

John Pass / THROUGH WINDFALL CENTER

in memory of Kristina Kishkan

The broken mountains have become neutral. — Forché

Its infamous indifference (our difference
that we care and mourn)
can almost hear the boy in me

in the ravine between school and subdivision.
The seminal religion of the weedless lawn
and burr-like bits of botany (fronds

not needles on the cedar, the hemlock's drooping
tip) dipped there into shared irrelevance: waste
ground too steep for building, logged over.
Its second growth was insulation, mossy sponge

for my singular adolescent portion
of anxious longing, coming
to self-consciousness, batting for the personal noises
disallowed everywhere else. And a bafflement

of voice and hearing, place and person
Wordsworthian mutter
drones ever on

reinvents its fashion
recycles through orcas or the singing forest
retro-prayer, a sappy public pantheism.
I think to wear with a difference

this Body Shop t-shirt on Father's Day
so you can read it on me if I turn
my back, try to walk away: *Nature*

never did betray the heart that loved her . . .



Meantime each thing as hard to say
as its form or atmosphere implores of me
metaphor's amber, nocturne, ambivalent specificity.



Where she died
I've never been but imagine

coastal high country
clear-cut slopes laced
with logging roads and mist.

Granite sky, loose gravel
on the hard turn at lake edge . . .

everything the pre-dawn grey
of the May morning her father phoned
waking us, having waited all night

for a decent hour, unable
to wait longer. She died

and a world in her eyes, behind her eyes
we'll never know, eighteen, planning
to study forestry. I imagine

nothing growing where she died.
The paralyzed moment. No sunrise.



To cheat, I explain to my curious daughter
and blunder on, *nature won't cheat if you love her*

enlivening the cruel conceit
it's *our* cheating hearts must belie it to live
somehow gladly grasping, bundling

wasp sting, or bramble dragged
through a sandal running, asthmatic
gasp of pollen, into haphazard exhilaration
the pup runs around us, sky-diving

caterpillar hope
in its plastic pail
leaf-nurtured, cocooning . . . All

close hurt, hurt aspiration, all
stricture unto death tricks open
tracery, delineation . . .

And opens a roving, rolling eye for distance,
death's princess, demure distraction, a good view

of mountain across the lake, star-shape, spectrum, long
avenue of trees . . .

Her diadem on a foreground bough,
a spring shower's trinket, dangles
the toggle switch

reach/refusal: simplistic riddle
of the light's contrivance.

But thing-bulk and biomass
back of every surface, every assumption
in fleshy O'Keeffe, Carr's turbulence
or Turner's luminosity imply

a problem not for the eye but of the soul.



When lilac first by the sundeck rusts
opening summer's reliquary

cottager confronting lake
bends to crank the Merc 850

humbled before the shadowy hills at e'en
and sunset's burnish on the alders

by a wet plug. Of elemental power
pictorial fiction

what show him

downwind of the party cutting loose
swathes and swatches of *Purple Haze*
and *Helpless?* Fit requiem

for attention, attachment.
Requiem for scenes imposed
upon the eyes closing
of things looked at day-long, idly

or in some mild anxiety
of expectation: fragile visibility

of new grass newly watered,
heat sheen of highway

at horizon, thunderheads holding
off. Is that *Stairway*

To Heaven clouding
an Ansel Adams' moon
and precipice

warped to the edge, extent
of meaning: earth, that marble
from Apollo 8, end of the genre?



Soul, that first rung artifice
of consciousness, unseen constant
memory holds sense to seem

clones the lustrous teen
and ornamental cherry blooming
outside the high school, DNA's plausible angels
simultaneous, adjacent

oblivious as I'm driving by
to the codes and processes
shared, their not-so-secret virginities.

How many hidden on the hard drive now
or danced on pinheads then
till we wholly ken that distance, space
itself folds

into smaller nowhere
the mind's clothing?

And those ancient forests of physical forms
more medieval daily (present and spectre
and prophecy) take to this new strategy
like logs to water, default

to directory tree, the booms' down-time embroidery
of the river's mouth, pulpy intertexts . . .

though love for texture likes the leaf
of another between thumb and forefinger
wants its transparent apples weighty

and the faller still needs his saw.



