

The Book With The Yellow Cover

John Moncure Wetterau

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for w.cat

I had a book of Chinese and Japanese poems that I gave to a friend on the west coast. It was a very small book with a yellow cover, stapled together. No adornments. Just the poems, alive after hundreds of years.
J.M.W.

The Japanese Mason

Without haste, gathering
scrape of the trowel,
slap of cement,
reaching for a block,
setting and tapping it level,
turning with the wheelbarrow,
graceful, sweating,
freed
of every moment.

Kauai

Sweet Hawaii

Even if somebody did steal
my battery, generator, oil cap,
visegrips last night,
I passed the test to be a taxi driver,
and even if I don't have the money
to buy a _Charley's Taxi_ shirt,
congratulations to me.
I'll figure something out.
I'll have coffee in _Everybody's Bake Shop; _
I'll write Varve and Finn,
tell them I love them,
tell them sweet Hawaii
going to be our new home.

Honolulu

Bus Stop

14, eyes of a deer
in bamboo.

16, heavier, going to school
without her books.

King Street
Honolulu

For Rob

Handsome Rob.
Half the women hate you;
the other half
will give you anything.
Deep in Nam:
your buddy shot, tracheotomy.
"He died happy," you told me,
"he believed I was going to
save him."
Perhaps he knew
he would lie in your arms
forever.

Too Big

Listening to Schubert
while Great-Aunt Hannah

embroiders on the wall,
and darkness closes--
what have we come to?
We've gone wrong,
too big
to find our way by song,
light
falling on a face
and handkerchief,
illumination
in the manner
of Rembrandt.

Peter's Answer

Little Blue Heron, young, still white,
by the north causeway bridge--
stick legs, too thin
for the swelling body,
the visual weight of feathers,
stepping slowly in shallow water,
long toes trailing limply, then
extending, three splayed forward,
one back. Brilliant neck
curving, poised. Dagger beak
the same gray as legs and toes.
Why is nature beautiful?
The lust for pattern, Peter said.
The heron's head rose and twisted,
circular eye, light brown, orange
rimmed, ancient intelligence
asking a different question.
I was unmoving, not dangerous.
The heron turned to hunt,
brush, a cloud above the river.

New Smyrna Beach,
Florida

Wally's Poem

Dolphins surge up and under.
Mozart's soprano
stitches the heart together.
Washes for a watercolor.

An ant crosses my foot.
Wallace Klitgaard;
Epitome of Splendor--
ants, sun, one's lot.
He typed it himself,
showed it to me on the bus
38 years ago.
He was grinning,

the glad no age
that we become, bent
to making clumsy prayer.

Morning, Maine Honolulu

Early mist breaking
on low tide, mud smell.
Ducks, the small birds,
the rooster down the road
begin to sing the air,
the light, the whole
enormous chance

grateful as the old people
reclaiming Pauahi Street,
seeing each other in doorways
after the night.

I Would

In 1948
I walked all the way
to 14th Street
to buy a bow and arrow.
It was 30 cents; I had 29.

The woman sold it to me anyway
and I was free and happy
on Sixth Avenue
as any Indian.

If I could find her tonight,
I would keep death far away.

For Anita Bartlett,
Too Late

Why cannot blue be enough?
Light in the sky, dark in the sea,
the shades between.
The green of fields,
red clover, buttercups.
Bridal white of apple blossoms,
burial earth, hawk's feather, snakeskin.
Monarchs, Anita,
feeding on purple aster,
fluttering up,
sun glowing orange, brown, bronze
through black edged wings, twenty
joining twenty joining a hundred,
down, up, over, from

color to color
to Mexico.

Clouds booming over
the washed woods,
blue sun, Finn eats
chop suey from a pot
while I shave.
Six months to dismantle
the dead rooms of a marriage,
down to a borrowed tent,
patches of snow, and invisibly,
all around us, sap rising
in its own sweet time.

April, Maine

Alexis

Icons, coal mines, Ten Mile Creek,
the Monongahela,
a long way to this house
by the Kennebec,
sitting erect,
brushing your hair,
fire and peace in your cheeks,
preparing for the further
steppes of feeling.

Back In Town

Billy Frailly's got a new shirt,
shaved and walking down the road
ready for anything.
When I was in fifth grade
Billy powered his bike up Church Hill
(black Stetson, yellow kerchief).
I helped him shovel out Mrs. Cowell's
parking place. He did most of the work,
but he split the money fifty-fifty.
He's an outcast now;
no frontier he can reach.
But he's not crying, and we know
there is no virtue, only consequence
and the sometimes music
of a new shirt.

