

QUAKE WAX

Quake Wax

by

Lenny Koff

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Quake Wax

Here are the instructions as discipline
against the tremor: scoop a pea-sized piece of wax
and place it in the palm.

Roll it with the index finger.
Layer it around collectibles
evenly spaced on the contact surface.

With a downward pressure,
set each object in position.
Twist one-eighth of an inch, a gesture.

For best results, allow the wax to keep
the centerpiece from touching anything
on the mantel.

At temperatures above the boiling point
wax is not the recommended seal.
To be steadied, it provides

a first line of defense. The underground
has its own direction,
moving mountains if it chooses,

teasing with a shift from side to side
that isn't going anywhere.
It can wait for years, knowing desire

glues the heart to irrational places,
making us sure of unsteady designs,
thick decisions, even as we choose them.

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I. The Shaking

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Boundaries

When the curator brought us to the case
in which the manuscript illumination
drew its light,

I stepped to one side of the tour
to lean in closer, resting my arms on the case's edge,
looking inside for supernatural reflection.

But my breath only met constant temperature,
and I lost sight of the page, my nose pressed to the pane,
my full will condensing before me.

I stood there, rubbing the glass,
again and again at a distance that kept the secrets
that would have cleared the way,

the Sybil's notes that led Aeneas underground,
that might lead me
from half light to something rarer.

But the page was made to lie in the dark
for its own safety, secure in looking up.
I was the future it couldn't reach,

its light promise, its prophecy illuminated,
and each of us, once the condensation cleared,
remained in the other's sight

as clear as glass, as lonely as history.
The best we did was stare,
knowing we saw right through

LENNY KOFF

to each other,
knowing what each other wanted
from the other.

Deletion

Over sheets of green or silvered glass
on slivered towers of steel braced rooms,
reflections and distortions, like the moving stills
on strips of flawless celluloid, duplicate
without revealing what they might mean.

No sculptured protrusions here,
no frieze-like half-globes, monumental thighs,
no attenuating masonry, a saint's hand or eye,
no pure designs off an emperor's crown or an elephant's jeweled
back.

Nothing is still on an unembellished building.
Film-like imagery washes an impregnable surface.

From inside we can look and not be seen.
Here cool, mindless air-conditioning and the muted keys
of keyboards make eternal noise
just at the level that sets our nerves going.

Under the light of the cursor, as if we were always shadowless,
we send our errors effortlessly to limbo. *Gone*.

We leave no trace on paper that we made mistakes
or corrections, entering the perfect surface of our documents
as fluent as the elements playing just the other side
of the window.

For appointed times, our hands are flawless,
explaining explanations at the terminal.
Then we stop.

I have tried it, hiking through the pines

where light's let in like calls to something broad ahead,
parting trees like someone moving through a crowd,
pushing aside the angular stretches, coming up for air.

And I have stood above the timberline, catching my breath,
the trees below as if their tops were grass,
the sky ahead thin blue
perfectly silent, except for my heart.

My head was light. My sense of things still dark,
hoping at this altitude for the smoothing out I was moving to
hour by hour on my way here.

This is where it happened:

not the change that taught me something else, a natural lecture.
I brought the darkness with me,
a steady state,
for no walking cure could make a difference.

So there I sat perched like a bird
too long, knowing I was resting where nothing
could be ground, all transfiguration waiting
for the wind to catch it, if I dared to leap.

O watch the sun. Even here something of it rushes through
and in this almost heat, this rare time,
we should blindly let our jackets fall
to dress for a new excursion.

An instant later I am only cold,
hands almost frozen, pulled back to caution like a two-year old
trying to button a red cardigan for the first time,
a precious little man, untried wings pinned to his side.

The Next Ascent

I was standing where the elevators open.
They were shut.
I pressed the button pointing up

and waited patiently
before one set of silver doors,
the Jubilee, the doors that I had chosen.

To anyone who noticed I appeared transfixed
as if behind these doors about to open
there'd be room enough.

Then up appeared behind me,
where I wasn't looking.

