

being of water

julia doughty

in gratitude to: mamma, trees & earth, shree maa & swami satyananda, sri swami satchidananda, pema chödrön, jane & richard, ann & jerry, all my teachers & friends & the ones involved in *ensemble*.

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notebook 2006

the sun as this orb runs, appears & disappears
a little girl walking tip toe
an elder woman going the length of the shore & back

sun and wind are newsmakers, too

to live in the floodlit truth

sky of evaporations
burning elements, falling stones

trees still coming up, reaching up

land opens & is filled with itself
rumbles & rests

coyote upcanyon groans low
and far downcanyon a group calls back, high wailing
a spring blackens the ground
water runs down from far above the desert floor
is there anywhere to go?

i dream but wake without impressions

the mountain becomes faded in shadow
while i'm submerged in sunlight

*

1.4 million years-old mammoth skull
so heavy it took three attempts to get it
airborne
dropped twice
weighed
1400 pounds, the maximum load
limit of the helicopter

*

did i ever know
remember
igneous plutonic rock
named after pluto
the upheaved
from the underworld

(richard:)

*you didn't ask questions
you were with others & watched & picked things up
something took, your skill
the one you watched eventually saying, here, & begins
to show you how*

*as a kid looking through the willow branches
the bear dancers'
secret
was what you might come to know*

*my father was in construction in the 50s
so that's what i did
now i call it destruction
now i work with plants*

make willow and tule huts

*

(jane:)

*i worry about the people, especially when
someone says they have diabetes
we don't say "my diabetes"
it's like a stray dog coming to your door
it's not yours
i say, "i'm going to take my survival pill"*

*the ones who knew how and when
to set the fires
and the ceremonialists*

no one knows how now

*

*what was hidden from you as a kid
looking*

through the willow boughs

*

*my mother helping my husband who came back
from the war with malaria
the doctors said he'd need pills
the rest of his life*

we've lost a lot but not everything

*she wouldn't tell me
about her healing
she'd say go get
that plant*

*she'd say come in
even when we only had tortillas
in the house*

she'd help you heal

*we would have to go to school
my uncle thought it was important
to have an education
because we would need it*

*we didn't know in the 20s
how the land's face
would change*

*i'd have to work on ranches
if i hadn't gone to school*

ranch to ranch

*became an assembly worker at honeywell
then asked to
be a community health worker
so i did
and waitress*

*i'd hug an adult who was sick
and saw them feel better
it helped the medicine take effect*

*certain parts of our body go to sleep
if we don't give them attention*

*another uncle told us to be respectful
it was 1933 and we were fooling around
we didn't know what he meant
when he said we would need it
and then in a few years the next world war came*

*

why are rattlesnakes woven into the baskets?
to keep out the rodents

language so private then made to complete
 form, required to fit
 made fit to learn more,
 work
 language that hasn't been quite translated

rocks making song pulled by high tide
 making one word

willow scented breeze
 leafless branches, the bent reflection

rain all night & now cloud fluffed sky

pulling out the drawers and emptying them out

can i do this?

*

the neighbor's dog, rusty, would hike with me in the desert & pull cholla needles out of his paws
 with his teeth

time rolls over itself

light shifts in

& out of systems

breakdowns in them

after awhile, she said, you find you've tried everything

such a big to-do

how can we live on a diet of fear

after destruction is the void before the next form

columbus, mamma says, came to the new world when the inquisition was happening.
 the jesuits exited spain to start missions in mexico. they had to save the people
 before the end of time, which they believed was immanent

water pours in & out

the child tells her story, puts the bear in a box, closes the flap-doors, opens and peers in

violets beginning
to move earth

*

there are the bogs where whole bodies
sink, intact

what did the scientist say—something about concentrating a particle so much that it weighs
billions of tons?

