

Invocation, and a Sort of Lullaby

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Bills unpaid, and half the rent, the baby
Pleistocene with borrowed heat,
I sing. No one coaxes

or demurs. Empty fail the savage pines,
their stock of seed already spent.
Three finches huddle in the planter.

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Go to sleep, my little dinosaur,
with no accounts or credits. Sleep,
while sleep alone is due. Soon

a frozen blanket will be pulled,
and all the local rodents will descend—
a fall election, and the virgin birth

again. My little five-eighths Jew,
such doings mean as much to you
as Keno to a coelacanth. Sleep.

If I could strip my postures bare,
or stripe my knees to charm
obsequious poetry, I'd sing

a wiser, more distinguished song.
My little mastodon, stay warm.
The agencies are everywhere, and cannot care.

Correspondence

The Scrabble game undone, I'm beating Amy
two to one. I rule. Rains of acorns pelt
and batter; local squirrels chatter,

battening. Football weather. Once,
I saw, or thought I saw,
as if inscribed in empty air,

some fancied secret drawer of things,
stuffed with letters tied with string,
from one unheard-of being to another

listening. If I could read
whatever they had written there
about the crooked hairspring of the wind,

or how the sky was folded up, or any
unsuspected truthful thing, such salve
and licorice soda it would prove

that I could answer, ever after, rage
with equanimity, and madness
with sobriety, and petty provocation

with finesse.

But now I crush her in the game
again, while sunlight bashes through the air,
that medium of violence and desire.

The Second Marriage of Heaven and Hell

Such storms come on, and load
their hailstones down. Done,
and after, no delirium can un-

Plainer: Hurt, you will, whose slender
living quite undoes me,
sometimes, or your two

obsidian-flint pupils rake a spark,
which sets and blazes
still. Stood one time

across a burning doorway, black
as a hound, but what that portal opened to
I know, or never knew.

Incompletely Heroic Couplets

1.

I made of pain a lovely wing,
its feathers noir and comforting.
I'd live inside its abling bars
with no instructions from the stars

and sleep, if so I pleased, for years.

I cannot give my son this wing,
who has no need of such a thing:
He's loved, and loves, and knows it,
while the boy I was could not suppose it.

2.

It plays this way in memory:
My sister, seldom good to me,
one day went mad.

The Iliad

remembers every dead man's name.

No one should remember us.
One day this pain will flavor dust
between the nearest stars—that's it.
The death of pain is not its opposite.

3.

You're poisoning my atmosphere! she screamed,
in rough tetrameter. For years, I dreamed
my sister's little hands, the Ouija board
we played at on her bedroom floor.

The ghosts I knew wore flesh and had no answers.

Tongueless light lashed through the back-yard trees.
The grass blades blazed with painful green.
The blameless dead were all about,

as though the earth had spit them out.

4.

I loved. I loved so much I incandesced.
Starred with mescaline and thinly dressed,
I walked
the new snowed streets in socks.

So much you see you can't bring back. I wrote

“Electromagnetism is the love
of beings on a vaster scale,” above
a diagram of wheels and nets. I fell,
from what I knew, to ordinary hell.