Woodstock

Bluejay Feather

Bluejay feather
in the grass.
Something was here
once,
A flash of color,
a harsh cry,
and it was gone.
The feather remains:
tough, precise,
useful

For Sylvester
On his 40th

Talking To Myself

Early dark blue, one jet trail
arching past Venus,
snow coming tomorrow.
My mother,
unable to move.
Hit it down the road, seven hours,
stand by her bed,
acknowledge the bond of blood,
the sensitivity
she could never handle,
that I have ridden to beauty
beyond all expectation.

Wilson Street

Low gray sky.
Cold. Still.
Christmas tree upside down,
tinsel on dirty snow.
A yellow balloon
bounces slowly
across Wilson Street.
A black cat
glides three steps up,
turns in a doorway.

Portland

On Looking At A Mediocre Painting

Thin paint. No passion.
We would agree, I know,
although we met only once--
some things are in the blood.
Mustard, orange, navy blue
around a fake significance.

The loss of Ireland, the 19th century,
what were you to do?

Fuck the beautiful, the gifted
(my mother before she went crazy);
leave the clanging cockroach cold
behind (Bobby);
find the best (Pollock, Kline,
Noguchi, Nakian),
live uptown (Kevin);
die finally.

Well, ashes to ashes then.

But the three of us--your sons,
scattered to separate lives--
one way or another
we carry you on,
this eye,
this fist within.

Sean

Every Moment

Sun warms
one side of the alley.
A young woman smiles at me,
surprised by her new beauty.
Sex, tenderness, cobblestones.
Once I was a Venetian
with my last gold coin.
Once I broke my vows
and left the Order.
Arms around her legs,
the blue milk crate
on which she sits, the
kitchen door propped open
with a mop--every moment
like this.

Portland

For Tamey

Drove over the bridge today,
saw the water far below
and once again imagined
your last jump--
desperation, pain, relief,
a twist of gallantry
across your face,
your final bow to the truth
you always told me to tell.
You sure as hell saved my life.
Tamey, I could never say goodbye.
I miss you. I wish
you could have played with Finnegan.

Rough cloth,
the gathering of giant ferns
woven together, supple, bending,
energy moving up your spine,
mind dancing in the night,
Palm Tree Exercise.

Kailua

The Early Ones

Black night turns dark blue,
a wedge of lighter blue,
dim gray.
Outposts on the beach
become aware of each other:
narrow stones
aligned to the east,
grouped around a driftwood stick
sixteen inches high.
In an hour--
sheltered by grass, overhanging
edge of the continent--
they will cast long thin shadows;
they will be first,
brave against the day.

For an anonymous sculptor,
Crescent Beach, Maine

Warm Sake

Warm sake, sashimi maguro,
blood red slices on a wooden block,
light green chicory, pickled ginger.
Outside: harbor ice rocking in the tide,
translucent, thin dark edges
swirling in black water.

Shiki
Portland

Leaving Finn

Las Cruces at dusk,
necklace on the desert.
Back in Tucson, Finn
recovering from surgery,
sweat on his nose,
trying to smile, whispering,
"Have a good trip, Dad."

Late Breakfast

Red nails,
gold cigarette,
young pampered mouth,
hair drawn back,
a sense of having reached
her limits,
a perfect twenty-two.
There was a moment
when she chose all this.

I must begin again,
without shame.

Wailana Coffee Shop
Honolulu

Spring Dream of SueSue

Perfectly quiet
a trout lets me hold him.

You surface laughing,
dark hair,
blue shirt unbuttoned.

March

Lament For Paul

Scratching your beard, excited,
"Fantastic," you said about
the Beatles' new record.
The next night you played
your own shy songs, surprising us.
You were crushed beneath your car,
but your songs, Paul, I heard them.
We all heard them.

Woodstock

For Coyote

I think of you drinking, dancing,
unable to sleep, reading until first light,
a blanket drawn around your shoulders,
afternoons, working your wheel until
the time to mingle with true hearts,
raise glasses, hug, laugh,
help as you can.
We are all dying, slower or faster,
but it hurts to watch.
And out of the numb exuberant wreckage of your days
come these raku pots--
graceful open shapes, lines freely
scratched into the clay, deep turquoise,
copper glazes, extravagant, surprised,
too beautiful for tears.