what is becomes what was

*

a page from the day
chronicle of the stray

didn't see what was coming
got & didn't get

it said go to the right

it made up constitution
the body politic that frays

falls apart

wacko season of first no rain
then late cold, mountains that
rarely get snow thick with it

a billion dollar mitigation
for san onofre nuclear coolant
that warms the steelhead's portal

what not to do

cardinal comes out from hiding

intense desert quiet

i forgot

yellowed rock unperturbed
impermeable to fast wear

where young tule has a start

the child walks curbs and retainer wall tops

sun persists

i don't insist on making my life hard

take the photos you want & erase the rest

*

mamma can't remember the names of the kids we'd visit in oregon

we climbed the ghost town steps
floral paper separating from the walls

jeans, if she had 'em on, she'd shimmy up the tree

at 70, up a tree for fun

*

this is sandstone—
not for grinding

come here
leave the rocks where they're at
return in season

desert creek in spring

ants up and over rock ridge

plans to make, plans to discard

at any age, beautiful

*

you come home
and they won't look
at your war-torn face

bee at the coyote bush, bloom to bloom

tributaries i hadn't seen before

coyote sun cleaned is manzanita

*

doldrums of the body

i will not be vanquished

nonviolence begins in this skin

even as days flop open
and their pages ruffle in the wind

*

the child throws the ball
throws whatever he can
with all his might
thrashes against door & window
in a rageful fit
has learned to point fingers like guns
and spit instead of sing

a bird i don't know begins
her song before the sun comes

in the dark in my sleep
she is singing

not like before not like it will be
the next day

by daylight, she's done

when water is still
it is water
and when it falls down a hill
it is still water

one foot in the house one in the forest

without all the week's news

but of haiti, all about haiti
slaves and colonized of the french
who freed themselves
but became thwarted by a signature
of indebtedness
now pulling out of that mire
but still, who they would elect
to lead, being quagmired
in frauds

it's children who pulled from
a garbage dump stolen ballots

you are here to do the work
you are born to do, she says

i saw the sky had become
yet another strangely colored space

inside
a house sweet with cedar smoke

a three foot skeleton from long ago
may be one of us, may not

it's open to debate, the scientist says,
which is how it should be, he says

*

it's spectacular, the child shouts again & again

too young to quite know the meaning
but happy enough with the sound of it

*

she eats chocolate, only the true kind,
that has little sugar, no vanilla,
a pound a day, your body burns it, she says,
she swims

we're consuming what we can afford and then some

you're something
like the commercial
a little swaying of the hips
what you learned along the way

but we got off the ride

otherwise occupied

even poor, inside immeasurable love

*

want to play ball? instead of next, next, next

waiting for
something extraordinary

my irritableness, my molting angers

even more tender

*

no use for the imprints of chapters

eating pride

the young coming back from other places
wounded or mind-shocked

remember the mocking bird tail dipping up & down

in the sleepwalk of living

little by little, not of thoughts

you're dancing because you're moved
inspirations
of breath

then the park's bell rings out two sets
of four, marking 2:30

walking beneath the velodrome wall
among yerba santa and chemise

how happy the child is, think of that,
how she stumbles, how she bursts into
tears, how it's all water

you thought of your house
you've never foreseen the actual turns
in the past

little aversions burned like kindling,
that woman walking by, that newspaper
full of intolerable reports

generous mint uplifting

and sets out with her crutches
across the big grassy distance
to the park table

sun graced

in love with

showing us how

water rising & falling & always coming
into balance with itself

then the tree in yellow blooms
then the child spilling
water out of the cup
to the earth, saying
watch this

o i am, i say, there's nothing else
for me to be doing

the one looking to the one

you were a girl who bellowed
when you got to the goat yard

there was your letter
your shoes by the door

on your mark get set go

might as well not race

playing the part

she plays all the parts

watching
with her eyes

because of their hold on resources
maybe mostly watery
soup
and how we live
is our estate

hold your seat
til your recitation is complete

as if coming upon a river
warm enough to swim in
just what you do
without a second thought

wind for two days running up
the canyon
clashing with the trees and house
the sky in all its turbulence staying leaden heavy
and just as startling
this morning's still blue

the moon disguised in light and night

why am i here

here?

