

Through a hole in the half-full cardboard case, the skaters can be seen.
At this stage everything depends on a special bottle
Covered by its tin case, and a second glass beneath
The bottle in its position, or two bottles instead.
Again, the cases are put over the bottles, and again they
Are raised, nipping the special bottle with its
Two linings, and the space for the glass to stand within its
Dumb patina. There are many false starts, and you can
Choose among them. Obligated to play with two or more, you
May not know the skaters' false chips, in the night of turns
Coming back once again the anchor of morning. Now your only chance is to begin over.
Secretly dip the point of the glass rod in oil of vitriol, and touch the mess.

Few of them were present on that occasion:
The teacher, and a few friends. It is necessary to trace each letter
Of the alphabet quite a few times to get them right.
The "c's" and "i's" can resemble each other quite a lot.
Now loosen the writing a little, and presently it will spread
On the farm landscape. The squares are called "White" and "Black" whatever their
actual color may be.
For invisible writing, dip a quill in some goose grease and write
On the pad. Then dust some powdered charcoal over the surface
And the magic writing will appear. For plain writing
Try beginning with an easy word, such as "neck."

We children are ashamed of our bodies
But we laugh and, demanded, talk of sex again
And all is well. The waves of morning harshness
Float away like coal-gas into the sky.
But how much survives? How much of any one of us survives?
The articles we'd collect—stamps of the colonies
With greasy cancellation marks, mauve, magenta and chocolate,
Or funny looking dogs we'd see in the street, or bright remarks.
One collects bullets. An Indianapolis, Indiana man collects slingshots of all epochs,
and so on.

Subtracted from our collections, though, these go on a little while, collecting
aimlessly. We still support them.
But so little energy they have! And up the swollen sands
Staggers the darkness fiend, with the storm fiend close behind him!
True, melodious tolling does go on in that awful pandemonium,
Certain resonances are not utterly displeasing to the terrified eardrum.
Some paroxysms are dinning of tambourine, others suggest piano room or organ loft
For the most dissonant night charms us, even after death. This, after all, may be
happiness: tuba notes awash on the great flood, raptures of xylophone, violins,
limpets, grace-notes, the musical instrument called serpent, viola da gambas,
aeolian harps, clavicles, pinball machines, electric drills, que sais-je encore!
The performance has rapidly reached your ear; silent and tear-stained, in the post-
mortem shock, you stand listening, awash

Seems a sorcerer's magic lantern, projecting black and orange cellophane shadows
On the distance of my hand... The very reaction's puny,
And when we seek to move around, wondering what our position is now, what the
arm of that chair.

A great wind lifted these cardboard panels
Horizontal in the air. At once the perspective with the horse
Disappeared in a bigarrure of squiggly lines. The image with the crocodile in it
became no longer apparent.

Thus a great wind cleanses, as a new ruler
Edits new laws, sweeping the very breath of the streets
Into posterior trash. The films have changed---

The great titles on the scalloped awning have turned dry and blight-colored.
No wind that does not penetrate a man's house, into the very bowels of the furnace,
Scratching in dust a name on the mirror--say, and what about letters,
The dried grasses, fruits of the winter--gosh! Everything is trash!

The wind points to the advantages of decay
At the same time as removing them far from the sight of men.
The regent of the winds, Aeolus, is a symbol for all earthly potentates
Since holding this sickening, festering process by which we are cleansed
Of afterthought.

A girl slowly descended the line of steps.

The wind and treason are partners, turning secrets over to the military police.

Lengthening arches. The intensity of minor acts. As skaters elaborate their
distances,

Taking a separate line to its end. Returning to the mass, they join each other
Blotted in an incredible mess of dark colors, and again reappearing to take the theme
Some little distance, like fishing boats developing from the land different
parabolas,

Taking the exquisite theme far, into farness, to Land's End, to the ends of the
earth!

But the livery of the year, the changing air
Bring each to his ~~own~~. Leaving phrases unfinished,
Gestures half-sketched against woodsmoke. The abundant sap
Oozes in girls' throats, the sticky words, half-uttered, unwished for,
A blanket disbelief, quickly supplanted by idle questions that fade in turn.
Slowly the mood turns to look at itself as some urchin
Forgotten by the roadside. New schemes are got up, new taxes,
Earthworks. And the hour becomes light again.
Girls wake up in it.

It is best to remain indoors. Because there is error
In so much precision. As flames are fanned, wishful thinking arises
Bearing its own prophets, its pointed ignoring. And just as a desire
Settles down at the end of a long spring day, over heather and watered shoot and
dried rush field,

So error is plaited into desires not yet born.