Doors I never saw, the doors I dreamed
weren't mine were always mine.
But not continuously;

for as I turned, the single car
this time with room enough for everything I was,
was shut.

New Molecules

On the moon we can't take off our space helmets,
breathe another air,
not purer than ours but simply different.

Only on earth can we transcend to higher ground,
the annihilation of human breath,
the fiction of science.

In the void of the movie theater
the Martian Godzilla hotwires Tokyo,
his foot a universal track

on which he drags all planets in our heavenly walk,
his prints a reel for the age's planetarium.
Where we find ourselves — at home —

we only watch the flag unfurling
every moment in the lunar breeze,
such as it is. We capture in our living room

the space of a sphere, our dream of planetary rebirth
prefabricated here and always with us like a banner
the TV camera's instant replay spots.

Germany Revisited

Once a thousand chimneys topped this world
and smoke ascended from a skein of thread
like filigree. A prayer shawl wept.
The social fabric rent. Who can explain unraveling?

Now the wall has toppled
and the hands that once made wire
circle a cousin's cousin.
There is no judgment. Just reunion.

A glossy sky refuses memory,
accepts no ornament, no history —
a ring of houses up the hill. The individual will
freed from death, embodied in a thousand rooms.

But in what spirit do we watch the marching band
each October, cheer this place in the sun,
the balding heads, the bellies taut with cabbage,
standing firm on a surface of tombs?

The Normandy Bluff

We came here not to find a soul, and saw,
at proper intervals, the names we did not recognize,
crosses that align at angles, David's stars,
now indistinguishable by rank or past.

Two swimmers way below wade waters
once a fury of blood. What could we do
but lug a pebble back from the beach,
and place it on the flat grass, the altar?

As I left I put away my camera.
I'd remember parking lots and the humid silence
of those returning to their cars,
hands behind their backs, thinking.

Soon an unknown soldier

will be known, the tomb cracked,
the seal broken,

his bones revealed to fresh air.
The national gesture
has all the signs of resurrection

(for those invoking the Bible),
for this time we have done it,
comparing DNA to testify to truth,

to comfort the grieving with facts,
as if being unknown were being forgotten.
So one of our own

has a name, embraced
once more by his family.
And the others?

More anonymous that ever,
lying naked
before our helpless instruments

to which we can offer
no cell samples, no sacrifice,
to give spirit a body.

That Sunday Morning

From the dock at Pearl Harbor,
I held the distant ship at arm's length,
hoping the sea would soften it.

But the sloping white memorial, once I docked,
stood anchored like an upper deck,
a school of fish surrounding it,

as if it rested in a tropical lake.
One starfish made a way over barnacles
and occasionally, standing at the center

as I reached to touch the sea,
drops of oil surfaced,
spreading colored rings almost within reach.

These are broken seals, the eyes of war.
They will leak indefinitely,
hover where they seem unnatural

like displaced windows.
Within the ship, water hardly moves
and the space is quiet, almost tender.

Where I stand, no ornament.
Only slabs of white and columns of names
and a bell that rings to mark the passing

of another boat of bone-dry visitors.
Their slow imitation of that great surprise —
black smoke,

the towering memory of war —
is photographed in colorless stills,
white knees and white socks.

Rosalyn

Not everyone deserves a poem, let alone
a book of them. Kings have them everywhere,
the fathers of empire who commission praise
on walls or on framed parchment
commemorating days in illuminated chambers,
halls of mirrors.

My aunt deserves much more than she got,
my grandfather's daughter by his second wife,
who kept his picture on the TV stand,
reaching for it, I imagine, each hour of the night.

She returned to childhood in that place,
an apartment on Avenue Z where she lived
unmarried after her husband died,
whose slippers at his bedside
glowed in the dark to keep him safe.

And when we saw how she had set the table
with herring and a bagel
for each of us, the liver still in thick, bright paper
from the deli, blinding white,
my tears welled up like the fountain of youth
I would have bathed her in.