subtracting, adding
giving away, keeping
it all adds up to
one

little mark in the big landscape

they're raping as part of their war plan
because the shame is a complete
devastation

our life as butterflies

devoted partners
wing-dancing, twirling in space

little dot in sky

p.s.

yes, please, the child learns to say

the sweet smell of apricots

the mother bird has just fed her little ones

inside this hour

a knock on the door
and i am here, opening

to what i have no particular name for

patched up in sleep

strength to pull weeds, to do
the dishes

diego meeting guadalupe

where there really is no door

wednesday

they brought in the goods and the little peaceful village became striated with class, rich factory owners, poor immigrant workers

indians marbling the countryside and town

in the rain, streaks of light

after the quotes

the lesson learned

the bit of bone broken off the ulna

if you look up a word, you can't be on the jury

off in the canyon the birds striking into twilight song

forty-seven years

first communion, six years old, and utterly entranced with the devotion

white sage, umbilical cord of the universe

without understanding,
understanding

in the midst of curses
fouled water, birds
i'll never see again
forever lucky

there where i've dusted on saturday
like lightning that pulled half the oak down
like the round willow house we took apart
this foot-worn earth
a dwelling place

water evaporated

deteriorated paper

poem

forever sung all the way back to you
all the way forward past here

there had been cows grazing in this city's river valley
where there are now shopping malls and car sales lots

makes no difference to the newcomer

and here you sit waiting for the late plane

and at your desk, divying up your funds for the bills

the child runs in circles and throws bean bags in the box

tea's ready, here's figs

the love you looked so long for and now have has a lot of friction—you've settled into
the imperfections

engaged in links to you

careful, careful
not to burn or wound

read the face
watch rooms crowd up with
ambition and worry

figurings, legacies, assessed judgements

see the house down the street get rebuilt

yet the new grass comes up green, even tho it's turned yellow, if given the smallest bit of water

wind comes up the canyon in the afternoon and rattles the windows

friday sunday

to sit at the fire

after our conflict

the stained page

o clouds

come closer

ten kumeyaay dialects
 over one hundred california languages
 seven distinct language families

but a people
 here living on the coast who can't remember more
 than one word for fish
 severed from sea & shore long ago

*

his grandfather ran cattle down
 from escondido to old town
 went right down linda vista road

stopped when trucks
 came into use

*

she said let me sit with you
 let me sit with you
 and her mamma said
 no, you go play
 we're talking
 she said, no, no, i don't want to
 i don't want to get into the poison oak
 and mamma said, honey,
 you're chewing on a stick of poison oak

*

even after
 100,000 of us died here
 10,000 each year
 for ten years

apologize to this fly

*for the swatting you did without thinking
 all those times
 and the spiders who need the flies*

*

*we don't set aside plant from plant
this was always here, this wasn't
we use what's on hand*

are you finding you're spending more time with your gardens?

*we didn't know back then, we didn't go to the store for candy, we picked what was around us
and we didn't get sick*

*you can probably, if you don't have food on hand, get by on the plants and weeds around you
with what you know now*

descendants of the ancients
are thriving in the ocean—
algae bacteria jellyfish

lyngbya majuscula, fireweed
leaps in growth across the ocean floor
and just splashed with water from where it is
sets your skin into a fiery rash

no oxygen
dead zones
in every ocean

southern california kelp beds
nearly gone

*

flying from guantanamo
to let other journalists in
to report
what they're allowed to report

factlets

what the government wants
you to know

why they, prisoners called detainees, committed suicide

force-fed fasters
and
drugged up, 1,000 pills a day dispensed
for illness, for depression

when the 48 bed annex
had been full

“the mass-hanging incident”