Therefore the post must be resumed, (is being falsified
To be forever involved, tragically, with one's own image?)
The studio light suddenly invaded the long casement—values were ~~the~~ ^{liberal} ~~one~~
She knows now. But the floor is being slowly pulled apart
Like straw under those limpid feet.
And Helga, in the minuscule apartment in Jersey City
Is reacting violet to the same kind of dress, is drawing death
Again in blossoms against the reactionary fire... pulsing
And knowing nothing to superb ^{ambient} ~~violet~~ distances that intersalate
This city. Is the death of the ~~Sube~~ repeated. Or in the musical album.

^{stat} It is time now for a general understanding of
The meaning of all this. The meaning of Helga, importance of the setting, etc.
A description of ~~passionate blues, etc.~~ Labels on bottles
And all kinds of discarded objects that ought to be described.
But can one ever be sure of which ones?
Isn't this a death-trap, wanting to put too much in
So the floor sags, as under the weight of a piano, or a piano-legged girl
And the whole house of cards comes dinning down around one's ears!

But this is an important aspect of the question
Which I am not ready to discuss, am not at all ready to,
This leaving-out business. On it hinges the very importance of what's novel
Or autocratic, or dense or silly. It is as well to call attention
To it by exaggeration, perhaps. But calling attention
Isn't the same thing as explaining, and as I said I am not ready
To line phrases with the costly stuff of explanation, and shall not,
Will not do so for the moment. Except to say that the carnivorous
Way of these lines is to devour their own nature, leaving
Nothing but a bitter impression of absence, which as we know involves presence,
but still.
Nevertheless these are fundamental absences, struggling to get up and be off
themselves.

This, thus, is a portion of the subject of ~~XXXX~~ this poem
Which is in the form of falling snow: ^{of}
That is, the individual flakes are not essential to the importance ~~to~~ the whole's
becoming so much of a truism
That their importance is again called in question, to be denied further out, and
again and again like this.
Hence, neither the importance of the individual flake,
Nor the importance of the whole ~~XXXXXXXXXXXX~~ impression of the ~~XXX~~ storm, if it
has any, is what it is,
But the rhythm of the series of repeated jumps, from abstract into positive and
back to a slightly less diluted abstract.

Mild effects are the result.

I cannot think any more of going out into all that, will stay here
With my ^{in agony} ~~mild~~ schmerzen. Besides, the storm is almost over
Having frozen the face of the bust into a strange style with the lips
And the teeth the most distinct part of the whole ~~whole~~ *business*.

just

~~XXXXXXXXXX~~ It is this madness to explain...

What is the matter with plain old-fashioned cause-and-effect?
Leaving one alone with romantic impressions of the trees, the sky?
Who, actually, is going to be fooled one instant by these phoney explanations,
Think them important? So back we go to the old, imprecise feelings, the
Common knowledge, the importance of duly suffering and the occasional glimpses
Of some balmy felicity. The world of Schubert's lieder. I am fascinated
Though by the urge to get out of it all, by going
Further in and correcting the whole mismanaged mess. But I am afraid I'll
Be of no help to you. Goodbye.

As balloons are to the poet, so to the ground
Its varied assortment of trees. The more asserted they are, the
Vaster his experience. Sometimes
You catch sight of them on a level with the top story of a house,
Strung up there for publicity purposes. Or like those bubbles
Children make with a kind of ring, not a pipe, and probably using some detergent
Rather than old-fashioned soap and water. Where was I? The balloons
Drift thoughtfully over the land, not exactly commenting on it;
These are the range of the poet's experience. He can hide in trees
Like a hamadryad, but wisely prefers not to, letting the balloons
Idle him out of existence, as a car idles. Traveling faster
And more furiously across unknown horizons, belted into the night
Wishing more and more to be unlike someone, getting the whole thing
(So he believes) out of his system. Inventing systems.
We are a part of some system, thinks he, just as the sun is part of
The solar system. Trees brake his approach. And he seems to be wearing but
Half a coat, viewed from one side. A "half-man" look inspiring the disgust of
honest folk
Returning from chores, the milk frozen, the pump heaped high with a chapeau of snow,
The "No Skating" sign as well. But it is here that he is best,
Face to face with the unsmiling alternatives of his nerve-wracking existence,
Placed squarely in front of his dilemma, on all fours before the lamentable spectacle
of the unknown.
Yet knowing where men are coming from. It is this, to hold the candle up to the album.

II

Under the window marked "General Delivery"...

This should be a letter
Throwing you a minute to one side,
Of how this tossing looks harmonious from a distance,
Like sea or the tops of trees, and how
Only when one gets closer is its sadness small and appreciable.
It can be held in the hand.

All this must go into a letter.
Also the feeling of being lived, looking for people,
And gradual peace and relaxation.

But there's no personal involvement:
These sudden bursts of hot and cold
Are wreathed in shadowless intensity
Whose moment saps them of all characteristics.
Thus beginning to rest you at once know.

Once there was a point in these islands,
Coming to see where the rock had rotted away,
And turning into a tiny speck in the distance.

