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After the Death of
Theodore Roethke

By

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THINKING OF JOHN WAYNE

while still thinking of john wayne
 after the movie
 i reach over for your hand
 & find only an imaginary cage
 now quite empty
 then i realize
 the iron bars used to
 bend easily
 into circles
 but i failed
 to pass through the open spaces
 when you did
 & it's hard now
 to move as i once did
 after you

INTERLUDE

For Sharon

raindrops falling in a
 soft winter rain

*

a summer snail
 small, quiet
 moving
 Buddha-like

*

first the gleaming
 iced plumbtree branches
 then the
 sun-melted snow

A CONFUSED LANDSCAPE

For Chris McLelland

1

the algae-green pond water
covers last year's leaves

2

in a shower of sunlight
you walked on
new steps of crushed stone

3

one tiny sparrow
a dreaming bird
settles in the pine cones
at the edge of the forest

4

solitude in a confused landscape

trying to find the right one
PERHAPS THE NEXT IS MY FATHER'S
PERHAPS

perhaps, perhaps. . .

no,
it is not his grave i need to find
it is not his dying i do not understand
it is not his life i must explain
but once

(IN THIS DREAM

i stopped
& kneeling beside a grave
near a pot of freshly wilting geraniums
i called, I CALLED OUT HIS NAME
(my father's

but it's not my father's grave
i do not have to explain
i can not reach him now
it IS too late, TOO LATE, too late. . .

&
some time later
when i got up from the grass
my pants stained
a spring green
i walked quickly out of the cemetery
knowing i had not found his grave
knowing
i did not see his name

i notice the lamp's light shadows
on the wall near the ceiling
watch the light of one candle
on the shelf nearby/
move across that same wall
stretching in flickering
in darting movement

reaching into the lamp light
 blending together
 merge one light with the other
 listening

(ALL THE WHILE

first to mozart
 his clarinet concerto
 then beethoven, his violin concerto
 hearing the full range, the exacting tone
 of each note

soft in my ear
 nearly feel my fingers moving
 over the keys

a delicate touch
 breathing yet carrying, sustaining
 with a control i never had
 from note to note

line after line
 the music touching me
 reaching

from the inside out
 feelings stirring
 stirring again
 those feelings i thought fallow
 emotions i felt drained
 & again the tears i have to brush away
 though i do not cry
 i know i do not cry
 i can not cry
 not now

tonight
 as the night becomes short
 i find some comfort in reading
 though not my usual reading of poetry
 &
 in this reading
 (of marcel duchamp

i note in his . . .
 in his shop window inquiry
a struggle, a mental twisting
a close unraveling
(some thing like my tying
 & then untying shoe laces
an association of thought
& object
 a using of the object
 to produce / TO PROVIDE
 an understanding
 of self
an awareness gathered
by conscious examination of external
physical objects
 a window, for instance
a self-portrait
drawn, in part, from reflected images
a wholly new & different view
of the inward human ocean

in the kitchen this morning
i eat cold pot roast
the onions
 (& potatoes / growing
YELLOW & GOLD
YELLOW & GOLD
the bread is carefully wrapped, dry
 not molding
molasses cookies still fresh
BRONZE & GOLD
BRONZE & GOLD
i reach for a match
the box from chicago
bottles of california chablis fill the wine rack
BRONZE & BROWN
BRONZE & BROWN
the counter-tops have a wood-grain finish

the door handles nearly match
 the chairs are there

with polished chrome side arms
 & legs
 leather seats
 & back rests

BROWN & YELLOW
 BROWN & YELLOW
 one ashtray is in its place
 in its place
 next to the coffee pot
 YELLOW, BROWN, YELLOW & BROWN
 BROWN, BRONZE, BROWN & BRONZE
 YELLOW & BRONZE & YELLOW & BROWN
 BROWN, YELLOW, BRONZE, YELLOW
 BRONZE, GOLD, BRONZE & GOLD
 GOLD, YELLOW, GOLD & YELLOW
 yellow &
 & gold
 bronze &
 & brown
 &
 / . . .