She was short, with a sort of limp.
And after we had lunch, she walked us to the door,
watching us moving along the hall
illuminated by rows of fluorescent tubes,
our shadows stretching around the tiled corridor
as if we were leaving her through a subway.

We walked for miles, it seemed,
until we saw the light through dirty lobby doors.
We never found our way back.

Once I dreamed

the revolution over yogurt
on the sun deck of the Student Union,
heard my narrative break and saw medieval birds,
exhausted icons, wing their way to the bottom of the page,
knocking down illuminated letters they could never read.

Once I listened to myself up Campus Hill
argue the hypothetical apocalypse,
walking with the setting sun to the salad bowl, an *idée fixe*.

More than once I called my father in the middle of the night,
left message after message on the answer phone
that took my voice without interruption,
Send tuition as soon as possible,

then left the next morning for the sun
glistening on the fountain and the warm spray
with which innocent birds
marked their daily migratory route from the hills
to the one instinctive sea beyond destruction.
They were calling my name with prepossessing assurance
from a world of loving patterns.

Grace

We always bless our children
with their things — a tea set, tiny houses,
cars they sometimes crush (we don't look down) —
like children under our feet.

We hardly mean to do it, but we do.
The towering demands of our height,
just lower than angels,
keep our eyes for self-protection always wide-eyed,

straight ahead. We bump against our toys,
harmful or friendly. There's no accounting for accidents.
But sometimes standing at the window,
having escaped our cubicles, wandering

to the only open space available in the high rise,
we look down at racing cars, play things.
They seem to move anonymously, completely without care.
If only we could pick one up and save it.

I couldn't help the wind,

that enormous anonymity, that pushed the window
or the stills on the dresser.

Without judging it took everything,
the equal and the unequal.

Its lesson was that time mattered,
though who can tell when time, like sand,
runs out, though that seems inconceivable?

Yet hope, simply waiting,
polishes itself like silver,
and though its eyes are shut
and it looks completely dead,
it will raise its hand and be counted
as soon as the counting starts.
It will move to the head of the line,
pushing others aside if the nod comes,
because hope can be fierce.

II. Longing

Built-in Furniture

Outside glass on the entrance level,
the corporate garden (in which no one sits)
attends bright noon for the ground to give.

No tree-lined calm from the wind,
no rotting wood, infinity of insects
over banks where lovers bathe and rise,

two slippery secrets.

This clear garden is a dry idea —
designer pots, stone steps,

a palm evergreen — standing open
an hour at a time to the parking structure
across the court.

At five the floors of staff descend,
walk quickly
through this prearrangement

suddenly abandoned in the evening light,
a distance half-tone like a canvas.
They leave an empty space to rest

and think of nothing else.
Who has noticed it lies wide-awake
and arching for the high dark sky?

I'm Afraid

Love for you, always within touch,
made me dance like a statue, my gesture
caught in a figure I had seen and taught myself,
a phrase as full of grace as an orator's tongue.

I beckoned out of some agitation for a still point.
A period. In truth I had no words for my body,
though you were always there, it seemed,
the audience for my dumb show.

What gleamed was my specter of light,
the form of my agonizing tenderness,
like curtains blowing from an empty room
from which the outline of a man flees.

Moving In

Today I wiped immovable dust, sifting like a pyramid
(since my mother died),
from off the table top, around the gentle cup in which I put the
butterfly
Jeanne gave us (saved from death by cupped hands),
around the long-necked vase,
streaked with tears,
the arching vase in which I put camellias
from the front of the house
the first Thanksgiving you spent here,
and I opened the house at the front door
and dusted,
even as dust whirled from the living room into the bedroom
I kept dusting,
and the house, from the moment we needed it
was clear as bright mahogany.

Moving Over

I've left the shade behind and you are adamant.
Without the beveled glass, the hanging light above the dressing
stand
reveals too much.

But I remember wrapping it in cloth and laying it inside a box
like a baby. An antique shade can soften light and shake the heart,
a precious stone.

