AUTUMN ROAD

Brian Swann
FOR MY DEAR WIFE ROBERTA

“Everything happens suddenly,
No matter how long it takes.”
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CREDITS

The poems in the following list originally appeared in the publications indicated.

Agni: Dis Pater
American Scholar: Rain of the Waldensians
Anthropology and Humanism: Slugs; Soft Boiled Eggs
Chicago Review: Heliography
Conjunctions: Orderly
Crazyhorse: More; The Psychoanalysis of Fire
Harvard Review: Amsterdam
Hotel Amerika: The Rose
Iowa Review: The Skull; Three Score and Then Some
Metre (Great Britain): De Profundis
New Republic: Calendar Girl; The Wind and the Rain; Rain
North American Review: The Painting
Notre Dame Review: Shadows and Distance; Fens; Eschatology; The Wanderer
Paris Review: Consumed; Alzheimer’s; Exist
Partisan Review: Neruda in Purgatory; The Lost Boy
Ploughshares: The Star
Poetry: The Point; Habeas Corpus; Painting by Anon; The Economy of Windmills
Poetry Northwest: Where the Woods Begin; Ars Amatoria
Prairie Schooner: Basso-Relievo
Prism International (Canada): Birdnesting; Catch; Watch Yourself
Quarterly Review of Literature: Variations on the First Elegy
Raritan: Le Grand Mal
Stand (Great Britain): Quasar; My Aunt
TriQuarterly: Deep Fish; Inspiration
Yale Review: Whiteness; HIV; Physics; Somewhere
THE LOST BOY
HELIOGRAPHY

Mage ic be me sylfum soðgied wrecan.
—“The Seafarer”

Losing I can accept, a long process like mould. That way I got to know this place in another way, like seeing the Pleiades from the other side. It could have been worse, I suppose. I could never have been here, instead of having been flung headlong into whatever it is, light breaking over me and fingertips reaching at me, the old fat guide picking me up. I’m your granny, she said. And your mammy, and your pappy, god rest his whatever. I will call you by your initial letter and you will live with me catty-corner. You will eat your fingerprints in silence, and everything will resolve itself as if a plot. She took me home where keyholes made my eyes lengthen and shrink until soon it was time to leave. They called it dead-man-time. The prostitutes who had taken me everywhere with them spat the last seeds into my mouth and sent me on my way. They tasted of seasons and the wild gyrations of atoms. Conjecture, introversion, wild surmise had made up my world. Now I needed new illusions. Soon I was making up my lives and the lives of others, biographies to live for themselves but in me till I was full of inventories, full of mirrors and ventriloquisms, and a rusty angel who faked his face but never opened his mail, who slept on the windowsill suspecting rebuffs from every angle, and who collided regularly at take-off with the same tree. But as for me I grew a colon for eyes and bells for ears. Shaken foil was my trust, the Zodiac my toy. So here I am, in a parole of flowers, flapping through libraries, outmoded, outmatched, but not yet old enough to be my own ghost. So I place these ghosts on paper, anonymous, ambiguous, festive as a crowd in an unnoticed world, myself a character who will not
rehearse any more, determined still to be someone similar to
who I am, but not me, keeping at it, mistaking the sky for
something else, mistaking flashes from my fingers for heliography!
DE PROFUNDIS

"Out of the deep, child, out of the deep"

The deck just gave way. At first you could hear nothing. Then the gunwale caved in, then the hull groaned & cracked. Pretty soon fingers were clutching at anything, but it was all slippery as fish. Then the switchboard lit up in a number of directions, mindless as headlights reaching into night, trying to predict when the next world would loom up, grasp at you, crash down, give way, but it kept snagging birds, catching blossoms bright as chandeliers, masking pure weight as a momentary pause while you tripped over yourself trying to make things do what they didn’t want to so nothing knew where or what it was, & you couldn’t see yourself because mirrors were still misty & fragments so you tried not to make too much noise among the twisting breakers & you sought the rumbles of shoals glancing off the nonlight on the other side forcing you to breathe a little longer before being swamped & forced deeper till up you bobbed to the surface, tumbling & dipping like a melting ice-floe, naked innocent & dumb
CALENDAR GIRL

The nymph sits in her cave, naked.
The deckchair lusts after the strange trees.
She cups her chin: I love you.
Each evening I return to her though
the divorcee next door who sunbathes on her lawn
has a big chest with a few
black hairs. When I take the nymph to school
& unroll her she says: I love him.
She’s keen on sports. Me too. When I get home
I forget I’m tired, but tired I am.
She has that effect. I crawl along my branch
like a chameleon, watching her with my
swivel eyes. My tongue is sticky.
She understands. I watch her try to move.
She twitches. Suddenly she’s
outside the window. My fingers open.
Something is undone before it’s done.
The divorcee. I stand up so fast I knock
the binoculars off the National Geographics
& onto the floor. Freeze. Turn on the radio.
It shouts something about cold light & old men.
She smelled of skin. I know how to swim.
Voulezvous swimmez avec moi? Ah,
she’s left her face in the mirror.
I lick it. She would understand. Now
watch me ride onto your lawns, destroy
your cities, rape your women till they
glint like large diamonds. It starts to rain.
Smell of beans downstairs on the stove.
I look out. She has me
where she wants me.
ESCHATOLOGY
EXIST

As a kid I never thought of “pain” as
something I felt. What I felt I could not
name or share. Now out the window I watch
a thin chemical yellow smear being
pushed down by gray rolls of night. Behind me
the physics of the TV screen

Plays out plots and previews. Outside is shapes
moving under neon like those who have
already moved on. Lighted windows stick
in the sky, independent of stone or
brick. I can only exist in writing,
when for a while I do not know

I “exist.” I exist only when I
don’t exist? There I am at the window,
staring back at me, in glass, dependent
on the dark. In a room beyond this one,
I see myself in replicas that come &
go with light, most there when most dark.
ESCHATOLOGY

The small body discovers the body dies, but
If it were a blackbird it would come back
Year after year and not stay down.
It is aware the world has seams.

Later yearning in hard dark, she has
The hummingbird fly out of its epidermis
As a lover would to feel the leaving,
And from the peel another bird double back

Into a rainbow. It is lovely, the whole range.
Now it will be all right. The world will race
And glow again like rivers. Imagine: All it takes is,
“What shall I tell myself?” And you have

A photo of a place you’ve never been
That takes you there, rapt in calm and quiet,
Intense and aureate, part of an evolving
Conversation that includes chasms that close

When you look at them, like in a fairytale,
And open too, done and undone the same,
And what was sitting on your chest
To stop your breath is now a marvel

You can enter as if it were ordinary,
Somewhere in a future that does not punish
But continues in different weather,
Much the same as this.
THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY PRESS/THE JOURNAL AWARD IN POETRY

Spot in the Dark
Beth Gyllys

Writing Letters for the Blind
Gary Fincke

Mechanical Cluster
Patty Seyburn

Magical Thinking
Joseph Duemer

Stone Sky Lifting
Lia Purpura

Captivity Narrative
Mary Ann Samyn

Blessings the Body Gave
Walt McDonald

Anatomy, Errata
Judith Hall

Crossing the Snow Bridge
Fatima Lim-Wilson

Popular Culture
Albert Goldbarth