But war's savagery... Even the most patient scholar, now
Could hardly reconstruct the old fort exactly as it was.
That trees continue to wave over it. That there is also a small museum somewhere
inside.
That the history of costume is no less fascinating than the history of great
migrations.
I'd like to bugger you all up,
Deliberately falsify all your old suck-ass notions
Of how chivalry is being lived. What goes on in beehives.
But the whole filthy mess, misunderstandings included,
Problems about the tunic button etc. How much of any one person is there.

Still, after bananas and spoonbread in the shadow of the old walls
It is cooling to return under the eaves in the shower
That probably fell while we were inside, examining bowknots,
Old light-bulb sockets, places where the whitewash had begun to flake
With here and there an old map or illustration. Here's one for instance—
Looks like a weather map... or a coiled bit of wallpaper with a design
Of faded hollyhocks, or abstract fruit and gaudrops in chains.

~~The wind sighs carefully in the umbrella pines.
How nice to lie on one's back, looking up
Into that bird-hopping world of flocked sunlight and shadow.~~

But how is it that you are always indoors, peering at too-heavily cancelled
stamps through a greasy magnifying glass?
And slowly the incoherencies of day melt in
A general wishful thinking of night
To peruse certain stars over the bay.
Cataracts of peace pour from the poised heavens
And only fear of snakes prevents us from passing the night in the open air.
The day is definitely at an end.

Old heavens, you used to tweak above us,
Standing like rain whenever a salvo... Old heavens,
You lying there above the old, but not ruined, fort,
Can you hear, there, what I am saying?

For it is you I am parodying,
Your invisible denials. And the almost correct impressions
Corroborated by newsprint, which is so fine.
I call to you there, but I do not think that you will answer me.

For I am condemned to drum my fingers
On the closed lid of this piano, this tedious planet, earth
As it winks to you through the aspiring, growing distances,
A last spark ~~there~~^{before} the night.

There was much to be said in favor of storms
But you seem to have abandoned them in favor of endless light.
I cannot say that I think the change much of an improvement.
There is something fearful ~~in~~^{about} these summer nights that go on forever...

We are nearing the Moorish coast, I think, in a bateau.
I wonder if I will have any friends there
Whether the future will be kinder to me than the past, for example,
And an all set to be put out, finding it to be not.

Still, I am prepared for this voyage, and for anything else you may care to mention.
Not that I am not afraid, but there is very little time left.
You have probably made travel arrangements, and know the feeling.
Suddenly, one morning, the little train arrives in the station, but oh, so big

It is! Much bigger and faster than anyone told you.

A bewhiskered student in an old baggy overcoat is waiting to take it.

"Why do you want to go there," they all say. "It is better in the other direction."
And so it is. There people are free, at any rate. But where you are going no one is.

Still there are parks and libraries to be visited, "la Bibliothèque Municipale,"
Hotel reservations and all that rot. Old American films dubbed into the foreign
language,

Coffee and whiskey and cigar ~~stubs~~ stubs. Nobody minds. And rain on the bristly
wool of your topcoat.

I realize that I never knew why I wanted to come.

Yet I shall never return to the past, that attic,

Its sailboats are perhaps more beautiful than these, these I am leaning against,

Spangled with diamonds and orange and purple stains,

Bearing me once again in quest of the unknown. These sails are life itself to me.

I heard a girl say this once, and cried, and brought her fresh fruit and fishes,
Olives and golden baked loaves. She dried her tears and thanked me.

Now we are both setting sail into the purplish evening.

I love it! This cruise can never last long enough for me.

But once more, office desks, radiators--No! That is behind me.

No more dullness, only movies and love and laughter, sex and fun.

The ticket seller is blowing his little horn--hurry before the window slams down.

The train we are getting onto is a boat train, and the boats are really boats this time.

But I heard the heavens say--Is it right? This continual changing back and forth?

Laughter and tears and so on? Mightn't just plain sadness be sufficient for him?

No! I'll not accept that any more, you bewhiskered old caverns of blue!

This is just right for me. I am cozily ensconced in the balcony of my face

Looking out over the whole darn countryside, a beacon of satisfaction

I am. I'll not trade places with a king. Here I am then, continuing but ever
beginning

My perennial voyage, into new memories, new hope and flowers

The way the coasts glide past you. I shall never forget this moment

Because it consists of purest ecstasy. I am happier now than I ever dared believe
Anyone could be. And we finger down the dog-eared coasts...

It is all passing! It is past! No, I am here,

Bellow the coasts, and even the heavens roar their assent

As we pick up a lemon colored light horizontally
Projected into the night, the night that heaven
Was kind enough to send, and I launch into the happiest dreams,
Happier once again, because tomorrow is already here.

Yet certain kernels remain. Clouds that drift past sheds---
Read it in the official bulletin. We shan't be putting out today.
The old stove smoked worse than ever because rain was coming down its chimney.
Only the bleary eye of fog accosted one through the mended pane.