am i inside sleep
 dreaming while standing
 or has day come again
 & again

THE NIGHT QUIET WITH SOUNDS & SILENCE
FOR GERALD CLARK

morning i move up through quick lifting fog
anxious to reach the side trail
away from the occasional hikers

passing overnight camp sites
i notice fire circles
outlined in hazy light
filtered by trees and ferns

*

evening near the cold swift stream
i wonder if i should follow the ridge
touch the trail now and then only
check directions
but i like this place

the night quiet
with tree and water sounds
and my own silence
stirred, relieved
by smells of wood burning
and thoughts of sleep

and i realize
i can handle that question another day

OF BRANCHES, FROGS & FOX
(w/apology, appreciation to Robert Duncan)

For Gerald Clark

i sit looking out
the window of my building,
papers littering my desk,
intent
i move into the exterior picture
merging with the world of
branches, roots, cuttings
moving with the butterfly

& the pondside frogs. There,
as the sun fades in a rising mist,
an alert red fox
pauses next to the road
winding thru this Frost woodlot
exposing the nakedness
of my mind in midday.

UNTITLED

as the earth turns toward the sun
children's faces turn to the light
& a snowy morning
foretells, half-fooling
that children's lives
will one day be their wishes
their happiness
the magic of childhood
awakening

IN AUGUST

in August
in the shadow
of a slowly circling eagle
i think of
fathers
of those with fathers
& wonder if in death
my father remembers
our only communion
was in his dying

SIFTING SAND

sifting sand
like stirring sexual crabs
in sterile residences
i walk foam-choked beaches
along the gulf

overhead a solitary dove
wheels & turns
floating over the bayou
soundlessly
as the easter moon
throbs in me
& the dead child
of each day's vision
jabbing within
burns materials of my mind
eating away the darkness

GOLDFINCHES

For Duane Locke

goldfinches
 male & female
 in brilliant summer colors
 flit nervously between
 an immature dying birch
 & feeder
 to share fresh seed
 with blue-oil backed grackles

 these finches
 float
 in slow motion, stop-action sequence
 as i move
 on rusty railroad ties
 in short subject pictures
 rear-screen projected behind eyelids

 while a muted trumpet
 protruding from my ear
 rough-soft as lizards
 crawling over each tree trunk
 in the tampa garden
 sounds the silent call of a tongue-
 tied squirrel

3 TREES, 3 RACCOONS, 3 ROADS

1.

gentle pressure on the rose bush
in early spring

a plum-tree flowering quiet in the afternoon

in the darkness
the shadowy outline of the moon

2.

i write exactly as i hear
the february wind
feeling as it moves
a poet reading

3.

migratory birds
first circle outside town
question the sanctuary
settle around the swamp pond
a bit wary

a butterfly faintly flutters
dipping and rising
zig-zags over an april maze of daffodils
dotting the hillside

4.

solitary at noon i
 walk on the jagged gravel
 of a creek-bed in july
 notice detail of each weed, each blade of grass
 in sun-blistered fields
 alongside its banks

a whisper
 not my voice
 a leaf falls from a maple
 not my own

5.

her hair shines in the slanting light
 of a cathedral stained-glass window
 the light of a candle
 half-used on the altar

i fear my imagination
 possible confusion
 movement undirected, uncontrolled
 in each effort
 to understand my single thought
 the question
 my mystery
 the i
 a puzzle missing pieces
 now scattered
 broken, unsolved

6.

crawling on the pavement
each hour passes
minutes slowly drying
disappear
into a crack of the street

it's anything but obvious
which is my left hand
the one bending toward the ground
or the other
bound, rigid at my side

7.

3 trees
3 raccoons
3 roads
using breath
sun in rain-water

8.

i sketch in damp sand
beside the lake
drawing flowers
each different
each losing petals

with the incoming tide
i remove cobwebs
use pencils
ideas deepen
in the recess of love
turn, misdirected
remember her face
darkening
her eyes blue, round
her hair
a scarf in the wind

9.

could it happen again
will i turn as before
do the days brighten
clearing enough
to restore sight, replace feeling
and fill dark spaces
the angle of light shifting

the circle widens
the flea a speck
on the mirror
glass unpolished
finger-smeared, dull
like slowly melting snow
tracked and splashed
blackening more each day

10.

the dream
happens again and again

i might say yes
if asked
i might describe it
if known
but i prefer the discovery
of a flower opening
in a may morning
or the recognition
of adam

