O LO feckless love mike finley

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Like I Could Give A Shit

What does that even mean?

You know it's about the commitment people are willing to make about a thing.

Giving a shit about justice, or about some issue in the news,

or some demand they feel you are making.

And they are saying something negative.

They do not care.

They do not choose to become involved.

Your appeals to their sympathy have fallen on deaf ears.

Like, they could give a shit.

Like, that is the lowest possible standard of sympathy.

They withhold everything from you, right down to their willingness

To defecate on your behalf.

If they saw you hanging on a cross, writhing in pain,

Their concern for you would not rise to the extremely low level of pooping

In our presence.

That's a hell of a statement. And yet,

This is something people say all the time.

Maybe we are all together in this game,

but this remark suggests we reserve the right,

an ancient standard of judgment,

that your life, your issues, your concerns,

your persuasiveness

are a matter of such indifference

that people cannot be moved to even drop a load in reference to you. You have to admit, that's pretty bad.

For Sale

(card pinned to the Nungalvik Hotel corkboard)

Woman's diamond ring \$400, firm Fits up to size 10 Never worn Must see to appreciate

Uncheated

There is a single day in Minnesota in April when everything happens at once the grass, the flowers, the leaves, the sky and if you are not out that day or if you are not paying attention to what is happening around you you will feel cheated by the world you will feel that winter made the handoff to spring and you were somewhere else and you will wonder what was the good of all that longing and how did the air turn kind and sweet again when you were about your business

Opportunity

Logically the caterpillar would chew the leaf forever But then the tumbler clicks inside and worm begins spinning its tomb How afraid we would be to seal ourselves in like that Until all light is gone And there is no leaf to eat And all movement ceases And we tremble in the dark

La Femme

The woman was hanged onstage and the lifting sprained her back and since the opera things have been difficult. When she is in spasm, I knead out The knots and tangles from her spine. When I massage her I work from her neck to her soles. She whimpers like a doe, if does whimper – I don't know. She is the general directing the attack indicating with a nod what happens next and how. She is the wounded lioness clambering up a hill And despite the pain She will make it to the top We have a deal That when we say farewell and she beams at me as now, on the railway landing She will be the femme My lion-woman And I am her man for the duration.

The Wonder Was

She peered into the mirror And wondered what the world saw That she could not It could size her up immediately As unworthy of investment. Efficient for them but perplexing for her. Was it a look of stupidity, Or was there a curse one could read In the turbine of the eye, A signal no grass would grow on this dirt, In a moment they saw what she could not see If she stood on tiptoe a hundred thousand years.

Summation

I know that you loved me though the rails clacked and the TV raged because I was no good in the way you would want good done because I was the one Particularly, or perhaps it was the light of late afternoon that rolled and stretched like a davenport dream – my hand on your hipbone, like a witness taking an oath

Old Girlfriends

I'm not supposed to but I think of them. Not the way they are now, wise and complicated, but the daffy way it was joyful to please me when we were young and things were possible. What a blessing their kindness was, the future stretching out like airplane glue. Me and them alive in the big house together, Grateful to be able to get at one another. I want to pick each one up in turn and spin her And look into her eyes and say thank you for thinking I was someone to dally with, that our hours were somehow well-spent. This one thought she saw something in the man. This one said, He's not going to hurt me, or He's not the one but he'll do for now, moments gleaming like a badge upon my heart.

Stubbornness

is a kind of beauty in some, when there is fire in the face that would burn up the world which is the price it pays for having you in it and it is unreasonable and it is doomed still you cannot look away from the power of that longing, kicking and willful like a young colt in spring

Springtime

When the floodwater rises it drapes the twigs and stems with the leaves and gunk stirred up. Then when it recedes the muck clings to the branches in the shape of the water's drift. The bushes seem populated with puppets and dolls with papier-machē blouses and bunched up clothes. And when the breeze comes through it lifts up their skirts and they dance.

The Rapture

Walking with Rachel, We detect a fragrance So sweet and so intense Like honey, lilac and swirled violets We look at one another With a look of deepest longing Until we step into a clearing And see the turquoise plastic Port O Potty.