Outside, the swamp water lapped the broken wood step.
~~Where~~ A rowboat was moored in the alligator-infested swamp.
Somewhere, from deep in the interior of the jungle, a groan was heard.
Could it be...? Anyway, a rainy day---wet weather.

The whole voyage will have to be cancelled.
It would be impossible to make different connections.
Anyway the hotels are all full at this season. The junks packed with refugees
Returning from the islands. Sea-bream and flounder abound in the muddied waters...

They in fact represent the backbone of the island economy.
That, and cigar rolling. Please leave your papers at the desk as you pass out,
You know. "The Wedding March." Ah yes, that's the way. The couple descend
The steps of the little old church. Ribbons are flung, ribbons of cloud

And the sun seems to be coming out. But there have been so many false alarms...
No, it's happened! The storm is over. Again the weather is fine and clear.
And the voyage? It's on! Listen everybody, the ship is starting,
I can hear its whistle's roar! We have just time enough to make it to the dock!

And away they pour, in the sulfurous sunlight,
To the aqua and silver waters where stands the glistening white ship
And into the great vessel they ~~board~~^{leap}, a motley and happy crowd
Chanting and pouring down hymns on the surface of the ocean...

Pulling, tugging us along with them, by means of streamers,
Golden and silver confetti. Sailing, we laugh and sing with the revelers
But are not quite certain that we want to go---the dock is so sunny and warm.
That majestic ship will pull up anchor who knows where?

And full of laughter and tears, we sidle once again with the other passengers.
The ground is heaving under foot. Is it the ship? It could be the dock...
And with a great whoosh all the sails go up... Hideous black smoke belches forth
from the funnels
Smudging the gold carnival costumes with the gaiety of its jet-black soot

Looked at from this angle the problem of death and survival
Ages slightly. For the solutions are millienfold, like waves of wild geese re-
turning in spring.

Scarcely we know where to turn to avoid suffering, I mean
There are so many places.

So, coachman-servile, or scullion-slatternly, but each place is taken.

The lines that draw nearer together are said to "vanish."
The point where they meet is their vanishing point.

Spaces, as they recede, appear to become smaller.

But another, more urgent question imposes itself--that of poverty.
How to excuse it to oneself? The wetness and coldness? Dirt and grime?
Uncomfortable, unsuitable lodgings, with a depressing view?
The peeled geranium flowering in a rusted tomato can,
Framed in a sickly ray of sunlight, a tragic chromo?

A broken mirror nailed up over a chipped enamel basin, whose turgid waters
Reflect the fly-specked calendar--with ecstatic Dutch girl clasping tulips--
On the far wall. Hanging from one nail, an old velvet hat with a tattered bit
of veiling--last remnant of former finery.
The bed well-made. The whole place scrupulously clean, but cold and damp.

All this, wedged into a pyramidal ray of light, is my own invention.

~~***~~

~~Under a reddish-brown and greenish picture of excited beagles and calm huntsmen
A ^{lot} ~~noise~~ of squalling and wetching arose from the messed-up crib.
The newborn offspring was given the name of Charles.
He grew up to become a successful business executive.~~

But to return to our tomato can--those spared by the goats
Can be made into a practical telephone, the two halves being connected by a length
of wire.
You can talk to your friend in the next room, or around corners.
An American inventor made a fortune with just such a contraption.

The branches tear at the sky--

~~The blight is on inert space
Footage to dig under you so~~

Things too tiny to be remembered in recorded history--the backfiring of a bus
In a Paris street in 1932, and all the clumsy seductions and amateur paintings done
Clamber to join in the awakening (~~the lover with its chocolate~~)
To take a further role in my determination. These clown-shapes

Filling up the available space for miles, like acres of red and mustard pom-poms
Dusted with a pollen we call "an air of truth." Massed mounds
Of Hades it is true. I propose a general housecleaning
Of these true and valueless shapes which pester us with their raisons d'etre,
Whom no one (that is their weakness) can ever get to like.

(The kidnapers had parked their automobile behind some black shrubbery.
Meanwhile Doris all unsuspecting was walking in the back yard with her lover.
Her father, the fire-chief, had told her he refused to have him inside the house
But he was off battling flames that day, a mysterious fire having broken out
At the Jones & Co. warehouse, the latest in a series of fires
Which had the nerves of the whole town on edge. Hearing a noise, Arthur--
That was the name of Lois' boyfriend--dashed into the side yard. Returning
Around the edge of the clapboard house he was astonished to note Lois' disappearance,
Already, behind the ragged foliage, on the back seat of the black Pontiac,
Not wanting the gag to be thrust into her mouth).

There are moving parts to be got out of order,
However, in the flame fountain. Add gradually one ounce, by measure, of sulphuric acid
To five or six ounces of water in an earthenware basin. Add to it, also gradually,
about three-quarters of an ounce of granulated zinc.
A rapid production of hydrogen gas will instantly take place. Then add,
From time to time, a few pieces of phosphorus the size of a pea.
A multitude of gas bubbles will be produced, which will fire on the surface of the
effervescing liquid.
The whole surface of the liquid will become luminous, ~~XXXXXXXXXXXX~~ and fire
balls, with jets of fire,
Will dart from the bottom, through the fluid with great rapidity and a hissing noise.

