

Riverside



Poetry by Jnana Hodson

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JNANA HODSON



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I



HALLE
STREET

REALMS OF DESIRE

Two cheerleaders wore white gym shoes
and thick white socks leading
to smooth adolescent legs

and who knew what else.
Freak girls bummed cigarettes like crazy
and you fed their neuroses.

A chubby chick fought and shrieked the hardest.
“God-damn fart-face!” she called a boy
she hit squarely, not to be left out.

WANT DO YOU WANT
FOR QUARTERS?

All the fat girls in town
had congregated in this Laundromat
to giggle at a skinny hippie.

When they sat, mouths agape,
stomachs bulged more than their breasts.
Everywhere, there's a pecking order.

The manager in her blue scarf and coat
fluttered in to chase neighborhood children out.
“They mess the place up. I don't want them.”

Kids, kids, kids, she muttered
raking in quarters – all this bitterness
robed in garments of honey and bees.

As for me, another day,
another dollar, down the drain.

URCHINS, ALL ON THE STREET

Those children
were small teeth
and wide eyes.

The older ones rode circles
at the Citgo station or played ball
in empty parking lots after five.

Cackling and unflagging
all of the eighth-grade girls waved
to me, to everybody
but wouldn't look for more than a flash.

Ho, ho, he was so funny, the little moon.
She was so tall and knock-kneed.
All on the street.

WITH FINGERS AS THICK
AS HOT DOGS

Resting on the park bench, she complained
she couldn't keep pace with her children.

When the seven-year-old pest returned,
demanding, "Ma, give me money"

for a cola, she complied,
thinking it love.



She couldn't touch her toes.



Her legs pushed away from each other, yet

in her cotton dress, unexpectedly
as she swatted a fly, she began to float

and meticulously shrank from sight,
bouncing along the horizon.

AROUND THE CORNER

A woman with a mustache
crossed herself three times
outside St. Mary's
and mumbled while wobbling away
in rubber duck boots.

Against her shabby brown coat
and scabby dry skin, she pressed
a Bible and presumes herself saintly.



A man in the corner grocery
weighed produce for forty years
while speaking Italian to his women customers.



An old black stumbled down the middle of Halle Street
as cars swerved around him or honk.
“Say, brother, my church is having a –“

“Sorry, no change.”

JUST IN CASE

Steel rings in a stone wall
remained to tie up horses
back when.

Just in case.

AFTERTONES

Up on the roof on a hot day,
the girls in No. 4A
invited him to sit between them.

However spiritually distant
they remained.



Before joining the super-snotty sorority,
she heard one of her dorm neighbors observe
he looked like a friendly freak.



Had he realized the male-
female ratio in the
high school Bible Club,
he might have joined in,
just to secure some action.

Singing, Hallelujah. Praise Jesus.



“We’re going to discuss infinity,”
her professor began. But Maggie demurred.
“Oh, no, that will take forever.”

POSTAL PERSPECTIVE

A three-year-old girl
held a life-size Mr. ZIP's
cardboard hand in her own
while waiting for Daddy
or an interior lobby
stoplight to change.

Can we go now?

These days, she
must be
my wife's age.

CONCERNING
THE PURE TEDIUM
OF A WARM SINK

She washed dishes so fast they're still dirty.
Even then, she overlooked
the beauty of tarnished silver.

Adding cabbage to the garbage,
she insisted Kosher pickles are obscene
and cheap wine's just funky venom.

When she visited my kitchen
she wanted to star in a detergent commercial.
All of it meaning we ate out often.

WITH PRAYERS TO OUR LADY
OF THE ASPHALT

In the congregation of pleasure:

Some are fat; some, skinny.
Some cute; a few, beautiful.
They smile, frown, dimple, blink.
Hair short, curled, long and free.
They come from anywhere.



“Roger was in my room again till five
telling me he didn’t want to sleep alone again,”
she said, glancing at her lover

while he simply smiled, facing away.



One votive burns
twice as fast
as the other.

Both, invoking
departed honeybees.

HOPING FOR ANOTHER ACCOUNTING

She liked to bite fingers.
She braided my beard.
Her nose and big toe were square.
Her tresses were thirteen years long.



She devoured the translation like a cheeseburger
and refused to understand me.

She spent her paycheck
on clothes she bought on layaway
while she was one unemployed
good dresser who had to do something.

She said *Kayak* poetry review
looked like a Sunday school booklet
with a cannon on the cover.



She didn't like the antique silver fork
with the engraved W
I'd bought for a dime

– the yellowed marriage
whose bride was no doubt long dead
held no treasure in her eyes.

Why else would we have it?

FARM GIRLS

“Those aren’t bulls, they’re steers”
she corrected from the passenger seat.

Now a waitress at the country club.
“I bet you get some pretty far-out passes.”

“More than *that!*” She giggled.

Here she was living with a man
in a hotel in town. He was a Mohawk
who raised horses and died
two days after landing a paying job.

“I guess I’ll never go back”
– to the farm, to the city –
it didn’t matter.



Sometimes it’s the Baptist upbringing.



She couldn’t understand why her parents
were still together. Thoughts her mother
once had a lover. She’d hear kissing
after being sent to bed, after her father’s
best friend had come over. Now

he couldn't stand him.

There was a big waterfall on their farm
which they had to sell.

And she told me

she had laryngitis the previous week,
making me wonder

if I should have kissed her good-night
so much.

EARLY SCORPIO

She doodled inside matchbook covers
and stuck the pencil in her
frizzy red hair.

So he was with her, too, but then
the place stunk of dog piss
one said to another later.

A living light switch
on) (off
terribly bitchy, taunting

elusive, “wanting to get myself together.”
Another Mary who couldn’t sew
but held her cigarette high, tavern style
in mid-sentence.

REVOLVING TOWARD A FINALE

We were gathering her possessions
for our return to school when I came across

Hollander's recording of *The Tempest*.
"Where'd you get this?" I asked curiously,

looking up to see her disappointed face
and be told: "It was for your birthday."

Years later, another lover
would filch the album

amid another tempest.

DOWNHILL FROM THE HEART

Beethoven's chamber pot beside the piano
revealed a man truly engrossed in his work
when there was nothing else to touch.

Not even another Zelda Fitzgerald, seeking
a Daddy-Daddy-Daddy who
never was what she's expected
nor was I.

It was all downhill
from the heart.

