

**Little Brown Head,
Little Blonde Head**
(for Joseph and Laurel)

Joseph Came in the Spring

Joseph came in the spring
when the wild plum blossomed –
his blue eyes the sky's
that wind-blown day
when he took his first breath.

When Joseph and Laurel Came

Joseph came in the early spring
when the wild plum broke into blossom,
Laurel just after the solstice.
Joseph was born on a bright blue day,
Laurel in a silver drizzle.
Joseph came to us late on a warm spring night,
Laurel at 8 o'clock on a morning
whose light slid down its fresh-washed face.
Joseph journeyed with us out of time's still point
in the dark of night; Laurel brought
morning and waited to share it with us there.

Little Brown Head, Little Blonde Head

little brown head, little blonde head
side by side by the barrel crouch
watching the hose I'd left watering it
silently overflow

forehead to forehead peering down
into the Halloween pumpkin

drowsily nodding in the car seats
where I'd left my
heart and soul
down by the children's side.

Oh, Loved One

why is it that the parent,
calling children,
will go through the entire list,
sometimes adding their own parents,
grandparents, siblings
even the cat and dog?
because the voice inside
is simply calling
"oh loved one."

My Musical Garment Bag

bringing home your musical teddy
so tightly stuffed in my bag
that whenever the bag is squeezed
it plays Lullaby & Goodnight
– unexpected as that voice
of mild music that came and soothed
and sang me to sleep so many years ago.

The Surprised Elf

(for Laurel, on Jennifer's Shoulder)

little round head popped up over a shoulder
like an elf over a log among the salmon berry
curiously regards me,
mouth a round O
head bobbing,
round eyes surprised but
determined to make sense of it all.

Picking Ripe Salmon Berries on the Quarter-Mile Drive

little boy in a hooded
red sweatshirt
dissolves in a blur of red
among green leaves
reaching for berries
themselves dissolving
blurs of red.

**Visit to Point Robinson
with Joseph, 2 Years Old**

green stone
in a white shell
on gray sand
by brown sticks

If Later in Life

(for Laurel)

if later in life, a woman,
you love the smooth swinging rhythm
of a man's work, find bodily
satisfaction in his labor,
the soft pulls and pushes of muscle
applied to the things of the world –
 raking grass,
 planing a board,
 making love –
perhaps it began here, 5 weeks old
as I take you outside to rake
(all hope of writing blown away
in the so'wester of your squall)
and, refashioning the sling
so that you rest comfortably
against my hip and back,
work through the morning
lumping the new-mown grass
into swales that dot our meadow
as, happily, you sleep
swinging there on my back.

Little-Boy Smells

he smells this morning like cinnamon toast –
little boy softly babbling
as he waves his toy.

other mornings he smells of mother's milk,
faintly of Cream of Wheat
an old clothes hamper
a helping of split pea soup
fresh soap, sleepy head
smelling of warm bed linen,
bright-eyed boy with earth
on his hands.

You Are My Sunshine

(for Laurel)

from your birth,
sunbreaks
in a northwest spring
fell into the house.

when every cranberry in this bog
was bright with the bitter bite
of sorrow too long
settled in the soul

small smiling tot
toddling into the slough
your face lit
the whole bog.

Morning

for Joseph

I have seen morning stretch itself awake
 with yellow hair
and knowing what was coming
and that it would be undeniable,
I have felt morning feel my face
carefully with small fingers
to see if I were awake and substantial
and I have led morning by hand
down the stairs and held morning in my lap
as it ate a banana.

Joseph, First Night in His Own Room

little boy lost in clean sheets
first night in a big bed,
his own room –
the first small move away from us
already felt, uprooting
not a huge tree by high winds
but a small plant from a vegetable garden
soil still warmly clinging
to threads of roots
like a small hand whose warmth
still lingers in mine.

Joseph – Catching Cold

we both wake at 3 a.m. with a cold –
I hear him through the wall
and go in to pick him up and rub his back
standing in the cold dark by his bed.
back in my own bed I hear the clock strike 4, 5, 6
Joseph tossing and turning.
at 6 I get up and bring him back to my bed
where we sit on the edge and I give him
the banana milkshake Jennifer made for him
last night while he sits in my lap.
at last we relax back in the bed,
lying side by side
and he eventually begins to talk –
still little-boy nonsense words –
and gets up, while I go on holding
the space where he's been.