Sure, but a simple shelter from this or other phenomena is easily contrived.

But how luminous the fountain! Its sparks seem to aspire to reach the sky!
And so much energy in those bubbles. A wise man could contemplate his face in them
With impunity, but fools would surely do better not to approach too close
Because any intense physical activity like that implies danger for the unwary and
the uneducated. Great balls of fire!
In my day we used to make "fire designs," using a saturated solution of nitrate of
potash.
Then we used to take a smooth stick, and using the solution as ink, draw with it on
sheets of white tissue paper.
Once it was thoroughly dry, the writing would be invisible.
By means of a spark from a smouldering match ignite the potassium nitrate at any
part of the drawing,
First laying the paper on a plate or tray in a darkened room.
The fire will smoulder along the line of the invisible drawing until the design is
complete.

Meanwhile the fire fountain is still smouldering and welling
Casting off a hellish stink and wild fumes of pitch
Acrid as jealousy. And it might be
That flame writing might be visible right there, in the gaps in the smoke
Without going through the bother of the solution-writing.
A word here and there—"promised" or "beware"—you have to go the long way round
Before you find the entrance to that side is closed.
The phosphorescent liquid is still heaving and boiling, however.
And what if this insane activity were itself a kind of drawing
Of April sidewalks, and young trees bursting into timid leaf
And dogs sniffing hydrants, the fury of spring beginning to back up along their veins?
Yonder stand a young boy and a girl leaning against a bicycle.
The iron lamppost next to them disappears into the feathery, unborn leaves that
suffocate its top.

A postman is coming up the walk, a letter held in ~~the~~^{his} outstretched hand.
This is his first day on the new job, and he looks warily around
Alas not seeing the hideous bulldog bearing down on him like sixty, its hellish eyes
fixed on the seat of his pants, jowls a-slaver.
Nearby a young woman is fixing her stocking. Watching her, a chap with a hat
Is about to walk into the path of a speeding hackney cabriolet. The line of lampposts
Marches up the street in strict array, but the lamp-parts
Are lost in feathery bloom, in which hidden faces can be spotted, for this is a
puzzle scene.
The sky is white, yet full of outlined stars—it must be night,
Or an early springtime evening, with just a hint of dampness and chill in the air--
Memory of winter, hint of the autumn to come--
Yet the lovers congregate anyway, the lights twinkle slowly on.
Cars move steadily along the street.
It is a scene worthy of the poet's pen, yet it is the fire-demon
Who has created it, throwing it up on the dubious surface of a phosphorescent fountain
For all the world like a post. But love can appreciate it,
Use or mis-use it for its own ends. Love is stronger than fire.

The proof of this is that already the heaving, sucking fountain is paling away
Yet the fire-lines of the lovers remain fixed, as if permanently, on the air of the lab.
Not for long though. And now they too collapse,
Giving, as they pass away, the impression of a bluff,
Its craggy headlands outlined in sparks, its top crowned with a zigzag
Of grass and shrubs, pebbled beach at the bottom, with flat sea
Holding a few horizontal lines. Then this vision, too, ~~passes~~^{fades} slowly away.

III

Now you must shield with your body if necessary (you
Remind me of some lumox I used to know) the secret your body is.
Yes, you are a secret and you must NEVER tell it--the vapor
Of the stars would quickly freeze you to death, like a tear-stiffened handkerchief
Held in ~~some~~ liquid air. No, but this secret is in some way the fuel of
Your living apart. A hearth-fire picked up in the glow of polished
Wooden furniture and picture frames, something to turn away from and move back to--
Understand? This is all a part of you and the only part of you.

Here comes the answer: is it because apples grow
On the tree, or because it is green? One average day you may never know
How much is pushed back into the night, nor what may return
To sulk contentedly, half asleep and half awake
By the arm of a chair pointed into
The painting of the hearth-fire, ~~or reach, in a coma~~
~~Out of the garden for foreign students.~~
Be sure the giant would know falling asleep, but the frozen droplets reveal
A mixed situation in which the penis
Scored the offer by fixed marches into what is.
One black spot remained.

If I should... if I said you were there
The... towering peace ~~around~~ about us might
Hold up the way it breaks--the monsoon
Move a pebble, to the plumbing contract, sataract.
There has got to be only-- there is going to be
An accent on the portable bunch of grapes
The time the mildewed sea cast the
Hygrometer too far away. You read into it
The meaning of tears, survey of our civilization .