I've gone through all the boxes that we carried over —
up each step I thought I lugged a stone.
One carton in the living room must be its place.

But shades defy logic, and the shade you want
has fallen to the bottom of some other box,
a lost treasure. You and the light above are raw.

Each morning since we moved, you see yourself alone
in the mirror, reflecting straight back what timeless glass
might easily, willingly curve.

You see everything. I see Degas from the bed,
my head high enough on the pillow
to make my eyelids shade you from anything harsh,

like being alone. You're wrong not to turn your body slightly
so I'll catch you touching your shoulder,
the porcelain basin of delicate bone.

The altar you stand before demanding truth
can so easily be swayed, its projections averted
by eyes that look this way.

Coins

I have put them in a change purse —
crowns with heads to deities, the candelabrum of the temple,
letters on the broken edge of castings.

Croesus made these pinpoints dropped in battle,
saved by priests who hid them under garments like a dowry.
I have bought them from a dealer, hide them too,

until I cannot bear their accidental history,
lodged for safety in suffocating places,
as if there were no change.

There is. And when the purse spreads out,
the coins make golden passages, and I can breathe
the way an instrument taken from its case catches breath,

the cellist in his tux, facing his audience
on a point of light, ready to play.
Everyone anticipates the evening.

Bach Took Her Breath Away

Call 911. I gave her CPR instead
and knew she said that
just to make me kiss her,
which I did,
a little ruse that made us laugh,
when she so often said she only laughed inside
where Bach lived.

So we were in love,
and all my anger went the way of flesh,
taking bed sheets from the dryer,
baking bread, fabric rising,
joy and everything else.

What we desired was the heat around our waist,
a high note wrapped in swaddling like a baby,
hands completely bound for life.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau Gets Spanked

The brush descends like an iron gate.
The innocent fanny rises
like the pink reshaping of the world after an earthquake.

For him it is desire broken, cruel acknowledgment,
as if his guilt, finally being opened, is now made passionately pure.
For her it is intrusion, and the tempting chance to make impressions.

Together, as imagined now in his *Confessions*,
they are emblems of autonomy, a perfect act,
as each of them, completed eggs (though Jean-Jacques never mentions
this),
comes rolling down the mountain side like the children of Easter,
tumbling to the surface of the lake at the bottom of the valley.

One maiden aunt in black, still bound to her sufficiency,
smiles from her bonnet, a chaperone.
She knew not what she saw.

What did he want from women?
To submit to virtue, to be shaped like rising bread,
mixing in his own mind a body of truth
suddenly liquid?

Here lie social contracts born of finger tips
and mastering rods, pleasure and pain,
and which is which?

Jean-Jacques certainly remembered this,
and kept her memory alive,
perhaps by never mentioning his kind of love to other women

LENNY KOFF

who might have given him again
that inexpressible return to paradise
from which, in the end, he remained,
except apparently once, with his Mlle Lambercier,
thrown out on his ass.

Einstein's Daughter

What we know of you we read about
in letters published after eighty years,
how they once treated you

just the way we can't help getting mad
at spoons or tires that go flat.
You were given away,

illegitimate before that,
his mother nagging him not to marry.
He was lionized wherever he went —

romantic, straight, a red mustache above full lips,
and when he laughed
they saw the boy who won the prize.

You were gone by then,
somewhere in Germany with a different name,
with something of your nature completely unnamable.

Yet he, too, in his early letters,
wrote he was at heart a loner,
imagining you at night when he,

still cloistered at the Institute,
scattered papers everywhere,
called your name,

Lieserl, my daughter,
the old defiance of his youth.
He could have met you easily

LENNY KOFF

because his universe was warped,
stepping across the line again,
mumbling each sentence in his world

before he said it once in this.
A double like us all.
Run to him and you'll catch up to one another.

Absolute distance, my special relative,
does not exist.
Desire passes through a vacuum.

III. Being Steady

Guide

A swan moves over impenetrable water,
a measurable distance in one direction,
then back in the other.

