Lying in a Hammock at William Duffy’s Farm in Pine Island, Minnesota

- James Wright

Over my head, I see the bronze butterfly,
Asleep on the black trunk,
Blowing like a leaf in green shadow.
Down the ravine behind the empty house,
The cowbells follow one another
Into the distances of the afternoon.
To my right,
In a field of sunlight between two pines,
The droppings of last year’s horses
Blaze up into golden stones.
I lean back, as the evening darkens and comes on.
A chicken hawk floats over, looking for home.
I have wasted my life.
Three poems by Bill Knott

Stumped

I wish I could count up to one without first cutting off nine of my fingers

Painting vs. Poetry

Painting is a person placed between the light and a canvas so that their shadow is cast on the canvas and then the person signs their name on it whereas poetry is the shadow writing its name upon the person.

Security

If I had a magic carpet I'd keep it Floating always Right in front of me Perpendicular, like a door.
A Way of Being

Elizabeth Scanlon

Curiosity killed the cat, then dug her a grave
in the backyard, wrapped her in old dishtowels and laid her in it,
mounded the cold November dirt on top of her
and tamped it down. Curiosity stood there
looking at her work, alone and chilled as evening came on,
wondering if she should do more to hide it from wildlife,
to protect it from the possibility of becoming a squirrel snack
or a stink hard to explain to the children.
Curiosity lit a cigarette
and blew the smoke away from the house.
She noticed a hole in the bottom of her shoe.
Curiosity contemplated, in her usual way,
if it was better to resole them or replace them. Idly.
The Gun Joke

Jamaal May

It’s funny, she says, how many people are shocked by this shooting and the next and next and the next. She doesn’t mean funny as in funny, but funny as in blood soup tastes funny when you stir in soil. Stop me if you haven’t heard this one:
A young man/old man/teenage boy walks into an office/theater/daycare/club and empties a magazine into a crowd of strangers/family/students.

Ever hear the one about the shotgun? What do you call it when a shotgun tests a liquor store’s bulletproof glass? What’s the difference between a teenager with hands in the air and a paper target charging at a cop? What do you call it when a man sets his own house on fire, takes up a sniper position, and waits for firefighters?

Stop me if you haven’t heard this one: The first man to pull a gun on me said it was only a joke, but never so much as smiled. The second said this is definitely not a joke, and then his laughter crackled through me like electrostatic—funny how that works. When she says it’s funny she means funny as in crazy and crazy as in this shouldn’t happen. This shouldn’t happen as in something is off. Funny as in off—as in, ever since a small caliber bullet chipped his spine, your small friend walks kinda’ funny and his smile is off.
HE TELLS HER

Wendy Cope

He tells her that the earth is flat —
He knows the facts, and that is that.
In altercations fierce and long
She tries her best to prove him wrong,
But he has learned to argue well.
He calls her arguments unsound
And often asks her not to yell.
She cannot win. He stands his ground.

The planet goes on being round.
Litany
Billy Collins

You are the bread and the knife,
The crystal goblet and the wine...
-Jacques Crickillon

You are the bread and the knife,
the crystal goblet and the wine.
You are the dew on the morning grass
and the burning wheel of the sun.
You are the white apron of the baker,
and the marsh birds suddenly in flight.

However, you are not the wind in the orchard,
the plums on the counter,
or the house of cards.
And you are certainly not the pine-scented air.
There is just no way that you are the pine-scented air.

It is possible that you are the fish under the bridge,
maybe even the pigeon on the general's head,
but you are not even close
to being the field of cornflowers at dusk.

And a quick look in the mirror will show
that you are neither the boots in the corner
nor the boat asleep in its boathouse.

It might interest you to know,
speaking of the plentiful imagery of the world,
that I am the sound of rain on the roof.

I also happen to be the shooting star,
the evening paper blowing down an alley
and the basket of chestnuts on the kitchen table.

I am also the moon in the trees
and the blind woman's tea cup.
But don't worry, I'm not the bread and the knife.
You are still the bread and the knife.
You will always be the bread and the knife,
not to mention the crystal goblet and--somehow--the wine.
The Lanyard

Billy Collins

The other day I was ricocheting slowly
off the blue walls of this room,
moving as if underwater from typewriter to piano,
from bookshelf to an envelope lying on the floor,
when I found myself in the L section of the dictionary
where my eyes fell upon the word lanyard.