Only one thing exists: the fear of death. As widows are a prey to lean sharks
And Cape Hatteras to hurricanes, so man to the fear of dying, to the
Certainty of falling. And just so it permits him to escape from time to time
Amid fields of boarded-up posters: "Objects, as they recede, appear to become
smaller

And all horizontal receding lines have their vanishing point upon the line of
sight,"

Which is some comfort after all, for our volition to see must needs condition
these phenomena to a certain degree.

But it would be rash to derive too much confidence from a situation which, in
the last analysis, scarcely warrants it.

What I said first goes: sleep, death and hollyhocks

And a new twilight stained, perhaps, a slightly unearthlier periwinkle blue,

But no dramatic arguments for survival, and please no magic justification of results

Uh... stupid song... that weather-bonnet ~~presented~~
Is all gone now. But the apothecary biscuits dwindled.
Where a little spectral
Cliffs, teeming over into irony's
Gotten silently inflicted on the passerby ^{yes}
Morning undermines, the daughter is.

Its oval armor
Protects it then, and the poisonous filaments hanging down
Are armor as well, or are they the creature itself, screaming
To protect itself? An aggressive weapon, as well as a plan of defense?
Nature is still liable to pull a few fast ones, which is why I can't emphasize
enough
The importance of adhering to my original program. Remember,
No hope is to be authorized, except in exceptional cases
To be decided on by me. In the meantime, back to dreaming,
Your most important activity. ~~Last night I dreamt of a wayside fen
Full of leaves, such as strawberry, ~~and many~~ goose-grass, buttercup, dandelion
and many wayside plants.~~

The most difficult of all is an arrangement of hawthorn leaves
But the sawing motion of desire, throwing you a moment to one side
And then the other, will, I think, permit you to forget your dreams for a little while.
In reality you place far too much importance on them. "Free but Alone"
Ought to be your motto. If you dream at all, place a cloth over your face:
Its expression of satisfied desire might be too much for some spectators. ^{Free but Alone} OK

The west wind grazes my cheek, the droplets come pattering down;
What matter now whether I wake or sleep?
The west wind grazes my cheek, the droplets come pattering down;
A vast design shows in the meadow's parched and trampled grasses.
Actually a game of "fox and geese" has been played there, but the real reality,
Beyond truer imaginings, is that it is a mystical design full of a certain sig-
nificance,
Burning, sealing its way into my consciousness.
Smooth out the sad flowers, pick up where you left off
But leave me immersed in dreams of sexual imagery:
Now that the homecoming geese unfurl in waves on the west wind
And cock covers hen, the farmhouse dog slavers over his bitch, and horse and mare
go screwing through the meadow!
A pure scream of things arises from these various sights and smells
As steam from a wet shingle, and I am happy once again
Walking among these phenomena that seem familiar to me from my earliest childhood.

The gray wastes of water surround
My puny little sheal. Sometimes storms roll
Tremendous billows far up on the gray sand beach, and the morning
After, odd tusked monsters lie stinking in the sun.
They are inedible. For food there is only
Breadfruit, and berries garnered in the jungle's inner reaches,
Wrested from scorpion and poisonous snake. Fresh water is a problem.
After a rain you may find some nestling in the hollow trunk of a tree, or in hollow
stones.

One's only form of distraction is really
To climb to the top of the one tall cliff to scan the distances.
Not for a ship, of course--this island is far from all the trade routes--
But in hopes of an unusual sight, such as a school of dolphins at play,
A whale spouting, or a cormorant bearing down on its prey.
So high this cliff is that the pebble beach far below seems made of gravel.
Halfway down, the crows and choughs look like bees.
Near by are the nests of the vultures. They cluck sympathetically in my direction,
Which will not prevent them from rending me limb from limb once I have kicked the bucket.
Further down, and way over to one side, are eagles;
Always fussing, fouling their big nests, they always seem to manage to turn their backs
to you.
The glass is low; no doubt we are in for a storm.

Sure enough: in the pale gray and orange distances to the left, a
Waterspout is becoming distinctly visible. Beautiful, but terrifying;
Delicate, transparent, like a watercolor by that 19th-century Englishman whose name
I forget
(I am beginning to forget everything on this island. If only I had been allowed to
bring my ten favorite books with me--
But a weathered child's alphabet is my only reading material. Luckily,
Some of the birds and animals on the island are pictured in it--the albatross, for
instance--that's a name I never would have remembered.)

It looks as though the storm-fiend were planning to kick up quite a ruckus
For this evening. I had better be getting back to the tent
To make sure everything is shipshape, weight down the canvas with extra stones,
Bank the fire, and prepare myself a little hard-tack and tea
For the evening's repast. Still, it is rather beautiful up here,
Watching the oncoming storm. Now the big cloud that was in front of the waterspout
Seems to be lurching forward, so that the waterspout, behind it, looks more like a
three-dimensional photograph.
Above me, the sky is a luminous silver-gray. Yet rain, like silver porcupine quills,
has begun to be thrown down.