And all I do is stand here,
following, my head hardly turning,
transfixed,

executing movement,
though my body makes no discernable ripples.
The obsession with infinitesimal distances

and the curve of her neck —
this way and that — make time measurable
and weight descend,

a calm between us.
I can see exactly what she fears:
to be taken for something else.

The consort of Zeus,
the unwilling mother of gods.
She won't lose her direction.

We are standing as still as we can,
and although no intercourse between species
is possible now,

nonetheless we are
for at least one moment
one.

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My watching her curving neck
return to its place of safety
makes all the difference.

Finding Prayer: Jerusalem

We can take a map, divine the city,
return each part to those whom He has promised it,
their claims as fervent now as ever.

Only since the war have gates been opened
easily to visitors, tennis-shoed, looking for a bargain.
We cannot mock them if they cannot tell
the false from the real. They want something,
an eternal souvenir.

And what they see, they marvel at:
the clerics standing where a prophet rose;
the kneeling priests, who see divinity take shape,
then walk bare-footed after Him, carrying His death;
the men in fringes, elegant black coats,
swaying at the boundary of the Temple.
They read again what He has written
as if appearing yesterday, a fire of letters.
Theirs was not an ordinary exile.

As for me, I see a single bird above the Dome.
It has plunged the sea, been rescued
from near suicide, then lovingly set down
on the golden hill to brood and wing, a sheltering arm.

I only pray the claim of the ideal
is not a dark appearance. I would enter the world
from any attic through the walled gate,
catching my breath, which runs ahead.

This morning I saw leaves

for the first time, looking for light,
and imagined roots desperate for air.

The day was windless, but I knew the inching
above ground, the trees moving
in the only possible direction,

out of soil that kept them steady,
beyond nourishment that kept them home,
into the open.

For all their projections, their presence
as fences, as barriers that secure fields
from the destruction of wind,

for all their possible uses in allegory
as tall and straight and natural
like Virgilian senators,

trees want their freedom, too,
their place in the unknown
from which their internal processes

take sunlight.

I see now
how much their roots take pleasure

in possible loss,
exposure,
the fear of being cut back each season,

in simply taking it
and then pushing again through the crust
of the planet.

To My Eternal Life

The tongue remembers extracted parts,
feeling inside, again and again, as it feels
the space, testing the outlines of the tooth,
the sudden loss of protection
along the wall of teeth.

But when the dentist plants the titanium root,
porcelain grows suddenly on the new tree,
and the tongue, taken by surprise,
moves around the placeholder,
getting to know it like an elephant,
learning and mourning, passing from one Eden to another.

Titanium is a common metal, triggering no alarms,
giving the robber or the archeologist no pause to stop.
You'll take it with you, the dentist jokes,
removing his goggles and the mental prongs,
the instruments of rebirth.
It's a worldly possession no one wants.

Language is a Dove

If you talk about it, you can understand.
If you understand, you can live with it.
Did you expect a cure?

Talk is human, not immediately a miracle
since no god intervenes enough
to make our speech his continuous revelation.

We get there in our own time,
not inexorably as the crow flies,
for language is a dove,
the wings of a divinity we soar on
like passengers on an airplane.

Travel loosens everyone.
The perfect stranger in the aisle seat next to us
knows, perhaps for five hours,
our long continuous hollow.

There's a place for truth between minds
once in a while.
For the rest, hope
we don't collide at intersections.

For all its majesty,
none of which is our doing,
the earth understands blessing,

the place mat, the cuttings.
It lets us leap to something comprehensive,
pausing long enough,

perhaps consciously,
for us to know its massive hurl
into the sun.

Bright from here, the moon
promising so much, carrying distant longing
to imaginable heights,

is loose and dusty, without pull,
now that we've been there,
letting us bounce on it

without affection.
How we misjudge the ground
under our feet.

The Visiting Summer

You were gone to fashion ancestors for a book.
Novel connections in France was how you put it.
We were left to care for the birch and purple plum
and your insistent rose garden in the back
Southern California weathered against.

