APPROACHING SEVENTY

1. Sit and watch the memory disappear
   romance disappear the probability
   of new adventures disappear

   well isn’t it beautiful
   when the sun goes down
   don’t we all want to be where we can watch it

   redden
   sink to a spark
   disappear

Your friend goes to Sri Lanka and works
for a human rights organization
in the middle of a civil war

where she too might be disappeared any time
and another friend goes to retreats
sits miserably waiting for ecstasy and ecstasy

actually comes, so many others
so many serial monogamists seeking love
some open doorway some wild furious breath

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Please, I thought, when I first saw the paintings de Kooning did when Alzheimer’s had taken him into its arms and he could do nothing

but paint, purely paint, transparent, please let me make beauty like that, sometime, like an infant that can only cry

and suckle, and shit, and sleep, boneless, unaware, happy, brush in hand no ego there he went

\[ \]

A field of cerise another of lime
a big curve slashes across canvas
then another and here it is the lucidity

each of us secretly longs for
as if everything belonging to the other world that we forget at birth is finally flooding

back to the man like a cold hissing tide
combers unrolling while he waits on the shore of the sandy canvas brush in hand it comes

\[ \]
So come on, gorgeous, get yourself over
to the shore with the sleeping gulls
—does the tide rise or doesn’t it

and are you or are you not willing
to rise from sleep, yes, in the dark, and patiently
go outside and wait for it

and do you know what is meant by patience
do you know what is meant by going outside
do you know what is meant by the tide

~
2. Now go dance
with the skeletons
feed them word meat be their slave

that worm there is hungry
that rubied iridescent beetle that fly
making a path through some sour dirt

you hairy impertinent bag of water
what do you know
about hunger

~

You hairy impertinent bag of water
says the fly buzzing on my windowsill
late in the fall about to die

tumbling over in its agony
leave me alone for God’s sake
leave me my pitiful dignity

The day is azure and breezy there outside
yet I cannot look away from the anguished fly
on the sooty windowsill

~
Buzz buzz: what if you feel like tepid dishwater, 
like a rusty Dodge, the fly says, you are still 
a member of the privileged species

the killer species 
that uses its intelligence to be 
the world’s butcher and poisoner

A toxic cloud floats by, alabaster and rose 
go watch the salt seas rise and the earth crack 
eager to return your insult

So here you are with your meaningless choices 
this way and that hesitating, fearful 
should you tell the truth to your daughters

should you forgive your husband how boring 
shouldn’t you spend more time 
trying to heal the world

if you would only recognize 
you are no more than this fly 
or that cloud

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Everything would change, you would find yourself illuminated from within like a paper lantern carried by a whore in a Paris street fair

or like a dragon kite you would fly in a high wind and be pulled back to earth by a string in a child’s hands, or you would be cactus

blooming blood-orange in sand, or monsoon charging across a grateful subcontinent, or lava plunging over old cinders to the seething sea
3. Espresso bubbles, I shout
*Breakfast in a minute* up the stairs
he comes down robed, we have
coffee, toast, cherry tomatoes, cheese,
fish, juice, almond pastry, the *Herald Tribune* then the long busy day then evening
in the tub after a smoke I remark
economics doesn’t interest me
the three things I care about are individual
human lives, then art and beauty
then politics and cultural history and mythology
I’m thinking: apart from the personal stuff
on the other side of the tub my rational man
says truth then fun then honor, by honor he means
both reputation and doing what is right
head to foot we recline in the warm steam
while I remember a few summers ago
the tangy peachy cool night air
that blew in through the bathroom window
as we stood in the tub looking out
side by side trying to locate the comet
with the double tail, ah there it was
off to northwest over the neighbors’ charcoal trees
difficult to see, like the lightest pencil touch
STREAM-ENTERING

Though reluctant
when his mother insists
   on joining the sangha
the Buddha admits
women too are capable
   of stream-entering
Reading these words
it is not that suddenly
   I enter the stream
it is more that I become
aware of its coolness and of
   myself pleasantly wading
then the sea appears
heaving between continents
   grey, horizonless
death-cold currents
day and night, and I
   would be a drop
INSOMNIA

But it’s really fear you want to talk about
and cannot find the words
so you jeer at yourself

you call yourself a coward
you wake at 2 a.m. thinking failure,
fool, unable to sleep, unable to sleep

buzzing away on your mattress with two pillows
and a quilt, they call them comforters,
which implies that comfort can be bought

and paid for, to help with the fear, the failure
your two walnut chests of drawers snicker, the bookshelves mourn
the art on the walls pities you, the man himself beside you

asleep smelling like mushrooms and moss is a comfort
but never enough, never, the ceiling fixture lightless
velvet drapes hiding the window

traffic noise like a vicious animal
on the loose somewhere out there—
you brag to friends you won’t mind death only dying

what a liar you are—
all the other fears, of rejection, of physical pain,
of losing your mind, of losing your eyes,

they are all part of this!
Pawprints of this! Hair snarls in your comb
this glowing clock the single light in the room

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LYMPHOMA

I come from visiting my once-blonde friend in hospital with non-Hodgkin’s lymphoma the chemo is working

we chat about other women’s husbands suffering from Parkinson’s
we laugh cry hug we feel a little lucky

down the hall an attendant rolls a gurney yellowish old man skull glares from under a blanket

now how in hell do I get out can’t find elevator or stairs despite red neon exit signs everywhere

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