

In The Dark Midwinter

Though All That Is, Is Passing

Christmas Eve, 2014

to the tune of "The Snow Lay on the Ground"

Where once there stood a-weathering
two tall trees
The sky now shouts a clearing
on its knees.
When all there is, is passing
on a breeze
The heart that seeks seems fastening
to love's lees.

Yet though the green be withering
in the freeze
No one who stands a-fearing
can be free.
When all there is, is passing
on a breeze
The heart that loves is shivering
constantly.

But whether come the brethren
gathering
Or stand alone a-fathering
what will be,
No heart that loves is fasting
eternally
Though all that is, is passing
on a breeze.

Draw Him Homeward Whom I Love

draw him homeward whom I love

past shade that moves in shadow
deep, at crossroads keep,
make bold dogs quake, his trails spice
though black blood seep
in barrows twice weep the dark slain.

draw him homeward whom I love

hush plainsong sung of wind and sea
hush croaking frog of sick despair
hush of hair and nightbird key
limbs that on my windows beat
cries from cradle, memories fleet

draw him homeward whom I love

light that flickers brief the east
keep from error him whom love slayed
oh can you knit the heartdark blight,
light that bleeds the shadow white
immolate the crossroads shade

draw him homeward whom I love

lightly spread the morning air
light is weeping done
lightly brush to dust his care
light is battle won
his face alight in grave repose

lower downward him whom I love

All That Goes

Christmas 2014

Nor all that lives is dying
day by day
Nor all that comes is going
nor will stay

So sing what goes a-flying
come what may
Love the love that's dying
in a play.

Know neither will deliver
what you pray
Nether runs the river
either way.

The Firs Lower Their Skirts

December 2008

the firs all modesty
lower their skirts
long branches drooping under snow –

white-armed women
stand in silent awe
in the vast circling
fallen now, and still.

they warm and everywhere
slide white cascades
from 1000 brides
white gowns slowly down
graceful limbs –

rustling she drops her down
into her white bed.
from every corner the eye
glimpses
the sleeves of snowing –
gusting, a handkerchief,

a veil,
a shower of linen
loosening lace –
what she put on
she lets drop,
down, down there is nothing
not falling.

Meditation as Winter Comes On

sitting on the dark floor,
breathing.
as often as it is caught
the mind begins weaving again.

a single star visible
in the corner of the window
not blocked by the dark cedar.

In the Frozen Hills

there doesn't seem to be much choice
but some relief
in accepting that this is where the path leads,
into the frozen hills;
neither dead end nor passage through
but only the bear trap
into which I've already firmly set my leg.
knowing not only is there no path out
but the way out is no path and while the trap
may be transcended, it is sprung.
still, the frozen hills
are the only direction
in fact I'm in them already
no question of going
but (with some relief)
only acceptance
that I go.

Christmas Season Commute

December 2014

Inching down the curve off the West Seattle ridge
a double lane of taillights
decorate the freeway bridge
strung like an overdone
skein of tangled Christmas lights
hung with little devotion askew
on the handiest knobs of morning
swing into view
as consciousness dully overtakes long strings
of cars like stalled thoughts
overcoats thrown hastily on last night's bed
in a darkened guest room
whose party the guests have long since fled.

A Snowfall Like A Blessing

(January 15, 2012)

may I calm
as this snowfall
settles

numerous, one
snowflake crystals
none dissonant

watching the breaths
of a lifetime
thickening snow

sand piled,
unpiled
by the sea

stars unhidden
by night
time created, uncreated

one of these
descending
like a blessing

holds them all
uncountable
and even were I

to use them
to cleanse my soul
there would be enough

the intuition that does not count
leaves each smallest twig
upholds the universe

in their passing
the lives
of all that fell and fell –
still falling, lost to no one

The Day Before the Darkest Day of the Year

December 20, 2012

The day before the darkest day of the year,
we celebrate light – we who have been the knife
plunged through our own wintry hearts.
On a morning that takes so long to come
to light, can our life be forgiven? The cabin
skylight has blown off and it is raining inside.
The soggy carpet soaks the socks.
Up all night replaying words that should not
be said. Up all night praying
in the quiet way of self-recrimination
that earns peace most painfully. Wishing no light
be shed on the fault-lines that criss-cross day.
Welcoming light welcomes exposure,
ruin, shame. Oh shame, shame that is
my nearest neighbor whom I have the dim
respite of seeing less clearly in the dark –
on the day before the darkest day of the year
it is the light thrown on your face that we celebrate.

The Darkest Day of the Year

December 21, 2012

The ark, sailed off by a stiff-necked man and his sons,
leaves behind to drown those of whom he is contemptuous –
which is to say, each small failure of which we are made.
Treading water, we watch as its huge hulk looms
off to the northwest, shrinking into the horizon.
Intussuscepted back into black water, choices
are few and the choice is clear. Speak little
or be silent. Eat small portions. Reveal less
than you say. Sidestep wrath. Quieten lust.
Buy few luxuries. Take no more than one drink.
Pride, refusing to sink, becomes the weight
by which we find the bottom. We have but one breath
to bring with us. No remorse weighs greater
than the loss of moments that have already been
lived; the escape of words that cannot be
unsaid; the waste of life that may never again
be relived. All of these are shrouded
by the bowed head on the darkest day of the year.