No cookie nibbled by a French novelist
could send one into the past more suddenly—
a past where I sat at a workbench at a camp
by a deep Adirondack lake
learning how to braid long thin plastic strips
into a lanyard, a gift for my mother.

I had never seen anyone use a lanyard
or wear one, if that's what you did with them,
but that did not keep me from crossing
strand over strand again and again
until I had made a boxy
red and white lanyard for my mother.

She gave me life and milk from her breasts,
and I gave her a lanyard.
She nursed me in many a sick room,
lifted spoons of medicine to my lips,
laid cold face-cloths on my forehead,
and then led me out into the airy light

and taught me to walk and swim,
and I , in turn, presented her with a lanyard.
Here are thousands of meals, she said,
and here is clothing and a good education.
And here is your lanyard, I replied,
which I made with a little help from a counselor.

Here is a breathing body and a beating heart,
strong legs, bones and teeth,
and two clear eyes to read the world, she whispered,
and here, I said, is the lanyard I made at camp.
And here, I wish to say to her now,
is a smaller gift—not the worn truth

that you can never repay your mother,
but the rueful admission that when she took
the two-tone lanyard from my hand,
I was as sure as a boy could be
that this useless, worthless thing I wove
out of boredom would be enough to make us even.
Every Day Is Sale Day

Natalie Shapero

If I had no money for every time
I saw a stock photo of an empty
pocket being pulled inside-out, I’d
have no money. My friend and I
sat on the marble steps, eating
nothing and drinking also nothing,
and she told me, right there
on the white stone’s subcutaneous
blueness, that her father really
should’ve been left-handed,
but in school they wouldn’t let him.
They forbade it. And now he uses
the right hand to julienne carrots
and dial the phone, and it’s all very
serviceable, but think about it —
that lost potential. Who knows
what he might’ve gone onto.
He might’ve been a surgeon
or a concert harpsichordist. And she
said that kind of thing — does it
happen here, too? Well, look
at us. Look at this crystalline city.
We are the side that was always
allowed to be dominant. What
did we do? Do you see a saved
life here? Do you hear a fugue?
Blood Soup

-Mary Ruefle

The last time I saw father alive he was using
a black umbrella, closed, to beat off some pigeons
hanging outside the marble portals of a museum.
We were visitors, walking very slowly, so father
could stoop and examine everything. We had not been
in the museum, but were resting on its steps.
We saw it all—the fountains, the statues, the parks
and the post office. Cities are made of such things.
Once we encountered a wedding coming out of the cathedral
and were caught in a shower of rice; as the bride
flicked her veiled head father licked his little finger
and in this way saved a grain. On the next block
he announced he was going to heaven. But first let’s
go back to the hotel and rest, he said: I want my mint.
Those were practically his last words. And what did I want
more than anything in the world? Probably the ancient Polish
recipe for blood soup, which was finally told to me
in an empty deli in a deserted mill town in western Massachusetts
by the owner’s mother, who was alone one day when I burst
in and demanded a bowl. But, she said, lacing her fingers
around a jar of morello cherries, it requires one cup of
new blood drawn from the goose whose neck you’ve just wrung
to put in the pot, and where in these days can I find
anything as fresh as that? I had lost track of my life
before, but nothing prepared me for the onslaught of
wayfarer’s bliss when she continued to list, one
by one, the impossible ingredients I needed to live.
We sat at the greasy table far into the night, while
snow fell on the locked doors of the church next door,
dedicated to St. Stanislas, which was rumored to be
beautiful inside, and contain the remains of his beloved head.
What Would Freud Say?