23 with sheets, 2003

10 men have been charged with war crimes and appear in court
faces to see

we do not know
4 1/2 years
the rest of the prisoners
450
held without charges

the reporters staying in the “combined bachelors’ quarters”—
one month of invading, enormous, ball-sized crabs inside and outside, clawing down
linoleum floors, dive-tumbling from ceilings

if it's white ash, it's too hot
a fire that takes every bit of growth

if it's black ash
the oak will resprout the pine seed will germinate
we'll find groundlings

and who sets the fire for black ash
is one who looks to tend it

from here you can see clear across the canyon

vantages without pixels
eye to earth

path stored in memory
returning to that rock
turning there
where there's no hand-hold

bees coming into the fresh-cut cactus fruit

it rains in july
it blazes hot in december

we cut the cacti roll the tunas on the ground
to get the spines off

up one dirt road or another
worth all the dust

one home and a lot of welcoming places

happy for any of it

if i could show you somehow
it's not on paper
it's not in a book

*don't say, i'm taking my pill
say, i'm taking my survivor pill*

*not, my diabetes
no, don't invite the stray dog who comes to your door
to have a meal
it's not yours
don't invite it to stay*

*eat wood rat stew when you're sick
because wood rat
only eats plants
and has a very organized home
different rooms for eating and sleeping*

*

clover and lupine feeding the plants
us

sometimes so slow all that
indoor intelligence

some birds revive
arrive in flock, in bigger flock

must give and give some more

immortal sun's astonishing song

insistent thankful flowers

in the store window
is a woman's face
with the etchings of age

the face that was mine isn't
and this is the new old face

*

*we'd make fire in a circle
then fire in the center
then stand at the edge
with nets for grasshoppers
with bows & arrows for rabbits & deer*

*

energy like acorns coming through the ages

just growing tule
dogbane
just off at the edge of the yard
some resting in water
with a rusty nail and some acorn shells

just twining with sumac
a basket

to be given away

*hold it by its sides, not the edges,
to help it have a long life*

maybe, so often, asking the unnecessary

so fixing attention on the lake

rematriation

all thoughts, all bones, returned to her

a language that says forgive me
but take all of me

they got the idea of congress and the constitution from the iriquois

*all the east coast leaders were women
when the europeans arrived*

*the grandmothers were the council
that would decide when they'd war
because they'd be sending their grandsons*

two cats below the window
pausing to stare

tar oozing out of the beach banks

and it used to come up offshore undersea

now the oil drills have pulled it away

mind of infinity
but without identity

you were joking when you said let's go to the casino

gambler or teacher?

*you soak the black acorn in water—if it floats to the top,
it's no good for planting
soak for a day & night til it splits open
put in a big pot of dirt
so that it can grow a long taproot*

lizard sneaks into the kitchen & loses its tail
in the chase

the deserts are torching

wind puffing & blowing as the sun sinks
done heaving by darkfall
little moon hue
oranged by desert fire smoke drift

you put the oak limb into the fire, it has to be green, leave it about half an hour, take out & bend into the rabbit stick shape, it's like rubber, the bark will burn but the wood won't

if you leave it too long, the wood turns to mush, you bend it & it won't hold shape

intimacy & chaos
you forgot everything i wrote to you

i'm sorry i stare
it's my studying

here's how the tump line worked—usually from yucca or agave fibers, its coarseness was softened by wearing a basket hat & putting the line over your protected forehead—carrying the weight that way is better than wearing shoulder straps—we carried our bundles on our backs—

brown bear won't sleep unless there's snow
 & there's no snow
 warmest it's ever been

if the old grasses could come back
 to where the new grasses have settled

*i don't know as much as my mom
 my mom didn't know as much as her mom*

*you'd only have a month or two in the fall
 to gather acorns before the rains*

*a short time to get
 what you'd be using all year*

something in me trying to hold on

when i came home, before doing homework, i had to crack open acorns, enough to fill a bucket

sun returns each day
 green persists

*and the fly i was always swatting
 come to find out
 is the one who in its infancy
 will eat our infection*

ground underfoot—
 hard, soft, crumbling

water from above
 water from below

make tea from what i've gathered

*

dove weed along the edges of the road

what is an attic, the students ask
 what does it mean "to pull away from"?