Instructions for Falling

We have to let go in order to fall And the steady tumble that carries us down Surrender all order, unclench every hand Until we are sleeping, and begin again

Happiness

When someone is next to the person she loves, the water in her cells laps at its thousands of beaches, pebbles and rock and sharp discs of light breathe from the pores of her cheeks. A whirlpool springs from a cloud to the west, by an island egg in a happy sea. A sparrow hawk flies off toward a bank of violet mountains. It lights on a limb of a tall green tree, the stars alight in her branches.

The Brood

I don't want to share anything with you, I want to be alone late at night, I want to drink until I'm dry, I want to make secret journeys down the dank streets where married men don't venture, I want rooms of clinking crystal and appreciative smiles, jokes tumbling from my lips like silvery grunions slapping in moonlight. I don't want to help carry groceries in from the car, groceries I will never eat, go for endless walks that take us nowhere, rub your back when mine is killing me, I want sleep forever under sparkling snows and dream of ballgames and girlfriends and the years of good times before this dagger snaked its way into my breast, I am afraid of waters and doctors and the look on your face when you are in trouble. I want to undo everything, erase my assent, irradiate my sperm, run off to a nation that is beaches only, that welcomes heels and celebrates desertion and whose official flower is the beget-me-not. And yet, to be father

of this melon thing in you with all its sweet red stuff, and seeds and rind, is a grand endeavor, and I see plainly in your eyes that this is your wish and because I am your slave by heart I accept the full penalty, let them come, let them swarm on me like ticks, I will bounce them and change them and wipe them clean as if they were my own and all the while knowing where once there was life is now only children, and the windblown fluff that was once my hide is all that remains of a boy who loved

to play.

Dead Cat for Ray

I entered a barn on an abandoned farm in the town of Kinbrae where I lived. In a manger on a bed of old straw I found a cat, very dead, very thin, no fur, its leather skin stretched taut around it. Its back was arched in a defensive posture, its face pulled wide in a final hiss, and in its mummified condition you could distinguish each vertebra and tooth. I believe it had a heart attack and died defending itself, perhaps against a German shepherd or raccoon. The attacker slunk away, leaving the cat a mummy of life and death When my friend Ray came to visit the farm I took him for a tour of things I had seen – the grave of Suicide Minnie, the sandpaper leaf of the lamb's-ear plant, finally to the manger in the Sveringen barn, and we stared at the cat like reverent bad boys then walked home. That night we lay down in the township road and watched the aurora shift and split in the northern sky. Ray was from Cambridge, a city guy, gay, into est, a sculptor, painter, performance artist. He flew back home the following day, and I did not hear from him for two years, when he invited me to read a poem at an exhibit of his. The art was stupendous, torsos in charcoal, roughcut wood, hairy ropes, chains.

Ray couldn't draw his way out of a bag, but he had something else, a ferocious vigor that moved me.

At the heart of the installation he had suspended on an invisible line the dead cat from Sveringen's barn, and it turned slowly in the warm air of the gallery, whiskers stiff, eyes black, teeth bared to the ear. It was like, the height of bad taste to exhibit a dead creature as art, and yet everyone who saw was overwhelmed at the brave agony of the cat.

In a gallery that had seen plenty of bad ideas and wrongheaded impulses

here was life and death hanging in a haze,

it was more than noteworthy, it was serious.

A part of me resented that Ray had stolen back in the night and taken my holy treasure from me,

the other part gratified he thought it so powerful

that he packed the dead animal in his dufflebag and drove from Minnesota to Massachusetts with it in the back seat. And astonished to see it now, in its current setting, twisting in the light.

Afterward I lost track of Ray. We had been friends since college, him always private, a dog-eared copy

of The Drunken Boat by his bed.

His scoliosis was so bad he spent a summer

walking through Europe with a backpack full of rocks to straighten himself up.

Once I went to his room to listen to Highway 61 Revisited and came upon his diary and read a few pages,

and I felt so ashamed of myself I started a diary of my own, in which I talked about looking at his diary.