~~Most of the lightning is still contained in the big black cloud however.~~
All the lightning is still contained in the big black cloud however. Now thunder
claps belch forth from it,
Causing the startled vultures to fly forth from their nests.
I really had better be getting back down, I suppose.

Still it is rather fun to linger on in the wet,
Letting your clothes get soaked. What difference does it make? No one will scold me
for it,
Or look askance. Supposing I catch cold? It hardly matters, there are no nurses
or infirmaries here
To make an ass of one. A ~~HEAVY~~ really serious case of pneumonia would suit me fine.
Ker-choo! There, now I'm being punished for saying so. Aw, what's the use.
I really am starting down now. Goodbye, Storm-fiend. Goodbye, vultures.

In reality of course the ^{middle-class} bourgeois apartment I live in is nothing like a desert island.
Cozy and warm it is, with a good library and record collection; ~~the fridge~~
~~Stacked with toothsome victuals, the medicine chest with the latest wonder drugs.~~
Yet I feel cut off from the life in the streets.
Automobiles and trucks plow by, spattering me with filthy slush.
The man in the street turns his face away. Another island-dweller, no doubt.
In a store or crowded café, you get a momentary impression of warmth:
Steam pours out of the espresso machine, fogging the panes with their modern lettering
Of a kind that has only been available for about a year. The headlines offer you
News that is so new you can't realize it yet. A revolution in Argentina! Think of
it! Bullets flying through the air, men on the move;
Great passions inciting to massive expenditures of energy, changing the lives of
many individuals.
Yet it is all offered as "today's news," as if we somehow had a right to it, as though
it were a part of our lives
That we'd be silly to refuse. Here, have another--crime or revolution? Take your pick.

None of this makes any difference to professional exiles like me, and that includes
everybody in the place.

We go on sipping our coffee, thinking dark or transparent thoughts...

Excuse me, may I have the sugar. Why certainly--pardon me for not having passed it
to you.

A lot of bunk, none of them really care whether you get any sugar or not.
Just try ~~ask~~ asking for something more complicated and see how far it gets you.
Not that I care anyway, being an exile. Nope, the motley spectacle offers no charms
whatsoever for me--

And yet-- and yet I feel myself caught up in its coils--
Its defectuous movement is that of my reasoning powers--

The main point has already changed, but the masses continue to tread the water
Of backward opinion, living out their mandate as though nothing had happened.

We step out into the street, not realizing that the street is different,
And so it shall be all our lives; only, from this moment on, nothing will ever be
the same again. Fortunately ~~are~~ ^{are} small pleasures and the monety of daily existence
Are safe. You will wear the same clothes, and your friends will still want to see you
for the same reasons--you fill a definite place in their lives, and they would be
sorry to see you go.

There has, however, been this change, so complete as to be invisible:
You might call it... "passion" might be a good word.
I think we will call it that for easy reference. This room, now, for instance, is
all black and white instead of blue.

A few snowflakes are ~~sinking~~^{floating} in the airshaft. Across the way
The sun was sinking, casting gray
Shadows on the front of the buildings.

Lower your left shoulder.
Stand still and do not see-saw with your body.

Any more golfing hints, Charlie?

Plant your feet squarely. Grasp your club lightly but firmly in the hollow of your
fingers.
Slowly swing well back and complete your stroke well through, pushing to the very end.
When putting, grasp the club firmly, swing back very slowly, and go well through with
the stroke.

"All up and down the whole creation," like magic lantern slides projected on the
wall of a cavern: castles, enchanted gardens, etc.

I am slowly coming round. But please don't ask for any news.

The usual anagrams of moonlight--a story
That subsides quietly into plain historical fact.
You have chosen the customary images of youth, old age and death
To keep harping on this traditional imagery. The reader

Will not have been taken in.
He will have managed to find out all about it, the way people do.
The moonlight congress backs out then. And with a cry
He throws the whole business into the flames: books, notes, pencil diagrams,
everything.

No, the only thing that interests him is day
And its problems. Freiheit! Freiheit! To be out of these dusty cells once and for all
Has been the dream of mankind since the beginning of the universe.

His day is breaking over the eastern mountains, at least that's the way he tells it.
Only the crater of becoming--a sealed consciousness--resists the prefaning mass of the
sun.
You who automatically sneer at everything that comes along, except your own work, of
course,
New feel the curious force of the invasion; its soldiers, all and some,

A part of you the minute they appear. It is as though workmen in blue overalls
Were constantly bringing on new props and taking others away: that is how you
feel the drama going past you, powerless to act in it.
To have it all be over! To wake suddenly on a hillside
With a valley far below— the clouds—

That is the penance you have already done:
January, March, February. ^{You} ~~We~~ are living toward a definition
Of the peaceful appetite, then you see
Them standing around limp and hungry like adjacent clouds.

Soon there is to be exchange of ideas and
Far more beautiful handshake, under the coat of
Weather is undecided right now.
Postpone the explanation.
The election is to be held tomorrow, under the trees.