Little Angel of Our Midnight Talks

(for Laurel, age 4)

In the middle of the night she comes in,
small tired body barely audible
crawls in next to Jennifer
and settles down, *small bird*
nestling close to her mother's cloud of warmth.

After a few minutes her breathing lengthens,
I wait, rise, lift her to my shoulder,
carry her back to her own bed,
returning to the space she opened
in the middle of our night

and then we talk.

Meditation with Joseph

“What are you doing?” he asks.
“Sitting quietly without thinking” I answer.
He crawls up onto my lap.
“What is this music?” he asks.
“Meditation music” I answer.

Rocking slowly, holding him,
no longer the little body
that balanced easily on my shoulder,
now he has to fold himself
onto my lap.

Rocking slowly, holding him,
nothing could bring me sooner
to my own heart.
I am not him
he is not me
but we are both waves
upon this sea.

“Why do people meditate” he asks
“Because there is Spirit” I answer,
knowing this makes no sense.
He nods.
He wants to talk about bugs and dinosaurs
and which came first,
and also when will the sun will blow up
and will we be extinct by then?
“This meditation music is making me sleepy” he says,
“Lets go get some cereal.”

Sweeping

November, the last sand
from the summer
in which Joseph was six
and Laurel four
sticks at the base of the doorjamb.

Take Any Chance

A minor occasion – a scratch,
the pea-brained panicked cat
clawing wildly free
because
the joyously bounding
oblivious dog
allows me once more to serve the beloved,
to peel carefully the backing from a bandage
dab on a little hydrogen peroxide –

the young man
(little boy no longer)
holding out his hand.

Father's Daughter

(for Laurel and Teri)

I

my father reached for my sister
(little more I'm told)
later many lies were sold
forcing her orbit far
face pressed toward interstellar space
until she rounded the ecliptic,
made the hard turn
and was waiting to board
in a small eastern Washington airport
to see him for the first time in 32 years
when word came of his death.

the spin jumps instantly in two
linked quanta, be they never so far apart.

II

"small daughter" he'd say
and then twist in that phrase her heart –

but ours, not quite six, tiptoes
early mornings careful
not to wake us –
into bed
and wriggles into place.

I place a hand a moment on your side
you cover it with your own
small hand patting mine.
and there we have it –
what neither my sister nor I
experienced,
spreading whole
across our hearts –
and I knowing he is gone,
and she knowing I am here.

Father's Father

(for Joseph)

outside, if you look tonight you will see a ladder
fixed upright against the night sky.
it cannot be leaning against the stars –
yet there is no visible support for its upper end,
its feet planted firmly in the earth.

if you look, it's there every night.

my father's father, so estranged from his father
that he took his mother's father's name,
would understand why I have done the same,
returning the name used only two generations.
my father may have his own
reasons: he knew his father (whom I knew
only as the kindest of grandfathers)
in ways we cannot know. nor was his father
able to reach or rescue his son. radical amputation
has removed our knowledge of that history.
but we know that each of us has been
in our turn, a ladder
set up against nothing, reaching,
it appears,
for the far lone bright points of light
that thicken impossibly distant
night's black blanket above the still earth.
silence surrounds their aloneness.

this will stop here.

you may lean your ladder on mine
and your son, if you have one,
will lean secure on you and on two generations
of interlocking love. may it build from us, Joseph.
may true family begin with us. this is how
tradition begins,
a ladder set up alone against nothing,
the night foundation for what is to come.
may our son's sons look back
on an unbroken line of father's fathers
starting
here.

Children's Poems

Going to Sleep Song

all the ways of self go by
all the days of life go by
down among the octopi
all the seas on earth go by

go slowly by
go slowly by
down among the octopi
all the days on earth go by

all the seas of waves flow by
all the caves of self flood high
down among the octopi
all the play of life goes by

goes slowly by
goes slowly by
down among the octopi
all the seas of time flow by

all the whys of pines that sigh
all the cries of mine that sigh
down among the octopi
all the cries and whys go by

go slowly by
go slowly by
down among the octopi
all the trying times go by
all the times of life go by

The Rainbow Song

i

Swing high, swing low
swing over the rainbow
swing till you know
what lies over the rainbow.

chorus

Rainbow of colors
rainbow of wonders
rainbow so happy and free
swing over the rainbow.

ii

Swing high, swing low
swing over the rainbow
swing till your toe
touches the edge of the rainbow.

iii

Swing high, swing low
swing over the rainbow
swing till you go
higher and over the rainbow.

iv

Swing high, swing low
swing over the rainbow
swing after the black crow
that flies away over the rainbow.

v

Swing high, swing low
swing over the rainbow
swing till your woe
runs down the face of the rainbow.

vi

Swing high, swing low
swing over the rainbow
swing till the Tao shows
its face to you in the rainbow.