In January I quit college and itched to Boston and spent a month in an apartment 20 inches from the El tunnel.

Every 20 minutes the train passed near,

but my friends and I were so high we thought it was charming

when the milk vibrated in the refrigerator.

I took him to the Tea Party and the Velvet Underground was playing

and we lay on our backs in a psilocybin haze and watched the ballroom dissolve.

Back at college Ray began joking that he was Jesus, and then as time passed, it wasn't so much of a joke anymore.

Without a smile he turned in a 36-page religion paper titled simply "Jesus," and every page was blank.

The professor had him sent home to get better.

Ray, I didn't know you were gay, and I wasn't your type, and it never mattered.

You worked for three years teaching painting at Walpole Penitentiary,

to murderers and rapists and killers.

On the last day you told them that you were gay because you wanted them to know you, and that a person could be OK and still be a faggot, but you didn't want them

to feel obliged to kill you in the process.

I didn't worry about the inmates so much as AIDS.

When people started to die you assured me you didn't do

the things that put a body at risk, but I worried anyway.

You visited twice after the cat exhibit,

and Rachel and I had had two kids, and our lives

took a sharp turn away from one another.

For a while you were in Cleveland, teaching at the museum.

Then Malaysia, doing I don't know what –

and that was where I lost you.

I called your parents, I called your friends,

no one would tell me where you were or what became of you.

I needed to understand because we were friends.

You once gave me a wonderful compliment,

you called me a human being

and that was so meaningful coming from you,

for whom human meant noble and feeling and alive and crazy

was not so bad, it was a sign you were paying attention to things.

I admired you so, and if I had the great spotlight of the world to direct

you would be turning in it now

like that dead cat in the gallery, abused in life and abused beyond it, ugly and craggy and ridiculous and raw

but fully engaged, all muscle and mind alert

to life and life's unlikely opportunities

and the aurora borealis would shift and slide

and light up our faces like 1977,

and the light show on the Velvets in 1968,

and that trip to Rockport in '73 when we lay in the back of the pickup truck watching the phone lines loop overhead,

when we were young and not yet treed or backed into impossible corners, and the world that I saw, Ray, the beautiful courage in the crowclaws of your grin and the manic dazzle of your eyes, radiant artist and friend of my youth, I would have them know.

Children

When we are little it is hard to believe we will turn into our parents. Grown-ups are so ugly and so tired with orange pads on the bottoms of their feet, the pores of their faces cry out surrender, and the hair, the hair is everywhere, But once we are grown we have only to look at a child to glimpse what they will become. The face fills out, the limbs acquire bulk. The boy enters a door and exits his father like a breed of ordinary dog. Or the boy roars into his fruition the malification of his mother, her beauty beaten into him like bronze and ramping out again like laughter to the world.

Revolving Door

Seeing the old man Step tentatively Into the glass cylinder, The girl slowed down, The two tiptoed around One another, palms high. He smiled at his partner, And she, who had never before Danced the minuet, stepping Out with the old, stepping In with the new, did likewise.

Accident

This coffee cup broken on the floor will never be whole again. Such a small thing, still all this pain. How can I make it right? Before I met you I was hollow, too, and every little tap resounded for hours. Now see how easy I shrug off disaster. You are my coffee. I stir, I cool you with my breath.

The Rose

I am the fallow-eyed angel next to your bed, I glide toward you silent as anti-words at night, and give you, O my dusky one, kisses cold as the moon and the serpent's embrace. Morning will come but I will be gone, my place will be cold all day. Let others tap at your hollow with light knuckles. Me, I reign by terror.

Despite All the Amputations

If we just stand here without all the distance And not say a word For five or six minutes

I want to remember you without error or sin As if we were young with nothing to forgive

This is what love does It commands the words to stop To remember who we are It tells us to shut up

While You're In Alaska

I try to keep myself busy, I do the laundry, I sweep the floor I try to keep my mind from thinking Because this is just week four

I try to keep the garden weed-free I cart the recycling to the curb I pour myself another bowl of Wheaties Thinking about the life I deserve

How do I function when the clothes are still wet? How do I mop when I run out of floor? I make a pile of pillows beside me on the bed, And I pat the pile and wish they were more.