After Months

Shifting unstable air,
patches of light,
raindrops standing on
the candy red gas tank
of a Kawasaki 750.
Coming down harder,
bouncing off the seat,
dripping from the tips
of black rubber handgrips,
tach speedometer needles
resting on their zero pegs,
twin mirrors focused back.

October,
Maine

Fortune Cookie

Almond lemon gritty on the tongue,
--_TIMES LONG AGO WILL PRESENT
A SPECIAL TREASURE TO YOU_--
A moment whole again?
To see more clearly, Trudi, 17,
washing in the Woodland Valley
stream. Tamey,
giving me another nickel
to play pinball.
Barbara's smile, wanting a child.
My grandfather's arm, levering
a floor board, skin hanging
from his biceps cord,
holding while I nailed.
So many treasures I can't quite see.

Wrecking Ball, Commercial Street

Salmon streaks of pulverized brick,
white pigment, tar, nicked and scarred
in every direction, patina of blows
on a mute obdurate interior.
Six weeks I carried it until
the beautiful surface cast off,
weightless. The iron opened from
the inside out and like a new bell
began to sing.

For Elena

The Polynesian Navigator

Swells current,
sky rimmed,
shell on a stick chart
promise of land,
alone and
singing.

Kahuna's Way

Twisting through high cane,
silver green, tossing in the trade winds,
toward the mountain wall

dark green jagged, deep shadows
where a warrior prayed,
ancient silence, Kahuna's way,
beyond King Sugar
and the city that is coming.

Hulemalu Road
Kauai

41, In The Honolulu Public Library

Like beautiful fish
moving slowly through coral,
they eddy through the library,
dark hair, bright dark eyes,
the wisdom of their mothers
lying gravely on their faces;
ready to love, to stay,
they flick away
on currents deep and proper.

For Catherine, someday
in a quiet hour, wondering
what is possible

When I hold your mother
while she holds me,
all that was, is;
the future comes
moment to moment,
complete.
For this, salmon swim
their river, elephants
remember, wild geese
call out at dusk.
I fought and risked,
trusted and betrayed.
How can you find another
before you find yourself,
traveling the heart's way,
alone, unsure, knowing only
that you must?

Rage's Place

Put your forehead
on the ground and
pound your fists.
Curl on your side,
close your eyes,

scream silently.
You will not be
answered. No.
But your cries--
your cries will be
clothes and flowers,
honor
for the journey.

for David and Louisa

The Purkinje Shift

All day, snow,
now turning gray,
trees darker
in the fading light,
violet peace
before the night,
slowly drifting
toward the solstice.

December

Bee Fantasy

Reaching, high on
the shoulders
of thinner air,
rising with the Queen,
the view! the view! mating
falling and falling
back to meadow,
the warm dark,
first light,
dancing out the maps.

The American Way

F18's screaming down
wing tip to wing tip,
brave, lethal, steady nerve.
Johnny Copeland's lead guitar
ripping through the air,
taking us faster, inverting, 6 G's,
dark forehead, sweat, hot and loose.
Face at the bar, arched eyebrows,

black hair back, wide mouth,
brooding, sensual, slightly battered.
Fighters, blues man, beauty,
power at the edge,
the American way.

Maine

The Sculptor's Trade

On white stands:
azure/turquoise branches,
flow and knuckle taken
by poured bronze--
bent, welded, gripped,
held, colored--
artifacts, works in progress,
ship's ribs, basketry,
child's play.
Hands dream as they fashion,
remember what they feel
(her thin shoulder,
a 9/16 inch wrench).
Let go. Follow
the sculptor's trade.
Find and shape
what is not known
until it's made.

For John von Bergen

Elegy For Simenon

Fresh air, faintly salty,
smell of bark and fallen apples,
small pond, lily pads,
dark water. White blossoms
tinged with ruby, floating,
heavy with light.
You enter one, still searching.
Slowly,
petals fold around you.

Deer Isle, Maine

Unfinished

Your hands
for clothes.
Your legs,

home.
We

For w.cat

Married twice,
once in a church,
once in City Hall,
each good in its way.
Now I choose the shade
of a live oak tree, veils
of Spanish moss,
a hundred cicadas
singing in the branches.
You are in the north,
but still we join
beneath this green
and raucous dome
Mated. Complete.
Mindful
of those
alone.

New Smyrna Beach,
Florida

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