She rather melted away, like the music,
at the end of the page,

while I expected another.

BREAKFAST IN BUFFALO

I didn't demand too much
but too little

walking along
in cotton bellbottoms and wool vest
in the gray slush.

I've long forgotten
she was Bufferin and headaches.

You know the stuff that's a misery to drive in
but a joy to watch, if you stay home.

From where we sat then, it was the Far West.
A realm the small-town designer would label
along with Pittsburgh
the "Near East."

I really ought to get going
again.

ECHOES

“Jim’s one of our young flashes,”
a production chief told his wife
when all three paths crossed in the grocery.

To which, you might add, “in the pan.”



“I wish I could have gone to college.
I wanted to be an engineer.”
said the unshaved man in a Salvation Army pullover.

There are a lot of older people in college classes,
his nephew tried coaxing.

“I have no money,” came closing in like a curtain.



An elderly mother and middle-aged daughter
argument escalated in the sedan
in the doughnut shop parking lot.

They’d no doubt discussed this before.
At last, opening her door, the daughter repeated:
“Let’s go in and drop the subject.”

UNLIKE THE USUAL

“George's problem is he's too affectionate
– he expresses himself”

one woman confided loudly
in a restaurant

unlike the usual complaint

YOGIS

The old swami was only fifty-one, I see now.
He thought Helene and I both were way too skinny.

The cookies my mother, an inept cook, shipped
went to class anyway. The break, after a workout.
“You moved away from this? You’re nuts!”

“Breathe as if you're a sponge,” Loretta encouraged.

Life is different when the mind controls the breath.

“You are the most interesting person you’ll ever meet,”
Guru-dev insisted. “Stand in your own Light,
not others’.”

Or stand on your own head, before falling over.

“People leave us alone,” the young bride radiated.
“We pacifists are no fun to fight with.”

An exchange of floral garlands
made a wedding.

When the husband chanted,
he sounded like a puppy
first thing in the morning.

This would be as close as I would get to India from Ohio.

PREMONITION IN NOVEMBER
AS NO WAY OF KNOWING

An elderly man in a baggy gray coat and black shoes
and black slacks and a baggy hat
drifted down the sidewalk, lost in thought
or maybe memories, while smoking a pipe.

Awash in some vague sense of guilt, I wondered
if this would be me in fifty years. Except, falling short,
I would not now touch a pipe – or cigar, either –
and seldom wear a hat.

Paradoxically, at the time, I believed
I wouldn't live to be more than thirty-five.
Big transformations were around the corner.

The scene was definitely urban, though
not necessarily metropolitan. A college town would do
as well. There's no way of knowing
how we'll age along the way or
how our past and future will overlap
in a particular moment. What bookends
or end irons will embrace our lives.

And then, a year after she asked
where I thought I'd be now,
there was no way of knowing
it would be a farm in the mountains,
with wild strawberries. I'd anticipated

Boston or public relations in Indiana
or even law school instead of this journey
into texture, the senses, and sensuality
after psilocybin, mescaline, and acid.

That summer, while watching
a tongue in a penny-size mouth keep pushing
the pacifier out, in its desire for the real thing,
the truth became obvious: there are better
legacies than being born with a silver spoon.

Grandfathers have grandfathers, too.
It's children or their mothers
who make a neighborhood
as much as anything.

FROM MY LITTLE THIRD-FLOOR DECK

did I hear thunder?
coffee in the treetops

just a pony cart of vegetables
street vendor's cry
(O! the Arabs of Baltimore!)
on his daily round
somehow getting by

yet clouds slipped in

with a long cord, the phone

this old apartment, all light and draught
the floor sinking, new cracks in the plaster
was giving way, downward, you could hear it in the night
paint flaking, more pieces falling to my bed

all going downhill, to the basement

rusty pipes, armies of cockroaches
at work in the walls

constantly dripping faucets
kitchen, shower, the bathroom sink

stacked magazines slid away on their own
new grit emerged immediately after sweeping

the faucet knobs never matched

water rings in the ceiling

blooms collapsing for lack of circulation

A RITUAL IN NEW ENGLAND

at Christmas his sister made everyone
 fish chowder
though she couldn't stand the stuff
 wouldn't taste it
ran fans, kept the windows open

still, insisted on only the best ingredients
and everyone raved
 in the annual expectation

LIMPING INTO AQUARIUS
NEW MOON
WIND FROM THE NORTH

manholes in deep white banks
fumed
through tube tunnels

in below-zero morning air
memories
of places I first comprehended
this



forced daffodil bulbs
trumpeted sunlight
through the long evening

once dried, their fragile yolk
would shrink
hours of relentless snowfall



and then
BARKING WIRES

after heavy wet snow
fells many branches

ZERO COLD
– 102 CROWS

rook, as they say

BOLTON HILL

nine finches
bent a branch

over snow
around a neighbor's
goldfish pond

the gray and orange
motions flitted gently

where I thought
I was alone

in the throes
of a major city

EARLY JUNE

to sneezing and weeping
late spring gave way

from the plump shade
of a two-sided porch

irises and strawberries
lifted a cloud of pine pollen

with a varied rhythm to sweep
the decks of my attention

II



SPLITTING

THE

RENT

GREEN, THICK WITH FOLIAGE

recalling my roommates, scattered wherever

the hateful, spoiled booby from Chicago suburbs

the farm boy, playing Hearts and then, grinning,

his wild honey

the gentle one from highlands Ohio, with all the evidence

I never put together until years later

the chipper go-go kid from South Bend

and my blunder, arranging the keg

the couple in the tower, as well

we were so guarded, and green then

thick with foliage

forming seed

THAT PUERTO RICAN INFLECTION

there was something cozy
in Isabel's phrase

dark roasted coffee
after dinner



North Amigo
South Amigo
– not Americans, but Amigos!
the United States of Amigos!