We could barely settle in the heat —
how had you done it all these years
below the airless gray rimming the valley of smoke,
the Indians' name for this benighted place?
The ground had cracked in the driveway
years before you remodeled.
You live on the spine of a great continental fault.

But I promised to water the thinning trees
and your sunnied rose garden every day for six weeks,
a topiary of wishes.

Finally, I too imagined the swimming pool
as clear as a Berkshire pond,
reflecting in all it saw not cloudless blue,
but a pleasant, natural idea lizards stared at,
from which, no matter where men rest,
they cannot flee, the tender archaic circle.
We were both glad to get home.

Wherever we go,

we are taken by imagination,
wandering through Europe

with head phones, private light
and sound on dead stone,
the tapes of Corelli,

the archangel, strapped to our waist
beside the bottled water,
trail mix, the green guide

in the other pocket.
We move as the spirit moves us,
flipping the cassette

from one side to another, our head,
the seat of blessing
for a world at our disposal.

At home, when blinding rain
obscures the windshield,
we can slip the tape

into the tape deck,
sing along,
windows rolled up against the flood.

Natural Consequences

Newton watched the apple,
first not sitting underneath the tree.
But distance fooled him
for he only saw it swing like biblical fruit.

He immediately moved closer,
straining his neck to look up
not expecting the revelation he got,
for he'd put himself in the line of fire.

What happened was extraordinary,
though it took some time to piece it together.
The red globe, another planet, a wandering star,
hit him on the head, a slap in the face.

He must have taken it personally
because it was personal.
That made him wait the afternoon
for another pummeling,

a rain of apples,
a garden landing around him,
and he on his seat in a barrel
as matter descended, he knowing why.

Farts

Kids delight in them,
producing farts at will,
sounding trumpets —

they are here,
and we have got to take it,
their calls to a new age,

where the body marches ahead
announcing forces
we sit on as long as possible.

Stool is a gift
our children learn to deposit
in a proud place

with a door they can leave
half opened,
nosing through a crack in the wall,

eyes beaming,
knowing they have done
a good thing.

But a fart at the table,
a noise we blush at —
maybe envy —

is always sudden punctuation
that changes everything.
And they laugh at themselves,

LENNY KOFF

making us scold them —
leave the table —
without our being able

to wipe up anything,
their presence floating above us
like the angels they are.

To Breaded Salmon

According to the guide, the restaurant
on High Street was the best place to eat.
But when the fish

was brought to the table,
we knew they'd done something terrible —
only in Scotland,

where the fish jump into frying pans
to keep warm,
only in Scotland . . .

for who would bread a salmon,
and make it swim in a dish
the waiter said was traditional?

We had to break the air-tight shell,
digging into the crust
to give it breathing room,

pull back layers —
the knife's little mercies —
that hid it from our eyes.

But the fish was flat and lifeless,
and we mourned the damage done
to those who have been given up,

remembering what they were,
how they once braced cold streams,
naked on the curve of heaven.

LENNY KOFF

Then instinctively we rose,
loosening our garments
right there at the table.

Like strenuous fish,
we pushed our way outside,
passed obstacles fixed to the ground,

our only thought: to follow our fish where it had been,
into cold highlands,
arriving naked at the place of its descent.

The Song of Return

1.

At first the mind reveals what the eye can't see,
an algaeous shadow below the tree's open limb.
Like a membrane giving way, new life ascends to heaven
in a gardener's hands; the leaves are mulched, the furrows
rows of undulating fields that shade, as far as the eye will see,
the interstellar globe like a wedding canopy.

The worms that plowed the earth, the beetles dance,
and gardens set apart by human care bring forth the cloth
on which we lay the wine and loaves of our communion.

No earth was ever barren, no yearning unattended.
The urge to open, like a trumpet, calls our still voice
and we lie awake in our own thermonuclear sun.

2.

Then oceanic calm. Along the beach, a crab scuttles home,
hides his protecting claws, cool and patient,
packs a picnic lunch. We've a summer's age
to read by the pool, look at ourselves in the mirror,
rule with a monarch's crown inside cephalic bone.
We're housed in neighborhoods, and the neighbors come and visit.