Bob Hicok

Wasn't on purpose that I drilled through my finger or the nurse laughed. She apologized three times and gave me a shot of something that was a lusher apology. The person who drove me home said my smile was a smeared totem that followed his body that night as it arced over a cliff in a dream. He's always flying in his dreams and lands on cruise ships or hovers over Atlanta with an erection. He put me to bed and the drugs wore off and I woke to cannibals at my extremities. I woke with a sense of what nails in the palms might do to a spirit temporarily confined to flesh. That too was an accident if you believe Judas merely wanted to be loved. To be loved by God, Urban the 8th had heads cut off that were inadequately bowed by dogma. To be loved by Blondie, Dagwood gets nothing right except the hallucinogenic architecture of sandwiches. He would have drilled through a finger too while making a case for books on home repair and health. Drilling through my finger's not the dumbest thing I've done. Second place was approaching a frozen gas-cap with lighter
in hand while thinking
heat melts ice and not
explosion kills asshole. First
place was passing
through a bedroom door
and removing silk that did not
belong to my wife.
Making a bookcase is not
the extent of my apology.
I've also been beaten up
in a bar for saying huevos
rancheros in a way
insulting to the patrons'
ethnicity. I've also lost
my job because lying
face down on the couch
didn't jibe with my employer's
definition of home
office. I wanted her to come
through the door on Sunday
and see the bookcase
she'd asked me to build
for a year and be impressed
that it didn't lean
or wobble even though
I've only leaned and often
wobbled. Now it's half
done but certainly
a better gift with its map
of my unfaithful blood.
You Are the Penultimate Love of My Life

- Rebecca Hazelton

I want to spend a lot but not all of my years with you.
We’ll talk about kids
   but make plans to travel.
I will remember your eyes
   as green when they were gray.
Our dogs will be named For Now and Mostly.
   Sex will be good but next door’s will sound better.

There will be small things.
I will pick up your damp towel from the bed,
   and then I won’t.
I won’t be as hot as I was
   when I wasn’t yours
and your hairline now so
   untrustworthy.
When we pull up alongside a cattle car
   and hear the frightened lows,
I will silently judge you
   for not immediately renouncing meat.
You will bring me wine
   and notice how much I drink.

   The garden you plant and I plant
is tunneled through by voles,
   the vowels
we speak aren’t vows,

but there’s something
   holding me here, for now,
like your eyes, which I suppose
   are brown, after all.
There's a whale outside my bedroom window
that is death. His name is Louis C.K.
He says come outside.
I throw empty bottles of orange juice at him.
I hurl old, expired diaper cream tubes at his blowhole.
He just sings his whale song.
Is that supposed to be funny? I say.
My neighbors come outside.
Go back inside, I say, that's death.
Everyone laughs, especially the Boston Police Lieutenant across the street.
That's not death they say in iambic pentameter.
Except it's not in iambic pentameter.
I run back to the bathroom for more shit to fling at the whale.
If I were Moby Dick I'd dick you up the ass, he says.
No no, I say,
that's some stupid shit you'd say
from one of your comedy routines.
The sky is beautiful orange.
It's dusk and it wants to be night.
I'm death, idiot, and I will always be death,
that's why I wear black tee-shirts and make fun of everyone,
especially white people and little asshole bully kids.
The pine tree wants to fall down but won't.
Neither will I.
I get in my car and try and run him over,
but It doesn't work.
What kinda name is C.K.? I shout.
He shouts back. It's money, brother.
I start to cry because I've never made any.
Here, he says, and blows some sea water out of his blowhole.
It's a Technicolor geyser straight outta Brooklyn.
You know, I say, I was with you at a small brunch in upstate NY, years ago,
and you were a jerk.
He doesn't remember and shakes his whale fin like a Japanese fan.
Death doesn't come to kill you, he says.
It just comes to say hello every once in awhile
to make sure you don't forget.
He takes a whale piss all over my lawn
and the grass is in heaven.
No no no, he says.
It doesn't come to make sure you don't forget,
it just comes to make sure that I'm not forgotten
and that even though everything you do means nothing
in the grand scheme of things,

in the grand scheme of things,
it means everything.
That is why you can’t be a prick or unjust or unmerciful.
That is why you have to love every little piece of shit
that takes up your time,
that calls you honey,
that is not a piece of shit,
that blows her nose on your neck,
that calls you sycophant.
My mind is blown and I say, Louis, brother,
you have blown my mind.
He laughs.
Blow me, he says, and opens his fat whale eye so big I swear,
I can hear every whale song sung
by every whale that’s ever been harpooned.
One big massive whale dirge.
It makes me laugh my guts out
all over my car seat.
I feel like I am at The Beacon Theater, at one of Louis’ shows.
You are, he says, and I am a whale,
and I am death,
and I love you
so fuck up, don’t fuck up, it doesn’t matter.
The only thing that matters is that when you’re fucking up or not
you are doing it one hundred percent
and that you know that,
that you are doing it one hundred percent,
‘cause one day I’ll come to see you at a dinner party in my whale suit
and you won’t be there,
you’ll be dead
and it has to be a right dead,
it has to be a good dead,
a perfect and complete dead,
a beautiful dead.
That’s how you have to live.
You get it?
And I did.
So the next morning I told my wife
what had happened,
that Louis C.K. came to see me in his whale suit that was death
and she believed me.
I don’t know if it was because there was seaweed coming out of my eyes
or because she knew
that I was completely in love.
Chicken Pig
Jennifer Michael Hecht

It’s like being lost
in the forest, hungry, with a
plump live chicken in your cradling
arms: you want to savage the bird,
but you also want the eggs.