The Day After the Darkest Day of the Year

December 22, 2012

How is it that the world did not end in winter,
in dark sorrow, shame, and remorse?
How have we come through this membrane
into a small but increasing light?
If only I *could* answer grace. But speechless
I confess I cannot be but a black bud hunkering
through the freezing sleet waiting the touch
of some new warmth when – shoulders untighten,
the black weave of night unlaces like some veil
unraveled, white windows appear at first as holes,
at last unbelieving the refutation is disproved
negation refused, refusal denied, denial renounced,
renunciation disavowed, disavowal undone, No
said to No, unreserved love, unrestrained
embracing,
unregarded overstepping of ordinary boundaries –
we uncoil slowly from what we had so tightly
clenched
only to discover it was the clasp of those we most
loved
on this the day after the darkest of the year.

Going North in Winter

home, where I was born, lies North this winter.
the window caked with snow looks that way.
it lies in a wing of the house never visited,
in a cold room, unopened for some years.
under snow, everything looks the same –
as does everything under earth, buried, in the grave.
in winter's death, coming into the room,
the only way to look out the window
is to break it. the fist-crashed glass shatters
to fall on the slivered snow like crystal blossoms.
spring indistinguishable under the winter landscape,
nothing presents itself to the eye
but this home, this spring, that cannot be seen.

Another Dead-of-the-Longest-Night

December 21, 2016

so much life gone by preparing for life to start,
unprepared to part, clutching a ragged shawl
 bowed over its knots
 telling it slow

rocking through stops in these two-car train towns –
nowhere bound through too still end-of-line
 rural night towns
 where no one goes

last aboard, riding the dinky rattler to its nowhere end
left to fend, to tell the tatters, mound up momentos
 finger heirlooms
 past the long-ago

a memory a town a stop passed, another gone,
so soon done? – who knew what was passing
 whose reflection
 (bright-lit windows)

flashed past not so fast as not to be treasured
what was measured but the length of the line
 that can't be told
 til ridden to its oh and no

Good Night Godwit, Good Wight

2016

The godwit window toward which
we reel in the rainy dark
draws us on, broke-neck birds
born to dark,
sea-long flight, half dead through
night-strayed – ah
good wight,
alone down the much trod
way of the world, the countless
compatriot
tred, the numberless footsteps, the
redounding tramp of the undone –
we find our way y unexpected
mistake to light, to light –
our way
to the light.

Hold Near the Dark

December 29, 2017

these are the days of dark, hold them near
pull them to the chin, turn over
in the dark, warm bed
burrow down while dark clasps close
for the dark earth turns inexorably
a little time for fecundating
the darkened planet spins and tilts
a line of white cracks the enveloping dark
black earth seed
 grasp earth to shoulders
turn over in the dark bed
white grains disperse the dark
lengthen by moments

We've Kept the Outdoor Tree Lighted

for Laurel, January 22, 2015

Hardly anyone but you stands my bitter taste –
age has made me a tea brewed too strong,
coarse as old winter, its rough wool coat hung
on an old poet's frame who tramps a century
long centuries occluded. I doubt
wiping the blowing wet from my face
with that worn coat sleeve
will much improve my sight of the trail, but
when I think how my cross-threaded old
temper got screwed down wrong
on even you I feel the driver strip the corrugated
ridges right down to the metal shaft. But
since you are my daughter perhaps
backing it out it will be no more than we do from ourselves
when a voice that blows back amid the blustery
flurries splatters history's face.
Soon enough I'll no longer be trampling
these trails and they, with no one rampaging
down through the ferns to the Shinglemill,
will soon enough overgrow and disappear
from beneath the disappearing feet, yet
this Christmas with you far overseas in Japan,
we've kept the outdoor tree lit against your return,
blues, reds, oranges, greens night after night
alight after we've laid our wearied selves to sleep.

Coming To

December 11, 2020

Coming to, arms slubbered in the same labor,
straining the hawser through the cat hole
slung over my shoulder, tugging
the freighter lugging the pain of time
up the narrow canal once flooded
with tears –

now only a little water remains
at the bottom –

freighting all the pain in the world we know
to the end of the world as we know it,
soles slipping, joints tearing, grip swearing,
barely enough water in the narrow canal to float her,
walls on both sides singing the shriek of metal

we enter Dark December – the 20 darkest days
of the year –

in the bleak midwinter sung without hope
but with the greatest of hope,

– *what can I give, poor as I am?*
not the poisoned heart soaked in its ink,
not that. though

earth stood hard as iron, water like a stone
the rain that steadies
falls within, without, without distinction
everywhere raining down faces,
overflowing gutters, washing the fir boughs,
filling the summer-dried pond.

winter sun

December 2020

winter sun falls at a weak angle,
pale trace over oak drawers.
the strong stroke of the sunsword
won't come again until the solstice.
the slanting light moves off west.

what suffering must contribute
in some deep way to what we become,
transforming, in some deep way,
that weight to human betterment.

a weak rain falls at almost no angle,
sprinkling the wet lawn and pond
with increase. undistinguished plashes
rebound and lip circles too small to note
as the quieting drizzle moves off west.

How to See the Path

December 31, 2019

walking at night
look down –
the path dark
but out beyond
shines pale