Down the block the public library has closed. It's Saturday.
The asphalt shimmers like the image of a pool
and the rippling heat slows traffic.

After dark we match the cooling stars with fireworks,
illuminate the air a mile high, stay up all night
under a lamp post.

3.

No time. No time like this.
The earth is moved by our resounding will.
Venetian ships sail the Adriatic. Towers sing.

We measure the blue circumference of the spheres,
higher and higher to the empyrean,
transforming memory into porcelain.

4.

But descent from triumph won is quick.
Buried under stones that barely catch the heat of torches
lies the skeletal frame that hangs the flesh.
Long walls and moats incarcerate the weak and strong.
How many layers down before our breath is gone?
I can't walk this fast, encompassed by the rings of Saturn —

ice — a windless shroud I hope is my cocoon.
All I have is prayer, a seeding thought within zodiacal time.
Then let me drown in hydrogen and be reborn

with the promise of elemental return.
No life is over until our matters cease.
Within us all are shades of understanding.

Invitation

Today I walked the trees, announcing I was there,
willing to move along their outer branches,
the nodding ones, whose trunks have thinned,

whose palms have opened to surrounding light,
expecting nothing, neither gifts
nor homage from the East, nor adoration

because their seeds were lucky enough
to make it to the top, pushing their way through soil
as if this were the resurrection.

Today was my categorical, a good day,
and any one since will take its measure from this,
where leaves are free to billow

like cupped hands, catching the drift,
playing with effect. Go there, and be there,
just like that.

Stones are glistening under my feet,
the distance, a soft step, a surge,
and the sun, when I look up,

lets me stride across it:
Here is someone's reckoning.
I will let him pass, singing together,

for the air is warm like baking bread
and I can see above the limber horizon
whose line bends just enough to bear my weight.

LENNY KOFF

Sing. And when you finish this,
I'll be gone, not fled into the night with a twin lover,
but once around the block in my track shoes.

To My Friend's Recovery

The therapist who comes at three
has jumping ropes of different lengths,
handling each, as is her skill,

like an acrobat. At first she jumps
to demonstrate that movement's still at hand,
then asks me to take hold of one end

of the rope. She prefers the longest one
with handles painted white
like your hospital gown.

Each time around,
I let the rope drag slowly on the ground
so you can step across,

then wildly flip it
so it lands just on your bottom side.
Smack.

The world has turned for each of us,
and you can learn to step from one side to the other,
imitating birth.

I would lend a hand at games or life,
just tell me which.
I want to see you running down the block,

showing off your step,
then later, out of breath,
just sitting outside

LENNY KOFF

as the day recedes,
waving your hands,
imitating flight.

In a butcher's pan

a heart is pounding.
Even without attachments
it won't give up.

People stream from aisles
in the supermarket
to cheer it on.
They climb on their shopping carts,
in rows, to see better.
Everyone pushes.

But a heart to itself
has the whole glass case.

The monitor of my computer

seems to be going bad, the screen
collapsing at its four corners

preparing for the big bang.
But this time the unearthly spectacle
can be monitored

by someone watching.
My expanding communication
implodes.

Way before breakfast, I find myself
clicking on files that speak to me,
while my wife,

in a thin robe, suspended in the half light
of morning,
appears at the doorjamb,

as if she still wants me
to join her for the coffee
I should have made hours ago,

not misreading my concentration
for neglect, not going away,
she, the patient center.

Having Breakfast on a Glass Table

A trick mirror, though which we see our bare feet
touching the stony floor
barely warming us.

This transfer of heat feels reassuring.
Secure this anchor on a path we ready for trodding
once we finish coffee and sweet sourdough

smearred with blackberry jam,
the seeds its texture in its once skin.
Beside me is my wife whose image I have known,

it seems, for longer than we lived together.
Her anticipation is my own —
to begin the day without fear,

to get up from the lucent table,
towering above our former place,
looking down through nothing.