STONES

For Valerie

she lifts two stones
one at a time
lifts then places each
on the sand
lifting each again
our daughter builds the wall
leading from water to weeds
a wall moving
with each receding wave

she works deliberately
extends the stone row
till satisfied
the structure
could tolerate the tide

AFTER THE DEATH OF THEODORE ROETHKE

i moved
walking near the site
of his father's greenhouse
trying
to enter his world
to sift thru
the florist's heap
thru the roses
the tulips & geraniums

passing
again & again
outside the gates
of Oakwood
unable to enter
unable
to approach his grave

why does
he move in
the mystic night
beyond me
within a circle
connecting our childhoods
into a slow early winter
with its shallow freeze
chilling wind
& meditative mood

when he passes
will i know
will petals
drop on his grave
untended
will i recognize
his twisting shape
his dancing spirit
will i only pass
once more around
outside the gate
alone
unfound

DANDELION NOTES

For Sarah

standing on the side
of a spring-green hill
i bend down & pick
a single dandelion

MOVING BEFORE WAKING

moving before waking
is like walking in sleep
something i used to do

AFTER VIEWING WARHOL'S "LONESOME COWBOY"

in arizona
it's still possible
to ride in hand-tooled saddles

here she wears
white leather boots
& walks thru
someone else's flowering cactus

how can she have so much love
in her body & still feel lonely

slowly she realized
there's nothing in it for her
& i discovered
nothing really exists

POETRY

1.

city of wind
water & snow
you provide a
panoramic view
give light, bright
dot trees lining
the avenue
which i walk
alone tonight
bundled yet shivering
in near zero air

you, my adopted city
open again
accept my wanderings
hear my thoughts
as no others do
taking whatever i bring
whether anger
mental exercise
the retching probes
or the echo
i hear in the
trash-littered alley
i pass through

taking whatever i bring
the explosion of dreams
shattered over years
the reality of failure
each time i do

you, an impartial kin
 of mine
 take, accept &
 return to me
 the concrete of cracked sidewalks
 leaves fallen from trees
 beer cans beside trash bins
 tattered shoes
 the laces removed
 sides full of holes
 ragged from dogs
 scavenging for food

2.

i enter the small bookshop
 off state street
 & finding a new Ashberry volume
 read aloud his *Fantasia*
 his handling of this
 whole *poetry* question
 learn his concepts
 feel his thoughts
 now become part mine
 & leave quickly
 when a clerk
 for the third time
 asks if i need help

yes, temporary
 city of mine
 i require assistance
 if i'm to understand
 if i'm to comprehend
 the pattern of your streets
 know the weight
 your bridges can hold
 or the desires of tellers
 quietly working
 in your banks

3.

leaving
i take the sofa
chairs, silverware
pots & pan
glasses
& books
materials with which
to seek comfort
finding little here
in my city
a place i leave
as uncertain as
when i enter

& yet if i add
some spices
a.few herbs perhaps
as i cook
stirring in red wine
do i have enough
enough leaves
pages or lines
to answer my question
or yours . . .

ah, poetry
oh, city
now mine . . .

4.

city
images in poetry
i return to give
what i borrow
that which you
willed me
the words
broken, jagged
impressions here recorded
on the page
so many wheel covers
on your streets
left unclaimed

WALKING ALONE IN THIS WORLD

For Lisa Ritchie

walking alone in a dense forest
thru steam rising from the afternoon's shower
the air is moist, damp
water glistens on the moss
next to tree trunks
leaves still dripping
my steps are deliberate
whether moving on carefully marked trails
or entering those small clearings
that appear with surprising suddenness
&
there's a new delight
in the discovery
of each wild flower
pleasure in the recognition
of every bird's call
& enjoyment in the solace
i find
in this world
now almost all my own

THE WIND BECOMES SILENT

1

yesterday you gathered grass
today the leavings from the cafe

2

tonight the wind becomes silent
a shadow over the moon

LIKE THOUGH NOT

For Betty

like though not a butterfly
solitary in June air
moving with the breeze
buffetted or hovering
close over flowers and weeds
the time lines of your life
are projected and sensed
in your touch
each day