BUT THAT'S NOT EVERYTHING

in the median strip of Route 17 just north of Pennsylvania
Paula and I found a road map of Fayette County, Tennessee
“you wanna talk about getting lost?”

all these vehicles entering a busy traffic circle
are just a matter of shuffling cars . as the matron confided,
“Harry and I used to go down to Buffalo” to do this or do
that

careening along curving roads, I saw the moon
swallowed and released over mountains . “she’s
a nice girl who does well in school, but that’s not
everything”

or we could have just stopped at a
BAR DINING ROOM
flashing in orange and green neon

BLINDSIDED, BLUES

to be starting out
behind once again

treading water, how
could we
catch up on
all the rest

all over again
out of nowhere

RINGING OUT

night after night, the ding-ding
air pump hose off the hook
rang from the corner gas station

that summer, I didn't register how
Thor was dropping acid on the sly
and drinking almost daily

he must have been as strung out as I was
unassisted, chemically . at least he was
getting laid and dancing
 all the while, looking cool



a block away, a year later
we were all sitting on the porch
when Glenn cried out that he'd seen a man
with a girl and the man carried a shotgun
so we all ran to that railing but saw nothing

I believed Glenn, but Maggie and Paula didn't

a few evenings later, Paula and I were in a meadow,
reading, as she listened intently to the hum of insects
and the wind and then a shotgun blast . shaken,
suddenly, she asked about the girl's fate



it finally hit me
there are wars within wars
even in this trash called a city

WINTER RITES AND INITIATIONS

whenever she wore her big frumpy brown hat
another snowfall hit us . I was so glad when she lost it

that covering didn't melt until March second
rather than Groundhog Day
as I've incorrectly remembered

and then we were hit with a twenty-four incher
a thirty incher, and a thirty-six incher
as aftershocks



that year, snow followed me to Long Island
Manhattan, and then a month later, the Poconos

I sat in front of a fireplace
while a rabbi tried to seduce a yogi
the day after his Jewish divorce

stoned on grass, he performed
a bar mitzvah

here, a seventeen-year-old girl
had been on acid for two years



driving home in the middle of blackness
there weren't even tire tracks to follow
while snow kept zooming at the windshield

SHE WANTED THE BEST SEAT

after we'd waited outside in snow
the doors opened two hours late
still, we were scolded

smoking isn't allowed in the gym and
dancing isn't, either, and we almost expected
the flashlight-carrying ushers to tell us

music isn't permitted there on principle
but when marshmallows rained down
and the frenzy erupted in the aisles and on chairs

there was an isle of liberty or salvation, however
temporal or sweet from the experiences she hoarded
but would never divulge

maybe it was those childhood beatings, over nothing
or Harlem itself or the dancing and sewing
so when she threatened, playfully, to

“punch you in de mouf,” you laughed anyway
even when the Latino band showed up three hours late
and the break didn't come until after midnight

on a weeknight, with the dream
where I'm being chased on a train or down a hallway
or hers, where they never sang in prison

WARNING, BEFORE ENTERING, KNOCK

on the coffee table we had a skull
with wax dripped over the crown

for a full month, I nodded to it
without recognizing
its identity as a horned goat

Methods of Logic and Modern Statistical Analysis
held the window open

a tiny nail and raised line painted across the bathroom
door
may have been left from a sign
saying Men or Women

Bushmen explain there's a male and a female side to every
fire
if a man sits on the wrong side, he becomes impotent
but here we had steam heat radiators set against the wall
no wonder we were acting neutered

still, Glenn taped a magazine photo
of Vice President Spiro Agnew on the back door
with a cartoon balloon quotation from James Brown
"Get on up! I feel like a sex machine"
issuing from his slimy mouth

I was trained to be a technician

FAMILY VALUES

Mrs. Richardson had been yelling at the kid
the fifth-grade girl who came around to our door
begging money to pay the babysitter

Mrs. Richardson yelled at the grandchild
for three days, and spanked her

then they were crying, in different parts of the building
all the while, their phonograph repeated
“the angels sing, glory to the newborn king”



Mrs. Richardson was pale as death
her face, hollow as a skull; hair, powder gray
her lips were chalky, and the eyes barely moved
she was thin as a broomstick

her son returned, with a cardboard suitcase
and cowboy boots
he wouldn't stay long, if he could help it

OH, BOY, WHAT A MESS

from the heart of the building in the night

“I hate your ass!”

countered by

“do I look like somebody who’d put you away”

and then she just screamed



behind the scenes at the fancy restaurant

a cook got shot

the maitre d’ was in the hospital with food poisoning

and the chief dishwasher overdosed on something

how many knives went missing



with all the Freudian potential

“Daddy, I LOVE you!”

drawing the twisted

“I want you out of here”

oh, boy, what a mess

SINGLE ENCOUNTERS

I picked up the receiver

“is your wife around?” pause
“what number did you want”

pause
“I’m sorry . I must have the wrong number”

she sounded so married
I wished there was a wife to answer



“God-damn idiots, afraid to dirty their hands”
the old woman reiterated
“real work would kill ’em”



“I want to stop smoking
but I’m a very negative person”

so just recast the proposition
if you really want to stop puffing

AFTERNOON
AT OUR THIRD-FLOOR
APARTMENT WINDOW

white body
with black wingtips
on white sky

a gull flitted past
the third-floor apartment window
on an overcast day

the next afternoon
panes sliced sunlight
onto a bubbling aquarium
that opened as butterfly wings
on the opposite wall

still, she was a question mark
who made him a question mark
in return

my Indiana, so faraway then

IF THERE WERE ONLY LIGHTNING

sleet against the glass
could have been corn popping

doing what sometimes occurs
on a stormy night, a cloud layer
trapped and reflected city light
which in turn glowered

snow on surrounding rooftops
emerged nearly as bright as daylight

the distance was rich chocolate

a cluster of fire trucks across the river twinkled
with red flashes that could have been a Christmas card
admitting some small disaster

nothing else was animate
in the stark gray trees against frozen black hillsides
in this vertical petrification

the questions kept returning: "Is she spoiled?
Does she pout or get upset when
she doesn't get what she wants?"

if there were only lightning,
there might be spring, come sunrise

POINTING THOSE TOES

my roommate salvaged a barber chair
left in the trash beside the street . so
the fourth-floor bushmen were migrating

just push the lever and lay back

we would not have owned a recliner
but who knows about the girls down the street



as she told me, “sometimes
I think you’ve changed
but sometimes I don’t”

even so, “You have funny knees”

“I know, I’ve had them all my life”

her sister, an 18-year-old Taurus
with a nose like N.T.’s
and eye-games like K.M.’s,
was a great kisser . so much
for high school, as I knew it



they came from different parts of the metropolis

“sometimes she makes you feel guilty
for just breathing,” one said of her boyfriend’s
brother’s girlfriend . “she has this especially city
thing of having to have every guy in the room in
love with her; have you ever noticed the way she sits
with her toes pointed”
well, to be candid ...

