

YOUR NAME HERE

NEW POEMS

Pat Nolan

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*“The chief characteristic of the mind is
to be consistently describing itself.”*

– Henri Focillon (1881–1943)

children are slow death
(but what a way to go)

oranges green tea
 won't rescue me
from certain gloom
 or that sudden chill
hands held over the heater
more wind assembles on the pale horizon
preceded by roof battering gusts

what about tomorrow
making the case for new dimensions
billowing smoke escapes the old chimney
fumigates the undersides of trees
a crack in the clouds
 leaks a clear colorless light
old crow balanced on phone wire
once augur of the future now just
another creature soaked by ancient rain

then gaze at the subtle clock
where time's measured by lines
around the eyes and mouth
done shaving every hair in place
always surprised at how
little it takes to continue

I TOLD YOU SO

There is art and there is art
I do both

motor starts stops starts
the sun is a dying star
act like there's no tomorrow
everything must be done now
mow lawn trim hedge whack weeds
blow leaves not a moment idle
driven by predestination's curse
let no moment go unoccupied

while I slice the olives
 washing machine agitating
speaks of the past
 and the future
Afrique Afrique Afrique
it says to me in French

the thumb all along
 destined for greater things
beyond its mere grasping ambitions

*"I have written a truly marvelous poem
which this page is too narrow to contain"*
 signed *Son of Fermat*

space suit
clothed by circumstance

I can be the center of the universe
or an imaginary particle
to go quietly mad or madly quiet

neck deep in river
ducks swim up like guests at a cocktail party
my head on a platter of sun splotched liquid

no one needs to know what I know

DOGS OF FEAR

*"I had nothing to tell them;
I was talking to their dogs."
— Philip Whalen*

Dogs of fear jump out from narrow lanes
hills echo with snarl tooth barks while
trees maintain silence within their own skin
a wet mutt stands guard in the bed of a truck
ducks feast in the shallows of the rising river
a cormorant looks lost in the wide muddy swath
the woman at the corner keeps two men
 her husband
and his new best friend
 the lust of one holds
the interest of the other
 such is the way of the world
urges well domesticated fears still wild
cat has produced a litter under the water heater
days embossed with season's gloom
a break in the clouds stripes the wet asphalt
notion of the path resides in the imagination
to think is to be
 to be is to suffer
 to suffer is to think
about being and the tortuous ways of the mind
the yellow bloom of the acacia attracts
 all the available light
a pair of Canada geese
silhouetted against the gleaming bulge of cloud
high above
 the stink of trash burning
 in a fireplace
how could have
the shapeless rain made square holes in the roadway

ANY DAY NOW

In the binary month of a binary year
the anxiety of one day seeps into the next
each little disappointment kills a larger
hope bad news in the mail
complication of fears exacerbates
all the aches and pains fastened
to worry by the glue of gloom and woe

*"his bitterness survived him
and tainted future generations
a strange and foolish galoot"*

there is always a price to pay
for being different
in need of that newfangled awe
befitting the god of love

but with age comes a certain responsibility
to act my age

jar of another speed bump
what it does to forward determination
how genius can be stuffed
in the pursuit of stubborn resistance
a density poignantly rejected
to possess authority known as author
effacements self-reliant calm
in the commonality of all

distracted by needless worry
heedless I bump into myself
a case of nerves and tiny ailments
the entire underpinning
questionable shaky prone to collapse
self-torture's miserable state of being

or ponder the difference
between a *kaon* produced
in high energy collision
with electrically charged forms
being about a thousand
times more massive than
its electron and a *koan*
as a paradoxical form used
to abandon ultimate dependence
on reason and enter into
sudden intuitive enlightenment

robins keep their appointment
with the freshly mowed roadside
at this particular edge of dusk
not quite dark a rain squall
whitens the air as a damp filter

there are words I should define
but faced with the dictionary
I can't remember what they are
I don't want to map my thinking
I just want to leave footprints

standing in line the woman behind me
thought it funny to unlock my knees
her name spelled with a secret vowel
only revealed once you speak it

my dreams parallel my waking life where
nothing much gets accomplished either

I can't believe I said "*doodle bug*"
not "*you cry baby middle class snot*"

ant navigates a vast listless sea of shag
persistent irony of daily life
sweep paper floor made to look like wood

swift moving clouds leave sunshine in their wake

does not my aura contain as well as emanate
a pure spectral body of surrounding light
as if I could actually see the strings and
strands connected to the physics of being

steady rain streams down a pale transparent code

evening imposes a kind of silence
a stillness of the moment
joined as it were to the mood of transition
I step out of myself

sometimes I'm my mother
sometimes I'm my father
sometimes I'm just me waiting to be

desire happiness mindful of all
the suffering it will cause
treasure the inconsequential
for more momentous matters
omens read into the unexpected
to explain a failure
at predicting the future

garden of purple and white
asters wag in the wind
edge of fog sieves the light
to understand those wavelengths
demark a cold neutral cast
neither inviting or terrifying
but pressing with its stillness

a cocoon-like transcendence
it's what I expect and accept
an abeyance in the ripening
buffeted by a hardening breeze

thump the remote
wake up the battery

how I drag my weeping carcass
across the landscape and sing
in a tongue yet to be understood

connect the dots the dots the dots

alone the empty house inhabited by shadows
and excuses for not getting out of bed