You felt the months keep coming up
And it is December again,
The snow outside. Or is it June full of sun
And the prudent benefits of sun, but still the postman comes.
The true meaning of some of his letters is slight—

Another time I thought I could see myself.
This too proved illusion, but I could deal with the way
I keep returning on myself like a plank
Like a small boat blown away from the wind.

It all ends in a smile somewhere,
Notes to be taken on all this,
And you can see in the dark, of which the night
Is the continuation of your ecstasy and apprehension.

IV

The wind thrashes the maple seed-pods,
The whole brilliant mass comes spattering down.

This is my fourteenth year as governor of C province.
I was little more than a lad when I first came here.
Now I am old but scarcely any wiser.
So little are white hair and a wrinkled forehead a sign of wisdom!

To slowly raise oneself
Hand over hand, lifting one's entire weight;
To forget there was a possibility
Of some mere politic movement. That freedom, courage
And pleasant company could exist.
That has always been behind you.

An earlier litigation: wind hard in the tops
Of the baggy eucalyptus branches.

Today I wrote, "The spring is late this year.
In the early mornings there is hoar-frost on the water-meadows.
And on the highway the frozen ruts are papered over with ice."
~~If you go out to the western gate, will anybody be likely to meet you?~~

The day was gloves.

How far from the usual statement
About time, ice—the weather itself had gone.

I mean this. Through the years
You have approached an inventory
And it is now that tomorrow
Is going to be the climax of your casual
Statement about yourself, begun
So long ago in humility and false quietude.

The sands are frantic
In the hourglass. But there is time
To change, to utterly destroy
That too-familiar image
Lurking in the glass
Each morning, at the edge of the mirror.

The train is still sitting in the station.
You only dreamed it was in motion.

There are ~~only~~ a few travelers on Z high road.
Behind a shutter, two black eyes are watching them.
They belong to the wife of P, the high-school principal.

~~It was forty-odd years ago I first saw you
Coming over the self-same track.~~

~~And I still walk out to meet you.~~
The screen door bangs in the wind, one of the hinges is loose.
And together we look back at the house.
It could use a coat of paint
Except that I am too poor to hire a workman.
I have all I can do to keep body and soul together
And soon, even that relatively simple task may prove to be beyond my powers.

That was a good joke you played on the other guests.
A joke of silence.

One seizes these moments as they come along, afraid
To believe too much in the happiness that might result
Or confide too much of one's love and fear, even in
Oneself.

The spring, though mild, is incredibly wet.
I have spent the afternoon blowing soap-bubbles
~~And am unfit for the company of my fellow humans.~~

And it is with a feeling of delight I realize I am
All alone in the skittish darkness.
The birch-pods come clattering down on the weed-grown marble pavement.
And a curl of smoke stands above the triangular wooden roof.

Seventeen years in the capital of Foo-Yung province!
Surely woman was born for something
Besides continual fornication, retarded only by menstrual cramps.

I had thought of announcing my engagement to you
On the day of the first full moon of X month.

Engineer Y said, "The clouds hang in the heavens
Like hungry hawks above a cornfield." It is time
To go inside now, and curl up with the misery of a good book.

The wind has stopped, but the magnolia blossoms still
Fall with a plop onto the dry, spongy earth,
The evening air is pestiferous with midges.

There is only ^{one} way of completing the puzzle:
By finding a ~~red~~-shaped piece that is light green shading to buff at one side.

It is the beginning of March, a few
Russet and yellow wall-flowers are blooming in the border
Protected by moss-grown, fragmentary masonry.
~~Territes are at work in the long central roof-beam.~~

One morning you appear at breakfast
Dressed, as for a ^{journey} ~~day~~, in your worst suit of clothes.
And over a pot of coffee, or, more accurately, rusted water,
Announce your intention of leaving me alone in this cistern-like house.
In your own best interests I shall decide not to believe you.

I think there is a funny sandbar
Beyond the old boardwalk
Your intrigue makes you understand.

"At thirty-two I came up to take my examination at the university.
The U wax factory, it seemed, wanted a new general manager.
I was the sole applicant for the job, but it was refused me.
So I have preferred to finish my life
In the quietude of this floral retreat."

The tiresome old man is telling us his life story.

Trout are circling under water--

Masters of eloquence
Glisten on the pages of your book
Like mountains veiled by water or the sky.

The "second position"
Comes in the seventeenth year,
Watching the meaningless gyrations of flies above a sill.

Heads in hands, waterfall of simplicity.
The delta of living into everything.

The pump is busted. I shall have to ^{get} ~~bring~~ it fixed.

Your knotted hair
Around your shoulders
A shawl the color of the spectrum

Like that marvelous thing you haven't learned yet.

To refuse the square hive,
postpone the highest...

The apples are all getting tinted
In the cool light of autumn.

The constellations are rising
In perfect order: Taurus, Leo, Gemini.

—John Ashbery