GENERATIONS

from the front to the back
of their working-class home
the additions telescope
toward the eyepiece
where they park

that's how I saw it
as they watered the lawn and tree
greener

HITCHING, IN PERSPECTIVE

five hitchhikers
a freewheeling party

two from Paris passing through Upstate NY
“you have many animals”
“yes, deer, woodchucks, squirrels, chipmunks, foxes”
“foxes?”
“oui, renard.”
and all laughed
likely expecting Indians in the Catskills

the army caravans would smile, flash us peace signs
and ask us for dope

hitching, Kathy got in the car . “hey, you look like a cop”
“well, I am the police chief of Windsor”
a good funny ride, she reported

KARMA LAW OFFICE

she was pregnant
but which of the three
brothers was the father

she was all heartbreak
and sorrow



an acid-tripping Lutheran seminarian
argued “religion is for today”
as he walked in on his roommate
still atop Pia



the long-haired blonde with the deep voice
had already been fucked twice

STARTING OVER DINNER

the scene broke up the night D and V
connected the same time R and M did

all in one apartment . for me
only torment and loss

her haunted poster of the gaunt Gypsy
came off the wall a week later



of course, the living arrangements
would change . “when I first met you,
you were giving off funky vibes
like at a 90-degree angle . all nervous energy”
of course, we remained friends
for a while



there they were
like a bad novel
on Doubleday Street

there, he smiled from the kitchen
“anyone want some cooked garbage”

WEDDING PARTY

“you said when you married
you’d still make love to other guys”

the guest at the house party argued
though now
I initially have difficulty telling whether

he’s talking to the bride or the groom
even as he added
“you’re too young to be getting married”

he spent the night anyway
among those of us encamped in sleeping bags
around that second-floor apartment



we’d had an intellectual tete-a-tete on the corner
and then, upstairs, stoned out and dancing
at the heart of the crowd, I collapsed

it was all ass and thigh from the floor

so she liked flirting with me . Ooooh!
she told me my eyes were a strange, beautiful color

HANA

with empty matchbooks all about
the apartment stank, as it had
since the 17-year-old sister encamped

at the door, a 50-year-old tattooed
sallow visitor with a front tooth missing
inquired if she was home yet

said he'll be back tomorrow

REGARDING ROOMMATES
AND NEIGHBORS

a black kid

as I was carrying out stuff

“you moving?”

“yeah, to a farm.”

“oh . hey, is your sister moving too?”

yeah, to the city

III



NAMOSKEAG

“wheel whine on granite”
– Allen Ginsberg

SITING THE MILL

rhythm of earth
rhythm of water
rhythm of wind

in the penstock
in the flywheel
in the turbine
conjoining

rhythm of fire



home in time to vacuum, dust
and change the sheets
other than that, she was pretty flexible

all together now
there are no riverboats
where canal locks skirted the cascades

REGARDING THE GATE HOUSE
AT BLODGETT'S CANAL AND LOCKS

Thoreau turned upstream on the Merrimack
rather than to the ocean

before heading back



needles and rotting leaves
the floor of the stream steep
water the color of tea

it's a dangerous
river that was home

shores denuded
when tall pines older than the railroad
were felled to make way
for fiber optic cable

they say you log on
in its branching current

owls and herons take him away
above the hydroelectric turbines



landing adventurously
perhaps to shout

I remember where you are
the cuisine isn't that much different
than our second city together

TURNING NORTHEAST

two blocks from my apartment, on the way
toward downtown
the Amoskeag Dam impeded the Merrimack
with a broad placidity I associated
with the upper Susquehanna
below it the roaring wildness of hydroelectric generation
or the snow-melt Yakima and its tributaries
why I didn't just dump half my stuff way back
and start over before trekking through the marketplace
to rediscover how outrageously expensive all these goods
I need at hand can be? at last, though, my belongings
began falling into place where old mills extended
an eerie sense all too similar
to what I had created in one novel
to say nothing of the French-Canadian hilltop
on the west side of the river, neatly occupied
by descendants of Kee-beck, and an air of Kerouac
oh, how I've come through calculator-town
foundry-town, shoemaking-town, college-town
fruit-packing-town, sawmill-town, meatpacking-town
car-assembly-line-town, blast-furnace-town
summer-resort-town, and spice-grinding-town
on the harbor
to this ghost of a textile-town on the river where
the warehouses of my broken ambition overflow
once more, I arrived without a lover or children
for now, though
this life in a sleeping bag and cardboard boxes

fatigues and I long to get back to Owings Mills to pick up
the rest of my furniture and files so I can really move in
with essentials that include a toaster-oven and
the little red light on my answering machine,
items I've come to miss
but having a little cash in my pocket once more
feels wonderfully strange
and having seven book-length works
drafted and revised allows me to show something
more than a concept in my head or scattered notes
the arduous, tricky road to publication can take ages
usually eighteen months once a house accepts a work
and the contract's signed, according
to the *New York Times* Book Review a few months back
In the meantime, my savings have gone
(the miracle is that they lasted as long as they did)
and it's time to get back on my feet, financially

PLACING MY PLACE

the first week rained daily except Sunday
with memories of moss-roofed, garden-slug Seattle

the next week steamed oppressively
with its sweat-dripping Baltimore

the wet evergreen-and-fern mountains
recalled the Cascade Range in the Far West,
and the Poconos and Catskills along this seaboard

the old brick mills lining the river
had already come forth in my invention

the triple-deckers on the French-Canadian hilltop
stood out from Binghamton and the Susquehanna
where they'd been Irish and Italian,
for the most part

to locate this new place in my mind
revisited my past, even the factories
in parking-lot seas
and vast green rectangles of Midwestern proficiency

this, too, was a river city
without barges and tugboat blasts in the night

a city of canal locks
replaced by a railroad roundhouse

a city of endless Lent I'd hoped to escape
in some New World
overflowing with pyromaniac romance
not this American flag fetish
erupting with every breeze