Sing-Song from the Liminal Land

pick up stones when hungry
they leave me empty
time out of memory
when once were plenty

click stones of memory
why now so hungry?
there once was plenty
time turns round empty

why now so hungry?
there are stones aplenty
no time is empty
once full in memory

no more the plenty
time turns to empty
each stone so hungry
once full in memory

give time to empty
stones out of memory
no longer plenty
no longer hungry

once there were plenty
why now so hungry?
twice full in memory
three times to empty
time out of memory

The Singing of the Ese

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the Veronese and the Viennese
the Tyrolese and the Milanese
the Javanese and Japanese
Siamese and Portuguese
Maltese, Chinese, and Dodecanese
all climbing the Pyrenees
singing what the summer weaves
sweet western breezes of Hesperides
the isosceles of Diogenes
in whose parentheses we seize
antitheses of hypotheses
becoming simple as aborigines
to please the weeping Pleiades
in antipodes of ease

The Peach-Stealer (for Joseph)

The peach-stealer

stands about so high
a short blonde guy
with that look in his eye.
I was eating my peach
when he came by.

The peach-stealer came by
with that look in his eye –
before I knew it
my peach said “bye-bye.”

The peach-stealer himself said
neither hello nor good-bye –
just took my peach
that once swung so high.

He can't reach them himself –
don't ask me why.
He'll eat them alone
or made into pies.

The peach stealer's gone
and my peach – oh my!
I tried to keep it, I always try.
But when the peach-stealer comes by
one can only sigh.

The Toilet-Paper Unroller

(for Joseph)

the t.p. unroller
has grown bolder
I'd barely left,
I looked over my shoulder –
in the blink of an eye
the roller's colder!
where white once
neatly wrapped the holder
now the floor's piled high
under snow-white boulders.

The Soda-Snatcher

(for Laurel)

the soda snatcher had a plan
(my root beer said "Dad's" –
it's right on the can)
she came in low, she left on the lam
what did I have? an empty hand.

the soda snatcher had my can
(there's not much left –
it's out of my hands)
she came and went like a flash in the pan
my root beer's gone, it was more brown than tan

the soda snatcher's gone a mile
a short cute girl with a burpy smile
a taste for root beer and plenty of wiles.
she's a bubbly girl with lots of fizz
my root beer's her's, it was gone in a whiz.

so here's to the soda snatcher,
may she never run dry
there's none to match her,
no one could try.
may she keep herself in good supply
from someone's root beer, other than mine!

Into the Tub!

(A Bathtime Rhyme for Ian)

rub! rub!
rub-a-dub-scrub!
into the tub!
you fubbed the grub,
bub –
into the tub!
rub-a-dub-scrub.

rub! rub!
scrub in the tub!
bare little chub,
scrubbed to the nub!
blub!
let's play sub!
blub, blub, blub.

rub! rub!
what a hubbub!
i dub you Sir Chubb,
bub of the tub!
scrub!
i dub you Sir Chubb!
what a hubbub.

Two Short Stories for a Small Boy

(for Ian)

I

small pine afield in a swell
of scotch broom
(the lithe sun slips long
into late afternoon).
asea in the green, can you
see past the broom
that deftly weaves you
in its golden shalloon?
then shoulder aside the
shouldering twine –
you'll reach the same height
as the full-grown pine.

II

watchfully coveted by a quadron moon,
sole in the sea slapped a log laced in spume.
the moon-wrung water walked up on white slippers,
wakened the driftwood with a pale harpoon –
stole up, caressed, crooned an innocent tune,
tugged and lay back beneath the silver dipper.
and the log tossed all night in a net gallooned
with the finest threads of a covetous moon.

Umpy

(A Silly Rhyme for Hannah & Ian)

She was an umpish woman –
 dumpy,
 clumpy,
 plump,
even frumpy; she stumped
toward me
and thumped my back –
but in all her stumpy, thumpy ways
(her lumpy lap spread
like a field for children
 to run and jump, her bumpy
chin poked out in fun) –

oh, she was umpy
 but she was happy.