New Poetry Setaside Program

Man at the door says he's from the National Humanities Office, to tell me about the new setaside program.

"I don't know what that is," I said.

"It's a simple concept," the man says. "Instead of writing all day every day, you agree to not write for a while."

"Why is that a good idea? Why would the government get into that?"

"Oh, it's a sound practice in many ways," he assures me. "First, it means there is less poetry in the aggregate. Gives demand a chance to catch up to supply."

"OK, I can see that. What else?"

"Well, it's good for you. You don't burn out your audience so fast. Lets newcomers get into the game a bit."

"I guess I can agree to that. But what about me, personally? How do I benefit, besides the monthly checks?"

"Mister Finley, that's the best part. You get to rest your brain. Your creativity gets a chance to renew itself. Just think how good you'll be after a few months."

"Yes, yes, I'm thinking about this. One last thing -- you're

not just telling this to me, are you? Every writer is being offered the opportunity?"

The man's eyes widened. "Absolutely, sir. We're telling everyone."

"Who have you told so far?"

"Well, so far, just you."

The Way to Do

Forget about all the eff-ups you've made. Thinking about them only effs you up some more. Stop worrying what the future has in store. Anxieties leave marks in your underpants. The best policy, I have found, is to plant yourself on your back stoop and watch the robins hop about, without knees. Think about how they do that, or don't. Eat when you feel the need to eat. When it's time to go down, give yourself permission to draw the eyelids closed. But stay on the lookout, because you never know, you know?

Talking Fly

A fly lands on my resting thigh and commences wringing its hands over my skin.

I say, Fly, do I look like a steaming pile of crap to you?

Fly says, Well, I did land on you.

Song

Could be I will come into a prize And suddenly feel legit Could be the sun got in my eyes And I'll get over it

It's possible for love to return The old kiss, the same embrace The loving people that we were Will come back to this place

The birds are singing in the tree I know what they want to say We have to learn to let it be Come what may

The Nymph on The Como Sedan

She wanted a shadow as much as a friend yet she yanked drunkenly the thing on her leash. Elegantly tired of the usual faces, she had the jigs to snag men by the eyes. Clamping and toothless all soon surrendered; what powers they had deflated on the sand. Hers was an extraordinary success, supplicating knees drew near to her in a prayer of perfect peristalsis. Her skin was a map charting decades and distances broader than the thoroughfares of light she delighted in. What she wanted was a pavement of the crushed bones of lovers, and the worry was that somehow all the things that she wanted, as costly as as the perfume of teardrops she'd extracted, she would get.

Rachel the Student

In the lab there was a cat Its head was shaved bare. and sticking out of a wad of putty was a wire. When the cat saw Rachel come in, it jumped. But it didn't land on all fours, as most cats do It hit a cabinet drawer and fell on its side And Rachel wants to know what good is a cat like that. Every day she bikes by the cancer hospital, chain grease blackening her pant legs. Today she looked and a face in a window was looking out at her, then pulled the drapes shut. A big exam is on the way and she's missed her period and her neighbor upstairs plays the saxophone late at night, and nothing she says makes any difference. I don't understand it. she starts crying one day, why do people want to be mothers.

It's Over

This is the end of everything so far. Here is the beginning of everything else. Two days ago we were in love like fire. Now we are worrying again. This is the end of all up to now, This is the start all whatever is left. The end and beginning of life on earth. We take turns drawing the dotted line between us Like a long fuse, and our life together Spits like the wayward snake. Sometimes I want to let it go, Twist lid, Watch it shoot from the can. I want to see if the fire we feed Would go out by itself, Or if we'd panic And reach for wood.