I gazed out the window
at a white cat calmly sitting in drizzle

make of it what you will

ENGAGING IN COMMERCE

sometimes the Merrimack ripples
past brick millworks being renovated
into offices, condos,
restaurants, museums
even a Budget Inn along the river
that once clothed the world

sometimes the Merrimack eddies
with a general friendliness that belies
New England's stoic dryness

sometimes the Merrimack calmly mirrors
a gallery owning a dozen famed paintings
in a good representation across eras and
nationalities

sometimes the Merrimack shrinks into a sequence of rocky
pools

proudly reminding there's no sales or income tax
from Nashua north, a matter
takes some getting used to as you stare
with disbelief at your change, wondering
why you don't need to hand the clerk another bill
to cover the few pennies' tax, though politicians
make up for this in property tolls, so that rents
are nearly twice what you'd paid in Baltimore
which seemed high enough, and the levy
on restaurant food's something else

so much for the high wages when you're finished

sometimes the Merrimack stretches from pale mountains
after a year of frugal isolation and doodling
to behold its basic obligations neglected
its engine lacking routine maintenance
its wildlife, having eaten little, now gaunt
and there hasn't been much of a social life without
money

sometimes the Merrimack smiles
with an underworld cynicism
swept over by churning infatuation and romance

sometimes the Merrimack rises with a vengeance
of costly machinery repairs or Winnepesaukee iceout
or returning salmon to drive like a flickering dream

sometimes the Merrimack cascades over ledges
of renewed correspondence with eccentric elders
whose pages turn phosphorescent snow

sometimes the Merrimack shouts Hooray!
in a ringing chasm by way
of confused welcome or warning

sometimes the Merrimack sleeps
in the oarlocks of shoreline boulders
brushed by falling red maples

sometimes the Merrimack whispers
of the mill culture where dropping out of school
at the end of sixth grade continues
while my books to be read stack up higher

sometimes the Merrimack breathes
into one of those long drifts
where we've casually fallen
so, tell me, Brother, how it's going

sometimes the Merrimack is covered with pine pollen
carried far out to sea

sometimes the Merrimack rumbles or roars
with overdue indignation

AGAINST BRICK-RED LETTERING

met for dinner in Haverhill, Mass.
(pronounced "HAY-vrill")

and you can take only so much lobster
before it was, "Oh, Ma,
Cahn't we have a Big Mac instead?"



only to sense unusual cool, dry
Amoskeag on the Merrimack
airing, especially after thy worries
contrast to fast-moving fireworks
interplay, serves, he said, born
for some intense reading . this morning

of prayer and uninterrupted meditation
holiday means barbecue grill odors
in brick-red letters



from this isolation
in that kind of dreaming for so long . like, yeah, sure

a single bottle from an idolized past
a Merlot, Washington State
my now ex-wife gave me for Christmas

brought back on an airliner

supposed to be finally coming into its prime
if my lack of a proper wine cellar
hadn't destroyed it my saving to celebrate
the big contest my now ex-fiancee
was supposed to enter

now they're forecasting a brutal winter
with the verdict it's about time, let it snow

hoping to catch you in Beantown later this month

ONE COUNTER GIRL
TO THE OTHER

“here’s the guy
you called a moron
the other day”

“that’s *Mormon*,
not moron!”

vital differences
in the distinctives
add up, I trust



came home the other day and found
my apartment door unlocked, apparently from when
the maintenance crew came in to leave a form saying
my rent’s going up next month

so much for living an hour from Boston

at least nobody tried the door in the meantime



in the circling, a return, or maybe
everybody’s coming down with colds or the flu

a repressed desire for children
driving from one town to another

interrupted by an “emergency” message from the operator
even when it wasn’t an emergency

(just informed I have
with two “personal days” that must be taken before
the year ends)
my bank balance says otherwise

LOST YEARS

these damned mill towns exhaust
another mystery in the night
of Indian and Barbados descent
as much a sphinx as medical

for a change, salmon, at the hydroelectric dam

(along with the fish ladders they're installing
two blocks from my home) the only evidence of life
is where beaver has gnashed a foot up the trees



the decade and a half
between the collapse of first
marriage and origins

that second spiritual redirection
and career retrenchment
not harried but

resignation
collisions
oh, all these devils



like the other stuff I was going to do tonight
my intellectual existence, it seemed
if she knows any alternatives

TURNING, INCLINATION

around midnight two months ago, somebody
was trying to barge into all the apartments on the hall

that's a scary sensation) (when it rains, etc.)
returning for a moment to that situation of feeling nobody
else appreciates our particular talents

thee gets the picture
maybe thee would even have
a few bovines rummaging through there



thy brother in Christ keeps smiling
driving the Fox, named "Uncle George"
after the vanity plate

makes for interesting conversation, *viz*
"I see you have Pennsylvania tags"
which just happen to proclaim "Live Free or Die"

so what the heck or Molly Stark sleeps a widow
though a note under the windshield wipers
seeks directions to Meeting

never mind the oatmeal



didn't do much in the way of mountaineering that summer
though did see a moose along the Kancamagus Highway
finally . next day, out to sea, saw three humpbacks,
including a mother and calf we followed more than an hour
– the breeze blowing their fishy mist exhalations across us
–

a week later, a perfect day of ocean sailing with my boss
in his new 30-footer, a new perspective on the courage
of ancestors who traversed on vessels not all that much
bigger
(without Dramamine, they did, too) (I never leave shore
without it)

in my own life, eight years after abiding in desert
I should have seen how the tide was turning

PRIMARILY AMERICAN

during the primary, a long-distance caller
asked what state New Hampshire's in
I nearly replied, "a state of confusion"

look, most conservatives lack an easy
sense of humor . whether that's the cause
or effect is undetermined

in person, the TV evangelist running for president
had a sooty aura, reeking of sin
Heaven help us! All the same, did



along the bank
who'd then be running
there's no telling where you'll be bit

technician
working two jobs and
toward to a degree

just about wrapping up those chores and
getting very hungry
while the beer, of course, is another matter



I remember once seeing that
in more ways than one, everybody up here's
Scots, Irish, or French-Canadian

Borderlands
excepting the pig-eyed
governor, sinisterly smiling

WISHING TO BE SEVENTEEN ONCE AGAIN

the waitress popped up with the usual
“how are you today?”
but rather than trying
to cover up with a phony “fine”
I said instead, “rotten”
and she did a double-take and came back

by the end of the meal, we were both laughing



arguing we needed music that reflected the Machine Age?
discomfort, bottled up until exploding

and when buzzed by a sailplane
I was all skull, brain, thought, memory

tried sunbathing just now: too restless
wishing to be seventeen again

SHOOT, IT'S A KILLER

the underlying reason for these orthodontics?)



