

Late February on Honey Creek

Walking along the sinuous, frozen curves of Honey Creek, passing ancient cottonwoods that have bent right over, dipping their once majestic crowns into the river, creating elegant homes for the air and light, the water and stones. Observing groups of mallards who have congregated where the living flow of the river has emerged from below to melt patches of the ice and delight the ducks who dip themselves in again and again and then rise up and flutter on their haunches, again and again dipping, rising, fluttering...reveling in this early sign of spring.

What is cold to this creature but the calling to settle inwardly in their inner fire, to gather together knowingly in the unified wisdom of the flock. And what is this moment but a loosening of this primal unity, a joyous movement outward, a celebration with a dip and flutter ritual of the slowly growing warmth of the air, of the light, and of Honey Creek.

Where does a river end and a mallard duck begin? Where does a mallard duck end and an old dead cottonwood begin? Where does an old dead cottonwood end and the air and light begin to take over, drawing upward all this life into one great chalice of offering to the clouds and sky, to the sun and moon who dip and flutter in this river of life that is rising up from the depths of the frozen, sensuous earth.

Yes, something is rising up from deep below, a river of renewed life and what is a sentient being to do but to dip oneself in this river, to let its wondrous forces flow across one's back and then rise up spreading one's feathers signing "Alleluia...I can taste the delicious spring that is to come and it fills me with purest life! Alleluia...I will pass the life upward upon the ladder of creation to the heights, yea right up to the thrones of the gods, the divine winged ones, keepers of the holy flame of spring!"

Mother Earth

early spring evening
the sky a canvas for distant showers
of crimson
falling softly
turning quietly
to rose orange
forming a corridor
from this broken earth
to that embracing temple
of lighter and lighter
unfolding
blue
blue that will not forget
the tasks
we agreed to
before birth

this earth has bled so deep
everywhere I step
my footprints open rivulets of sorrow
in her
quiet brooding sorrow
that smiles softly when I come near
but I know deep down
what she is feeling
what she is suffering

how it goes with her
to be so unseen
so unknown
yet so full of riches
to bear such fullness
which only the awakened heart can receive

all creatures crease her liquid lap
like the ducks that send stars and planets
rippling in their passage across the pond
so her blessed substance is raised up
or desecrated by my passage
is twisted or made beautiful
by my thoughts and feelings
it's not that she judges
it's not that she has set expectations
it just that her very breath
is drawn from the unfolding
of our highest potential
and our highest potential
is her very breath

And you, sorrowing woman, have you buried your teenage son who was sitting in the back seat of the stolen car when the driver lost control? My house is there, it stands nearby, invisible no more. My trees, my yard, my fence posts, they witnessed your son's death, my neighbors heard it all and I saw the aftermath: the police tape, the ambulances, the officers, the media, the police chief wringing his hands over another senseless death. Oh how in the face of tragedy you finally feel yourself a neighbor, a citizen, a priest...you finally rise out of your selfish enclosures

and take the hand of your black neighbor, a woman you do not know but are suddenly united with in grief...suddenly our hearts open to the harsh realities around us, realities that bring us to our knees, that must eventually bring all people to their knees...

blessings

we count our blessings

only when they leap

from our waters

like trained dolphin

through a ring

deep below

sounding

whale-like

through the

dark and silent

depths

is the love

of our fathers

You Builders!

To Walt Whitman

You builders working next door to my office, you crane operators and cement pourers, you engineers and electricians, I feel you there raising up a great tower from nothing and I am in you, I am in all your work, I am a part of your great project. And you across the river burying the phone lines and you mothers and fathers dropping your children off for dance lessons down below, I feel you all, I feel your pulse, for we are all together building, creating, shaping a civilization, a landscape, an atmosphere. We are bound in myriad seen and unseen ways, indeed, is it not each other we are building, creating, changing, for good or ill?

And you governor and you murderer and you paramedic, with you I am also bound up, I am a part of your laws and your depravity and your heroism, I have contributed to it all, I am in it all, the life taker and the life saver, the rights giver and the rights taker. Your thoughts and feelings, your creations, corruptions and destructions are as much a part of me as my body, are as much a part of my world, my landscape, as the air I breathe, as the ground I walk upon. I swim in the culture and it pours over me like a flood, like a torrent, at times glorious in its earnest ambitions and at times ominous and baleful, ugly and fearsome, changing each day like the weather.