You go weak on your legs.
What’s worse, what you need
most is the companionship,
but you’re too hungry to know that.
That is something you only know after
you’ve been lost a lot and always,

eventually, alit upon
your bird; consumed her
before you’d realized what
a friend she’d been, letting you
sleep-in late on the forest floor
though she herself awoke
at the moment of dawn

and thought of long-lost
rooster voices quaking
the golden straw. She
looks over at you, sleeping,
and what can I tell you, she loves
you, but like a friend.

Eventually, when lost
in a forest with a friendly chicken
you make a point of emerging
from the woods together,
triumphant; her, fat with bugs,
you, lean with berries.

Still, while you yet wander,
you can not resist telling her
your joke:

Guy sees a pig with three legs,
asks the farmer, What gives?
Farmer says, That pig woke
my family from a fire, got us all out.
Says the guy, And lost the leg thereby?
Nope, says the farmer,
Still had all four when he took.
a bullet for me when I had
my little struggle with the law.
Guy nods, So that’s where
he lost his paw? Farmer shakes
it off, says, Nah, we fixed him up.
A pause, guy says, So how’d he lose
the leg? Farmer says, Well, hell,
a pig like that
you don’t eat all at once.

Chicken squints. Doesn’t think
it’s funny.
On Flowers. On Negative Evolution

Alan Dugan

When the front-end loader ran over my wife’s Montauk daisies
I wanted to tell the driver, Butch—a nice kid—but couldn’t:
“No flowers, no us. Flowers are basic to human life.
That’s why we think they’re beautiful. No flowers, no seeds;
no seeds, no greenery; no greenery, no oxygen: we
couldn’t even breathe without them. Also: no greens,
no grasses; no grasses, no herbivorous animals;
no animals, no beefsteaks. There wouldn’t be anything
to eat except fish, and no way to breathe unless
we went back to the ocean and redeveloped gills.
There the seaweeds would make oxygen by flowering underwater,
the way it used to be in the old days, and you
would be running over them in your submarine. This is why
flowers are thought beautiful, and this is why it’s important
not to destroy too many of them carelessly, and why you could
have been more careful with my wife’s god-damned daisies.”
from *Nature Poem*  
Tommy Pico

I can't write a nature poem bc that conversation happens in the Hall of South American Peoples in the American Museum of Natural History

btwn two white ladies in buttery shawls as they pass a display case of “traditional” garb from one tribe or another it doesn’t really matter to anyone

and that word “Natural” in “Natural History” hangs
also “History”
also “Peoples”

hangs as in frames

*it’s horrible how their culture was destroyed*

as if in some reckless storm

*but thank god we were able to save some of these artifacts — history is so important. Will you look at this metalwork? I could cry —*

Look, I’m sure you really do just want to wear those dream catcher earrings. They’re beautiful. I’m sure you don’t mean any harm, I’m sure you don’t really think abt us at all. I’m sure you don’t understand the concept of off limits. But what if by not wearing a headdress in yr music video or changing yr damn mascot and perhaps shouldering the .05% of personal annoyance for the twenty minutes it lasts, the 103 young ppl who tried to kill themselves on the Pine Ridge Indian reservation over the past four months wanted to live 50% more

I don’t want to be seen, generally, I’m a natural introvert, n I def don’t want to be seen by white ladies in buttery shawls,
but I will literally die if I don’t scream
I'm not a religious person but