Her uncle comes to the funeral
his forehead, hands and forearms bandaged
battered from beating against the windshield

to get back in
underwater
and unknot her seatbelt.

(that apple-cheeked girl)

Whatever she saw disappeared forever
a liquid light.

I'm uncle too, and landholder, believer
after a fashion.

Mother earth, spaceship earth
the firmer than me and you dimension

nothing
where the off-road vehicle goes off land.



Daylight at least. Daylight.
And fireweed flaring in the bleached
and blackened slash, deadfall.

Maybe some buckbrush willow
by the water, clumps

of gangly alder in the gullies
like kids hanging out at the mall.

And the ghost of a moon.



Just let me climb up out of this . . .
spinning my wheels, relentless
pivot of the cycloramic

crowning green neutrality endlessly
shuffling its wild spaces, vistas
into prospects, new perspectives

new age where the worthiest
lie on their backs in the old growth, squinting,
counting murrelets. Omnivores cleaning off

the rose leaves, cleaning up
dropped fruit, even the wasps
have their uses. Mine

incomprehensible, inappropriate here
as right angles, language.
Oh let me climb up out of this

flood of myself, lunacy
of reflection, grotesque in the armoured
circuitry of the virtual

reality harness, vision's bulimic.



As love hasn't made
me part of you, wife, lover, you
part of me, and has

buried my face in the burnt-toast smell
of your hair, *my whole heart*

or some such felt
phrase sprung to mind

so we whisper to each other
aghast now at its toddler charm
your best remembered phrase of hers
coming home in winter, huddled
in all the coats and sleeping bags
as the house thawed: *It's seizing cold*
Aunty Terry, seizing cold . . .

So I've wrestled erect a wall I've framed, spiking
down the braces, or propped the burgeoning

Conference pear, crouched under
its full-term, fruitful shade
overhearing my own seduction.

Skills! Husbandries! Incantations! The struggling
blind entanglements of sorrow, effort, passion!
Everything rests upon them

and their out-sprung gestures, presumptions
of connectedness, unity

played out into . . .
as far as the eye can . . . And this must be

the life of the spirit, echoes
of physicality, feeling
cooling its heels

a bodily resonance boding . . .
and foreboding

formal transactions
of material plus gesture: blanket

ceremony, somebody moving
through the windfall center
as through debris, disaster

to enfold another's shoulders
in the gift, borne . . .



awaiting word, wording, received
in the sobs and shudders

of the spine collapsing
its extension ladder
of amphibian toeholds into gravity

in the self-hug's moan and rocking
in lamentation's shocking self-respect
in the exhaustion of supplication

in body mantra (the monitor's beep
and hum) mind's generator hatching
at last on its flat horizon

a "happy-face" sticker
or the first Himalayas
of new-sought habitation.
His wavery row

in the gardening therapy plot.



Localities, lucidities.

Don't say endangered, dying.
They are done. And stand as they can
in staring, wordless independence

in disproportionate import, icons
of the texts and galleries, decor
of the lobbies and lounges, that portion

of porch steps and railing visible
through a kitchen window

within and outside our fashioning.
We are barely begun, becoming
every ending chased
after *I remember* . . .

each brush-stroke and f-stop and crippling ellipsis
along the way. Chastened, I laze in flesh tones

in close-ups of the body taken
for Saharan dunes at dawn
or drifts of lunar snow

blunt tongue in the dark
earthy taste of you, the mineral juices —
its life's work bumping into what

might warm to me: the close earth
auditioning, rehearsing us (walk

through to full dress)
for the closing closeness
its choking gasp or sigh

where family throw flowers on the water.



A world to see: not you, not me,
not other, neither
kind nor unkind

emerges from that incidental calm
time (or is it only our time)
finds, belittles, isolates

in glimpses, immeasurable . . .
You wake

. . . upon a shore
your cheek a little sore from
its position as you dozed

in late summer, late afternoon
on a towel on a log extending
into the lake. A diver

has stepped over you to reach the end.
Everything is close now:
various, explicit, lovely

and committed to itself
and to the contingencies.
Each thing is wise with contingency

and won't say its simple, singular shape,
its colour. Love, work, language

are our business, but
before we are about it, before
we breathe a word or wish

we'd brought the camera, a world
is new, and worth it. Wants us.
It is the world where everything has happened.