And somewhere in this sea of life I see you my friend, in a small room whose walls you have painted rose. I see the ebony chair you have placed against the rose wall and there, perfectly invisible to the whole world, I see you close your eyes and raise your mind in purest devotion, in purest thought, in purest humility. And no one knows you are there but you have changed it all with your stillness, with your intent the sea of civilization storming around you has been

brought to naught, its greatness and its crazed eyes and awful gaping mouth—in you it has been tamed, in you it has found its peace, its fulfillment.

November

the age of falling
leaves is past
the age when the drama
and the splendor
of brazen yellow
and ardent red
and the suddenness
of brown
nakedness
against
the azure sky
and the wind-swept cries
of the last stragglers
fighting their ashen destiny
within the tomb
of earth
filled
your soul
but the limbs and the branches
they have outlived this burning
outlasted the conflagration
and so radiate now
in the peace filled
cold
a courageous
crystalline strength

a silent power
of victory
over
death

Prophecy of the Mounds

Bury our ashes at the foot of the tree
like good medicine
for the illness that will come
and for the health that will follow
bury our ashes at the foot of the tree

We will forget and be forgotten
but in the bones we shall remember
and be remembered
in the bones of another people
we shall remember and be remembered

Our spirits will rise again
like the eagle from this sacred ground
and the medicine of the mounds will quicken
and the medicine of the mounds will quicken and flow
and the medicine shall make whole
the illness that comes
and the health that will follow

Dancing with the White Buffalo

John, I see you happy now
I see you honored by your tribe
at home within your clan
the warriors gather to clasp you, the mothers weep in gratitude

and I see you dancing John
I see you dancing with the White Buffalo
and I see her bless you, Pte San Win, the Sophia woman
she welcomes and blesses you
and she rolls you on the sacred ground and smokes you in her sacred pipe

oh breath deep inside her John
breath deep in her windy temple of truth
so surrounded are you by her goodness
so penetrated are you by her beauty
oh dear brother I can hardly see you
she is so surrounding so penetrating you now
dissolving your pain in her old ways, her honored rhythms, her great truths

oh brother how blessed are you
to be her smoke
to be her sacred tobacco
to be her sacred lover
to rise from her pipe into the great spirit's hoop
into the great spirit's sky
into the great spirit's village of stars
where they are singing:
welcome welcome welcome
welcome you great one who has poured out his soul upon the imprisoned earth!

My grandfather's Scythe

1

my grandfather swings

his high and gentle

scythe

his grain washed

blade

through the rolling fields

of his hopes and fears

cleansed by the wind

washed

his dramas of love

pure by the decades

washed

and buried like fateful treasure

in the motion of the sun

his charged blood

circulates in the sloping veins of the land

his memories

alive in the generations

washed

his sweat, his countenance

planted and tilled

harvested and reaped

washed

in the deep lake of the heart's fire

by the high and gentle

swinging of his scythe

2

constellations shine along the handle of
my grandfather's scythe
shine along the well-worn wood
and iron blade
the scythe
that is broken now...
broken by the earth
in the warm crease of the land
in the hard-fought harvest of his soul
broken and purified by the salt and iron
of his blessed soul
his toilsome life
raised up now
carried up like grain
to the threshing barn
with the rest of god's children
shining like the stars in heaven
shimmering like the northern lights
above the bluffs of Preston

Cloud Healing

Learn to appreciate the shrouded glory, the veiled abundance, the tones that do not shout but rather draw us inward with their whispering, subtle music, their earnest, evanescent countenance. Oh how they free me, the mists, the clouds, the overcasts, the swelling thunderheads. For who can bear so much light, who can bear it without a body and soul to tone it down, without a forest of clouds to reflect it back upon itself, without a bank of fog to absorb it and let it flow back gently in the course of a day or a year. Oh you glaciers of cloud substance, oh you weaving continents of grey, oh you tender skies of swaddling clothes embracing the whole earth, embracing my soul, helping me to release my burdens of sadness into the soft brown earth, again and again my burdens of rage and grief into the lap of the earth. Oh brother clouds, how you free me from too much weight, how you heal me from too much light. Surely you see how brain dazzled I am, surely you feel how body frazzled I am. Surely you have the medicine to set me free: water drawn into the atmosphere and held there in the moonlit chalice of the sky...air drawn into that water like a sunlit seed which grows into fields of mobile cloud substance...and the light passing through that becomes on the other side transmuted into sweetest gold, tenderest crimson, gentlest orange. Surely there would be no colors without you brother grey and without your somber voice we would never hear the twilight speech of the earth's golden mantle, the earth's radiant mantle of love... Oh grant me the strength to bear your cumulus light into my soul ever deeper, past the nothingness, past the despair, past the fear of utter annihilation into my deepest wounds...your balm, let it flow, let it flow there, your healing, let it glow, let it glow there....evermore.