God sent an angel. One of his least qualified, though. Fluent only in Lemme get back to you. The angel sounded like me, early twenties, unpaid interning. Proficient in fetching coffee, sending super vague emails. It got so bad God personally had to speak to me. This was annoying because I'm not a religious person. I thought I'd made this clear to God by reading Harry Potter & not attending church except for gay weddings. God did not listen to me. God is not a good listener. I said Stop it please, I'll give you wedding cake, money, candy, marijuana. Go talk to married people, politicians, children, reality TV stars. I'll even set up a booth for you, then everyone who wants to talk to you can do so without the stuffy house of worship, the stuffier middlemen, & the football blimps that accidentally intercept prayers on their way to heaven. I'll keep the booth decorations simple but attractive: stickers of angels & cats, because I'm not religious but didn't people worship cats? Thing is, God couldn't take a hint. My doctor said to eat an apple every day. My best friend said to stop sleeping with guys with messiah complexes. My mother said she is pretty sure she had sex with my father so I can't be some new Asian Jesus. I tried to enrage God by saying things like When I asked my mother about you, she was in the middle of making dinner so she just said Too busy. I tried to confuse God by saying I am a made-up dinosaur & a real dinosaur & who knows maybe I love you, but then God ended up relating to me. God said I am a good dinosaur but also sort of evil & sometimes loving no one. It rained & we stayed inside. Played a few rounds of backgammon. We used our indoor voices. It got so quiet I asked God about the afterlife. Its existence, human continued existence. He said Oh. That. Then sent his angel again. Who said Ummmmmm. I never heard from God or his rookie angel after that. I miss them. Like creatures I made up or found in a book, then got to know a bit.
The Party

Kim Addonizio

I know we’ve just met and everything
but I’d really like to fall apart on you now.
I'd like to think you’re the kind of person
who’d refill my glass all night, then pour me
shitfaced into your car and take me home with you
so I could regurgitate salmon and triple cream brie
and chocolate strawberries into your toilet,
and then you’d cook me a little something –
I’d like to think you’re the kind of person who cooks –
while I rambled incoherently about my loneliness.
I know we’ve just met but I feel like maybe
you’d feed me and tuck me into your big bed
and only touch me as you covered me with the comforter.
I feel like you own a comforter. I also somehow sense
that your family was extremely dysfunctional
in a way that differs from mine only in surface details,
like which person was the black hole
and which the distant, faint mark in space
that might have been a star. I feel all that.
I feel kind of, I don’t know, like my inner space heater
and TV and washing machine are all going at once.
Do you own a coffee grinder?
I have an ice-cube tray. The last ice disappeared
a few months ago, into the freezer mist.
I miss that ice but once the mist gets hold of it,
it’s gone for good. Unrelenting mist. Many-headed
mist. Who knew mist had undone so many.
I feel like my underwear would fit in your silverware caddy.
It’s just a feeling, though. I could be wrong about that.
Could you get me another drink now?
I think we have chemistry. I really need a lab partner.
Could I just, you know, let my molecules separate
while you keep an eye on the burner? The flame’s kind of fickle.
Here’s hoping it doesn’t go out.
The Paris Review shared a podcast titled “Missing Connections” and around the 34:00 mark, we are treated to a snippet of Robert reciting James Wright’s poem “Lying in a Hammock at William Duffy’s Farm in Pine Island, Minnesota.” Enjoy. Source.

***UPDATED 12 December 2017***. The latest episode of The Paris Review Podcast features Robert Pattinson reading James Wright’s classic poem “Lying in a Hammock at William Duffy’s Farm in Pine Island, Minnesota.” Listen here: https://t.co/rxp8baiYYR pic.twitter.com/CxTppQ66qh. — Cutter Streeby (@CutterStreeby) December 11, 2017. “Lying in a Hammock at William Duffy’s Farm in Pine Island, Minnesota” is a poem by American poet James Wright. It is one of his best known poems, partially because of the tonal contrast between the content of the poem and its final line. The poem was first published in The Paris Review. It was later featured in a short story by Ann Beattie also published in The Paris Review. The poem was included in Wright’s collection This Branch Will Not Break. While not formally a Buddhist, in “Lying in a Hammock” he offers an example of awakening in everyday life. This poem, with its surprising ending, presents us with two apparently contradictory epiphanies—both suggesting Buddhist teachings. But there is the other way of reading the poem—the line bursting in a shout of sudden enlightenment. Wright once said this is the way he intended the poem to be read, and it goes more like this: “Here I am, lying in a hammock, not doing much of anything, just looking around. I see a bronze butterfly on a black trunk, hear cowbells, see the droppings of last year’s horses blazing like gold, a chicken hawk floating over. Suddenly, I see I’ve never really looked at the world before. I’ve walked around like someone asleep.”