we'd never fill.

Strangers in the Crowd

Did I even really know
what Grief looked like?
Would I have noticed
if it walked right into me,
bumped my shoulder, stepped
on my foot?

Or would I
mutter some half-hearted
reply, not even raise my head
to look it in the eye
as it carried on, left me
behind, to continue quietly
living my life?

The Way Home

I look for the best way home as I trace
the faded, frayed map with sweat-stained fingers.
Gone forever the house where I grew up; raised
long ago to an ashen heap of rubbish. Nothing

now remains of my childhood, but the dust,
weed-pocked, encircled by chain link fence.
Graveyard of broken toys, swingset rusted,
deflated soccer ball, punctured bike tires.

Yet still I drive by, from time to time
gaze blankly at the *STAY AWAY* signs,
longing for some trace remains
of the innocence I left behind

and search for still, though I know
I'll never really find my way home.

Resounding

A chipped chalice, kindred to kindling flame,
unused on the empty church's ancient altar;
the purpled-poison cup's tarnished pewter pales
beside unleavened bread, golden-brown, broken,
with ashen, charred crust. Here I look for lilac,
day-old daisies, crown of red rose thorns,
whispering wildly in the silent sanctuary.
Reverberating with thunderous melody, I long
for a different kind of refrain, resounding
in a crowded cathedral, where I'll earn
my existence, subsisting on a new Eucharist,
replacing the milk and honey of old, escaping
the rocky, desert terrain I need no longer roam,
stopping my endless drive to sift through the loam.