“well, if you do find a way
to become seventeen, they can’t
throw you in jail!”)

two calls in a day, one wanting
the bank’s certificate of deposit department

and another an alleged beverage survey
calling long-distance from Philadelphia
for the youngest female in my household
(a likely story, probably an obscene phone call

that got hung up on) . old wounds have reopened

ALWAYS WASH THOSE HANDS

and that's the really frightening thing
the bomb-sniffing dog
on the way to the Laundromat, before



I've had enough this season
to satisfy my sensibilities
though it's still unseasonably warm
and raining

lingering
over
food

this buzzing
finds pollen
wherever
our sun warms



yet to the Appropriate Authorities
Immigration and Naturalization Service, the United States
Government

unrelated by family or livelihood
my next-door neighbor

together on numerous occasions
I further state
intelligent, industrious, socially responsible
capable of

very truly yours,
the prodigal son, without the dissipation

HOW UPSTANDING

on that damn pedestal like a Virgin Mary
she complained all the time she was looking
ten, twenty, thirty years down the road

I might have seen all the mud between her toes
wherever the snake's led
to be moody! manicky!
well, I claimed to be ready) confident
to be active, when she appeared

disconcerted, reaching out, toward a cloud, perchance

the robe wrapped ever so tight around her



to name her nature
crosses the double-yellow strip

delightfully earthy, that Good Mother
gardening and sewing
what airy/dreamy/ethereal temper
I'd venture, cooking, too without losing

the river or the hearth
that confine her



typically one or another
we encounter

“and when you finish washing the windows
you can change the oil and then rake the leaves”

so activity-oriented they’ll forget the dream
or rarely stop to savor attainment

driving a battered car
just tuned up by the neighbor



we stayed up all night conversing
what’s to be done
sensual not just the Great Smooching
encompassing the possible futures

would she, after all
live up to the initial promises
feminine in a way that performs trampoline flips
suggested on the smiling carpet

or the extra step shakes branches so leaves fall across
the just-swept walkway

TRAILS, AS ROOTS

needing to get out, around noon
I trek about Massabesic
with light snow aground

grateful to have trails
in mixed evergreen and deciduous forest
so close to home

a concert of winter birds
in glinting white

A DAY OF SORROW AND THANKSGIVING

nesting branches accommodate

SEASONS OF TURMOIL SEASONS OF CALM

all of the ways I've crossed jagged stone
boulder-field and glacial moraine
even bogs and midnight salt flats
mingle in whatever conflicts and trials
I'll encounter

overhead, the cheeky birds tell me

STICK TO YOUR ROOTS

WITH OR WITHOUT GOLDBLOCKS

the hunting and fishing store's
second-floor display window

overlooking the Auburn Traffic Circle
presented three bruins in some arrested motion

of taxidermist art
Mama Bear, Papa Bear, Little Baby Bear

as I mumbled spiraling past,
amused and annoyed many mornings

when nighttime burglars cleaned the place out
investigators didn't look to children's stories

rather, they sought someone with a truck bed
that wasn't too little and not too big but just right

all the same, in the end, they
collared more juvenile delinquents

ALSO FLOWING TOWARD
THE MERRIMACK

just a warning, of Concord, revolution or dancing
the bridge or the barn, different eras
come, swim across the pond, watching
a commuter train race along the wooded hilltop
a shot, yes, by the river a bronze Minuteman regards now
with its great writers buried in its bosom
maybe you expect a great calm while packing
or overlook the state prison and traffic rotary
pressed together, “a port of entry and departure”
all of these pages, yes, being “bubbles in our wake”



the temple wall folds
to the green river
of migrating salmon

its unbroken factory façade
springs from gravel
not here or there

with the neon lights, if you would
export calico
or denim
from a carp pool

VICTORY PARK

copper green wings
and Old Glory
cap a marble stone pillar
 between locust trees
 between a four-story parking garage
 and the public library
 or old Post Office
 and a cathedral
as pigeons take flight

this stone pillar
the color of mourning dove wings
hoists laurel leaves
toward the midday moon



Parks, Recreation, and Cemetery Commission
says it all, doesn't it

for those who died laughing
or just having fun
or want to be buried
under home plate
though they claim this
as their hardworking city

but I'm not running for Mayor

sensing I'd be buried
in the end

ASWIRL

downstream
meets the ocean
shortly

the way lovers
wash

before or after
rainfall

IV
❖
CALICO
AS IN
COCHECO

*"this part of the planet's
famous for red leaves"
- Allen Ginsberg*

COMING HOME

1 THIS PLACE

dark storm clouds all the way to Dover
downtown, a band of golden light illuminated
only the top story of the mills and the crown
of the Hill Street maples

the waterfall, wild
no rocks showing
under that raging torment

the Piscataqua curves far more to the south than I'd
projected

as a bobcat ran in front of the car, Route 43

on the ice of Lake Massabesic
the sunset magnified itself
the long stretch reaching
toward the setting sun and thin band of trees

following ski tracks around Hamilton House
Vaughn Woods, laughed my head off
after my downhill attempt and fell
Fran tells me afterward she "plows" down
while Liz climbs 'em sideways

when the river's frozen over
straight footprints, presumably deer, straight across the ice

COCHECAW ... COCHECOW other Colonial spellings
while Bloody Point's opposite Hilton Landing

so lush! is this really New England?

our house was owned first by Avis Mills
and then Blanchette or
Burchette ...