My Bicycle

I set aside this perfect day to be with my bicycle. Beautifully red, she's been mine for three years. I have just bought a pair of blue handlegrips. Now for our free pirouettes in the sun. There is no joy like this one. Down a smooth hill and into the wind, the low sound of whistling in her spokes – I close my eyes and trace a shiver down my spine. Now we rest in the shade of a tree, and my lovely bicycle, anxious to please me, guides herself in small circles. Here, the figure eight. Here, quick brakes! I'm so proud, I applaud, and my bicycle wheels sheepishly toward me, sets her handlebar in my lap. I stroke her saddle, I murmur kind words When she stands before me, her chain sags irresistibly, her bearings rattle deep in her hind parts. I mount her.

and we ride.

Lullabye

Rest your drowsy cheek, My girl, quiet on my Prickling arm. Dream Your dream of lapping Waters cresting on this Human form. The tides Are breathing, you and I, in your small clench And my tight heart. Tonight we fill the Grave with stones and Slumber in the summer's Dew. And all I make Are promises which can Not come true. I will Not give you away, my Girl, I will never make You cry, nor morning Find us far apart, nor This hand gone away From you.

Triangles Prisms Cones

From a distance all we were were big blue wheels; we called them 'our reasonableness, ' we called them 'true circles, ' living in the world and spinning with love. It was our only course, like the rudderless boat's, to see land, any land. I was bound in copper coil, you were a fire of slippery jewels. From a distance we were static electricity. living in love with the stock-still world. Crying under our floorboards was our silver pyramid, penned inside our walls were ancient bulls in bas relief. Our flags were sins on lascivious oceans, our word for regret was 'a whirlpool of blood, turning in space.' It sped on. The dot which was so small at first became what it had to become, a collapse into feeling. Item broke down into item of light,

each one new and unknown. It was 'our home,' a wave of slow motion, which was all our lives forever.

Four Jewels

for Rachel

Christmas time and you and I And our two kids in tow, Tobogganing down Highland Hill, Diamonds hiding in the snow.

I remember you in spring, I would do anything to hear you laugh. Seeds explode and send up shoots, Emeralds peeking from the grass.

Dismal rain at Lake Itasca, Summertime and you and I Curse the bugs and zip the tent, Sapphires shining in the sky.

Our children are beautiful, We did the best we could, When they are gone, I still love you, Rubies moving with our blood.

Trompe l'Oeil

The painter's wife Turned her back on him And went to sleep. He Went to his studio and Set up his easel and Painted a picture of Snow falling on a small Wisconsin town. On one Of the whited-out Streets was a house with Green shutters and a Streetlight shining on An upstairs window. The Man and woman inside had Undressed, a pair of Shoes lay under the bed. Before climbing in, the Man bent over and Brushed the dust from The soles of his feet. I know, the stooped-over Man was saying, I will Rise up early and paint A picture of snow Falling outside our Bedroom window

Truck Stop

The older man in the leather vest Walks with the gait of a gunfighter Toward the men's room, a gallon bottle Of pink windshield wash In one hand and a bag full of cigarettes And Hostess Snow-Balls in the other. He is compact and erect, and his mustache Is trim despite hours on the road. His white-haired woman, taking smaller steps, Follows close behind, eyebrows penciled in an 'I will follow you anywhere' arc, Her frame a little dumpy from the miles She has kept his company, but you can see There was a time when she was wonderful. Is he a good man? I can't tell. But I admire The seriousness he girds himself in. Like the last sworn knight in a useless world Ambling past the Sega Strike Fighter And the 'For Your Safety' condom dispensary, Past the claw-fetching crane game and the Lip-biting girl eying the Tickle Me Elmo embedded in the heap.

Other Women

How you must wonder what the man is really like

The delight of him so human, so stirring to the breast

He seems to have a sense of their experience

To be near to such a one so ripe with understanding

He is the one they didn't wait for all those hurried years

He is the one who feels the lining of their hearts

He is no great lover but who cares about that

They hunger for instruction And he has armloads written

They hope for the moment when the iris flutters out

And the plumed figure struts and the speckled flank may thrash

On the barbed hook of an upraised eyebrow

Game

some say the world will end in stone, others paper, and still some blade because fear makes hash of every laugh and laughter drives love to distraction but love's cover can smother fear rock scissors paper fear laughter love