the older I get the better
feel I get for the inevitable

waiting to turn the ignition off
so I can listen to the last of Lady
Day's breathy lilt on the radio
in what sounds like an intimate
nightclub atmosphere and reflect on
the incredible richness and bounty
of the moment and what a beggar
I am to appreciate it so little

yet morning's roar of machine shattered
stillness projections of ego reconfirm
my status as the center of attention
where surface frivolity hides a deeper demon
quaint perceptions lead to unusual conclusions

rain wet streets mark a change of season
low spots along the road as puddles resume
birds gather in joyful congregations

the air streaked with delicate splash

transition from one moment to the next
full of holes gaps light year spans
the pace of eons with each breath
conscious of the unconscious
unconsciously
a snarl of hair triggers

vague giants march out of morning mist
silhouettes edged in softness
a day of no sun and pale spumes
the trees shedding a steady fine glaze
as awakening color adds its transparency

you never step into the same stream
twice Heraclitus was fond of saying
what he didn't say
you still get wet

DO THE MATH

Sitting here waiting for the light to change
I wonder if the irrational universe like
the numbers of the same name will go on
forever without repeating in a pattern

tall shadows resist the mist
with their outline alone

the demand for light
equal to the demand for night
at this time of year

complications of death and disease
regardless of what I think
poisons surface as on leaves
so I can ripen to a colorful
glory before I go

"I can't remember how I got that bruise"

the complaints of old age age old
going gently into that good night
not always an option
and rage
against the dying of the light
often only dementia
that death should have dignity
an elusive goal
especially when they just
won't let you but first must
poke prod slice dig remove and stitch

(I'm a professional do not try this at home)

visualize going
slumped over a crossword puzzle
all but a few columns filled in

65 down (my age)
a four-letter word
for *"river in Greek mythology"*

so a particular fragility enters my life
what was taken for granted has to be
put back on the shelf of my assumptions

yet another indication of what
this world has come to
I have to complete a questionnaire
*"before you die on a scale of one to
ten how would you rate your life?"*

"married or living as married?"
this question requires more
than just checking a box

disappointment is that alternate truth
evening's rain gathers in a puddle of street
light in front of the empty carport

"we meet again, mon ami" said to the darkness
got news that someone from long ago had passed
surprised to hear he'd lived as long I realize
all mental life continues as that dark
energy scientists just can't quite figure

finally the autumn boar roams the dusty lanes
leaves dangle alone or as mottled trios
an oppressive gray frames all with shadow
and gives everything the same dull value
not greener nor rustier reds and melon yellows
white birches pressed against a house's angles
amid scruffy tufts of frost bent grass gone wild
a faint orange glow illuminates the outer edge
of morning's mist as a slow lingering promise

on a day of incomplete thoughts
in which all roads lead to nowhere
I have an opinion

about everything

(go ahead just ask me)

I tell strangers the most improbable stories
of my own true self that no one
has ever heard before

*"I was sure I told you about that to-do
with what's her name
I hope that doesn't change anything"*

dead the leaves gather
at the bottom of the stairs
like guests at a party where
no one wants to be the first to leave

JACK'S DREAM

"words words words, what are blank pages for?"

– Jean-Louis Kerouac

Living Kerouac's dream
a little place in Northern California
wife and kids as he notes in his journal
running cattle the fantasy of any boy
growing up east of the Mississippi
anyone out West knows the hard reality
but writers want success and the leisure
they believe comes with it another fantasy
*"if it weren't for fantasy most writers
wouldn't have anything to write about"*
slouched in chair plaid dressing gown
scuff streaked slippers needing a shave or
stand at window gaze at the luxuriance of fall
that old crow atop the power pole might just
be Jack a voluntary hermit St Anthony
squawking *heteroclite heteroclite* like some
Mexico City martyr that old orange tom who
makes all the kitties might be Jack (or Neal)
or mocking jay just out of reach all of them
Jack out for a walk Jack sees what I see
because I'm living that dream as soon as
he's finished writing it before the pencil lifts
from the notebook page I am there as him
in the dim shadows of late afternoon embodied
by certain admonitions the American dream
becomes a nightmare for those lousy with hope
Jack says *"I know that I am just an imaginary
blossom"* shoulder to shoulder with old Walt
as yawping Yankees Jack made it ok to be silly
fool jester madman on *Firing Line* Jack jowly
and jolly a paper target thereby illustrating
the benefits of a low profile as Jack wrote
to Allen *"Fame makes you stop writing"*
I admit to having taken that advice to heart
"It's a long and lonesome road" says Jack
"but I couldn't ask for better company"

ELIXIR OF YOUTH

Distracted by a hair
the archeology of my desk
shifted layer by layer
what great discoveries
wait to be made among
paper thin strata

*paper paper everywhere
not a pen to be found*

expansiveness of dusky fall day
frost curled leaves early morning
car rooftops spangled wet
an angled light spreads cresting
rising moisture illuminated as pure haze

I have found the elixir of youth
mix with water and
I'm good for another millennium

hot water flavored with dried leaves
hot water flavored with ground roasted beans
hot water alone for that ascetic effect

though these days it's more
about neurosis than consciousness
I live in my language wear it
like a comfortable pair of jeans
and an old faded t-shirt

chatter rising

out of the void and its silence
comes mind and truth breath brings
life and its aspirant word