Maurice / Doris across the street
remember

Dover the size of Yakima
shovel or plow or walk
the blower after a big snow
and then everybody's out

Durham Landing, the massacre of July 18, 1694
attack led by French soldier
100 residents killed or captured

where ducks go hopping on the water

2

OR THAT

maybe it's just my getting older but I'm

just plain getting more bitter
less likely to cut slack

no nostalgia for IU, this instance
or even the Guild
wary, wary

go anywhere, but there – Ohio

not always flat, exactly
but expansive
forest opened now all horizon running around
woodlots
opened into fields
soy and corn mostly
or housing sprawl

I can work from this

flight
cloud shadows on Allegheny forests
themselves shadow green
surrounding meadows

from the air, sterile streets of uniform houses
(Detroit, for the record)
I'd never want to live there
between a freeway and a mall or railroad
who knows, this is America

Detroit or Dayton wherever
this ugly acreage, the cemetery spanning
the National Highway exposed, open, treeless
big stones but barren

Washington's Birthday dense fog over snow
I'm reading of terroir in wine

while stuck in a place lacking conviction
its dialect once a standard for broadcasters now overrun
by West Virginia and eastern Kentucky
hard-ass white trash
unrooted, unstable
while feeding the zombies
the nurse speaks of a college friend who shot himself to
death
while driving
and another who committed suicide
a half-dozen years back

humid night air reminding me of Warren more than
Baltimore

Gnarly Wood ... make "Oakwood" Laurel Green?

from the air, with my wife and daughters
to follow via Cleveland

if I wanted traffic like this
I could have moved to Manhattan or Brooklyn
or even New Jersey

California's another story

KAYAKING ON THE ISINGLASS RIVER

balance in imbalance – no straight lines
only the spiral, endlessly reconfiguring

all the clear purling, bubbling springs /
steams / in the woods yesterday

still water
full, filled
expectation

the boldness
of a boulder

FROM FOLIAGE AND ICE, SNOW

today I don't want to do anything
very wet forecast 4½ inches of rain
a wild week with some gorgeous days
much color coming on

the early touches of swamp maples or blueberry foliage
now blown into prime color

apple-picking afternoon
cold nights
the prolonged skunk smell

new style orchard, pruned for center growth
and a twelve-foot pipe support

weather swings

the tapestry, Belknap Mill

SPRING
SUMMER
APPLES
WINTER

such incredible foliage at the barn window
over the smoking garden, two yellows
 one pale, the other golden
with intense blue sky and slate branches

a palette of four colors

the remaining foliage now pale yellow or dull tan
a brooding sense of November
afternoons

a blue cloudless sky against mostly yellow foliage
of what remains

how quickly the foliage moves to November bronze
the remnant on the branches

the window / the field dull, tawny or shadowy
with a spray of bronze (leaves

the distance reasserting itself as the dominant range
in the field of vision

November windy, shifting from west to east
(the smoke indication) seen from abed

whirlwind of leaves

late fall, we still have some flowers in bloom
I picked a pink rosebud . green parsley, too
plus clover and dandelion for the rabbit

an old oak at the meetinghouse crashed in a storm
so large, you anticipate a lot of boardfeet, sectioned
except so much of the trunk is hollow

a whole set of other value
animal holes, homes, insects
the foliage and limbs, all the same . in God's eyes?

or my soul, it's not yet winter
or even Christmas
too warm, mostly, and no wood fire
yes, that's it

the sunsets begin coming later by mid-December
before the solstice

first day of winter, I walk in the snow
another storm, a blizzard, moving up the coast
only a few inches here, yet we've had snow cover
most of the month

Christmas Eve freezing rain
the icicles reach down to the first-floor windows
upstairs, they largely block any view

we've come through the deep freeze intact
without frozen pipes
although the hot water faucet in the bedroom vanity
no longer shuts completely

great to have the dishwasher back, too

awaken to fresh snow piled high on the branches
even the bird feeder perches

trim the hedges in the snow

in a breeze a single bronze leaf flickers
a flame over snow

(late spring) the ground clears
and during the dance
snow returns
another twelve inches by noon (April 5)

AFTER TOWN MEETING DAY

1

snow still stands deep along the roadway
through woods—Monadnock woods—
I follow
the unbroken night from Goffstown to New Boston
beside an ice-jammed river
a twisting canyon road
 dark hulks of hills
reminding me of the Yakima Canyon road
those years of marriage ago
far now to Francestown village
a New England contradance
a century and a half extant
me, alone these days
in a fiddletune of my memory

— original, from my journal: 12:III:94

2

snowfall mounded sedan high
against one more discarded marriage
comprehends the night mountains

a dual embankment of boulders and ice
cleaves frosted sagebrush
clasping bowed birches

startling an ice-jammed river
years behind the next Indian or Yankee village
an Irish fiddle jig casts yellow beams into

horse sheds when I approach the town hall
doorway to strut out a partner in a pulsing reel
perhaps this time, on my own warrant

MARCH
CHARM

wet snow piles up
on telephone wires

portions break off
to reveal Morse Code
black dashes and dots

the snow recedes
into stave rows
of cornstalk stubs

a rhythm
along white sentences

asking, so where's this zigzag life
GONE?
where's it headed, anyway

"I can't tell when you're happy
or just being polite," she imparts

our firewood's burning hot
and clean –
the chimney radiates

nothing by the doorstep indicates
what triggers the fern

to unfurl in season
when the boots come off

I've never been an easy riser

SNOW SQUALLS AND MORE

*with magnolia blossoms
and corn flakes*

feathery as kittens
fiddleheads uncoil

three weeks after
tenacious snowfall

flood watch

three magnolia trees in a row
blooming at the Bay Bank in Newton

other tree limbs already bright yellow-green clusters
about to unfurl
forsythia yellow

the rampant flood of spring unleashes
phlox . violet . dandelion

we begin
ENUMERATING AND NAMING

a toddler swing
suspended from tree

still April, but youths at Copley Square

are soaked to the skin from leaping in the sunny fountain
and young lovers stretched on the lawn
roll into each other's arms for open kisses

daffodils and tulips
counter the art of a rock garden
made apparent in front and back yards
of boulder

in a month, we'll go swimming outdoors
before breakfast

SPRINGING

mossworks, lichens
ferns flatten
against mud
under snowpack

this is a time of faith

in two weeks
grass will green

catkins, fall
 from the limbs
willows, embrace
a chlorophyll mist

as we awaken
flakes melt on impact

banks of crocuses
emerge in white grain

LAURELS AND LILACS

with all the rain, the waterfalls are full
I see them now as stairs or stairsteps
rather than a plummet

from the bridge, look down on cormorants

full lunar eclipse RED MOON
by my not-so-north attic window

“they use a lot of big words over there”

forests dripping
into fog

declutter, she says

amid the rhododendron in the tall pine lane
in the burial ground
 we have mountain laurels

white star fists
open into
porcelain teacups

lilacs
open

garden parables

HEART TURNING

1

the next afternoon's commute
some necessary grounding (even for a bird or sunlight

the worst New Hampshire and Massachusetts flooding
since the hurricane of '38
(10 inches of rain, a record

mostly a funk – everybody in meeting

“I'm alive but I'm not living”
a quote from Iran

LOOSE

ENDS

(will the clutter ever end?

2

the drive north, in desperation / desolation
my heart turning toward the green Old Ways

I've always been a night owl

maybe Laurie was the last stop or opportunity
for the glitzy road
Yuppie / Muppie
I seemed to desire

my life now more stripped down, practical, earthy
in Rachel's manner
compost bins and raised beds
this old house / its endless repairs

let's go for a swim

3

sharp light and air
high wispy golden and rose clouds
lots of pale blue
plus the mountains

fresh from the pasture
the herd you keep milking
silage to store for winter
to empty, come spring

in moonlight across my estate

ALWAYS SOMETHING

1

a decrepit mess / pit

put them away

a cat, a dog, an auto executioner
gone, finally, by dawn

desperate houses plunked down in rock face
where will everyone live?

2

Warren Farm's disastrous pick-your-own corn experiment
DeMerritt Hill Farm now owned by New York City refugees
who need to make the mortgage

while I've planted

blueberries, raspberries, asparagus, pussy willow,
 rosa rugosa
the laurel and rhododendron that didn't survive
all mine, all the same, within some inexplicable current

3

gentleness versus meanness
anger (I'm angry all the time)

RITUAL
versus
SURPRISE

Wild Willy's still closed on Sundays

DISCLAIMING AUTHORITY

a noon, Walden Pond
sign says

DO NOT FEED
DUCKS OR GEESE

makes me wonder
how old Henry David
would react



at dusk, Swain Lake
turtles swimming nearby
goose Mama Duck

as if ordering

TAKE A DIVE
OR FLY

there's no time to question
before nipping repeats

an evening thunderstorm brings relief
before I broke my favorite martini glass

DROUGHT

so dry, even the weeds
are wilting

the summer goes by so fast . too fast, even
with severe drought in much of the nation

even the Merrimack runs lower than last year
all the same, rusty rails: no trains in too long, either

low water
ponds and rivers end the summer parched
we need rain . a lot

virga is the meteorological term
for rainfall that evaporates
before touching ground

I remember from watching a desert

AFTER THE EQUINOX

somehow, I let the equinox pass
unnoticed

I hadn't connected
the Common Ground Fair
to a harvest celebration

all the same, it's officially fall
– a wild aster lavender profusion
my reward for not weeding

only later do we realize
chock-full of thistle-seed goldfinches
have departed

observe a bright-red maple
in the morning
the last day of September

IN A SPOTLESS SHROUD

frost again, but this year's foliage cosmetics
stay corked . the twist, of course
is late-season green leaves get knocked
to the floor by snow and rain
before turning color . the same thing
happens prematurely . except for that
they could be cranberries or pumpkins

* * *

you won't find me in a camouflage suit
out hunting squirrels or even deer

still, Mount Washington already
floats all day in a spotless shroud



I just can't tell
if it's a sprig with leaves
 or a strand of twinkle lights
she holds
across her chest

MORE THAN GEESE

am I really so prepared for seasonal change?
for once, I don't feel myself two or three months
behind the calendar . our exterior doors
have been painted . firewood, stacked

we've cleared the gardens and spread compost

more than geese
assume V-formation overhead
in the clear afternoon

GET OUTA MY WAY

yes, I've seen fall foliage before
maybe even this beautiful

it comes back to sermons, then
these English poetics

Ashbery, Bly, Whalen
all courting Heaven
(all counting Heaven, as well)

as if there's greater merit
in reading to the choir

it's not the diamond
but the flash arising in dusk

the ruby or garnet
sapphire or jade

a fly captured in amber
reaching out in flight forever

all of one's previous loves
speak to the present

as if you're essential
to their survival

AUTUMN BY DEGREES

1

in bursts of hundreds, ten thousand leaves
stampede over the crest of Rosemary Lane

this scurry of heedless massing
of rodents in drunken escape streams

their electric discharge belittles
the sunset slipping into darkness

crossing our feet in some derangement
the pelting of sleet

2

some October night
shivery petals shall upend
a row of headstones, too

somehow each New England autumn comes
down to boughs in a graveyard

a common of stone and bone

a wailing wall
for a New Zion

it's not blood you're shedding
but fire

– flames and coals
before the icy

flurry
turns airy in sequence

until only the strokes
remain

PANNING FOR GOLD

all day, limbs
filled with sunrise and sunset
discharge pages
with or without rain



how many blades from a single tree
does a row of bags at curbside arrest

how many in the two bins beside my barn
wither into black debris my wife treasures



repeating brief sunset clouds
discharge blood or flames until

one night droplets fall
through empty branches

when our five months of winter begin

AFTER BLOOD DRAPES THE TREES

the remaining leaves are mostly bronze
save a handful of yellowing old leather
with brief bursts, the regal mourning
of a woeful loon scatters crows and blue jays

reeds that were green last week are now
brown, except for a band at the waterline
the woods resemble a wet grocery bag

soon, between the end of hunting season
and beginning of snow pack, I will gather
all scab, snakeskin, and wasp wattle paper
discarded before a woman wears red

BANDS OF CLEARING

a fastidious old cat walks a gray fence rail
above a winter yard not yet glazed over

an overcast spring day ends in a blazing
bonfire atop a penumbral mountain

fish-pattern blue bedding atop a raft
ripples a green pond in summer

folded spectacles ride an open Bible
in the orange afternoon light of autumn

MOTHER AND DAUGHTER
ON THANKSGIVING MORNING
INTO DUSK

back-to-back
aprons
in the kitchen

steam in the air

a sharp knife
punctuating
their chatter



after harvesting Brussels sprouts
from our garden
and then



blue sky, thin fog especially
over ice-covered lakes
shimmering, veiled air
a Luminist sunset

New England Revival

in their awareness

COCHECO FALLS MILLWORKS

above the mill
beavers and otters

in the mill
levers and shuttles

around the mill
rows of stores and then houses

over the mill
a clock tower and ram weathervane

below the mill
freshwater curling into tide

ABOUT THE POET



In his leaps across America and times of settling near downtown, Jnana Hodson has found commonalities despite the size of the city.

These poems arise in those experiences.

ALSO BY JNANA HODSON

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Hometown News

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Peel (as in apple)

St. Helens in the Mix

Kokopelli's Hornpipe

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Poetry:

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In a Heartbeat

Johnny Badge

Harbor of Grace

Waves Rolling Too

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