we sit around the table

the soldier has come back
 with all ideals vanquished

stars flicker

she gets up and gathers the plates

we have eaten

if i walk down the moonless road
i hear some laughter

i can't remember word for word what was said

crickets in the scrub

i don't know half their names
but i have to say
it's a beautiful night

*

voice drifting this way by wind

untamed horse following the broken horse

yucca leaves pulled free

sometimes from room to room
i can't remember what i'd wanted to remember

matches for the candle

in the rhythm of the voice of wind

to be loud, to be coming through trees,
to be still

a song about aging

i can't believe a person is all one thing any more

tortoise found on beach in 1930
still a companion

who will eat weeds

meteor showers
we might be able to see

*

it's not so easy, you have to peel every acorn—it takes a lot of time

*

that whole stretch from mountainside
to canyon to other mountainside
scorched

one way or another getting renewed

we'll lose the oaks in a hundred years if we don't burn in winter and clear in summer

buggy ground where it's thickly untended

you can walk up & down the hillsides right now
because all that's there are blackened sumac trunks

quick fall day, late leaky light

some flowers appearing
in the fall's division of time, heretical growings
of mallow and nightshade

why so much wanting
as if all of this weren't enough

she made herself so big
too much & too little
who had made themselves also very big
couldn't match her grandeur
and so were compelled to sit in her lap

which made them come into balance

*

i use "genetic memory," think about what my ancestors would do with the plant

*

bees hum in the trees
the notebook of fallen leaves i've been given to read

torches of war burn the ground
we'd relied on

so then the ashes of expectation

elemental, simple, unfathomable

emptiness

for all those voyages to the moon
discoveries of the depths of the sea

unschooled in what matters beyond matter

looking for the beginning

my body slipping away from its young form

the fly comes into the house
rests on the wall
and is gone

she meant to write about immigrants
but wrote instead about her lover

who else but

if we don't go to what's left
of the quick-melting arctic

encyclopedia of rocks

sacrificing air and water
for our leaders

hummingbird still comes

throughout the day
shadow moves around the tree

i don't suppose we will ever be as close as i imagine
 a thousand gates in but also a thousand locks
 of misinterpretations

*

the facts of life, the wise woman says, are selflessness

*

all the pine nuts i cracked open were
 shells of themselves
 too late in the season

everything in this realm is an action

*i understand now,
 now it's a time when women don't think anything of wearing pants
 men wear pants, they sweat, they have to
 for protecting their legs for their jobs,
 i had to when i went to work for convair.
 but men don't have their moons,
 they don't get that self-cleansing every month,
 they wear pants, they do sweat lodges*

they told him an eagle is something to be shot
 a woodrat isn't better than a human
 and the fairy shrimp are mythological

and that rancher is selling oaks,
 overgrazing, and siding with the town developers

*if a deer comes, you pray, asking
 if it's the one if the answer is yes,
 you move swiftly with bow and arrow
 there's no chance for the deer
 to shift into feeling fear*

*after spearing the whale,
 offer her a cup of stream water
 because she, too, is an air-breather,
 one who came from the land*

taking the long view, we freed ourselves

now that the glaciers and permafrost are going

tonight the animals dance

up at the creek pool, the oaks that have come back from the fire,
and the ones that were spared by a turn of wind

bees have kept their trunk abode

winter makes up stories here, gets mythical
with snow one week and turns real with heat the next
we believe whatever we're in as the absolute,
don coats or pare down to short sleeves,
crank out respective complaints or praises
according to our personal preferences

*we made our homes from tule & willow, then adobe, then planks,
then the more solid plaster and wood*

it wasn't til 1975 that we had electricity

what was there ever to hold onto?
each of my lovers in one time or another of my life

they're gone

a ladybug briefly visits my turquoise shirt

i dream of the harpy eagle whose face feathers conduct sound vibrations, of the new elephant
that the whole group of adult elephants find of interest

how the calf learns to pick up one foot, then another, one by one

our people came up out of the lake

this rock a billion years old
the whale skull, probably two million

*

*when the spanish came in the 1700s
that's when it started to change*

*then we didn't go back & forth,
ocean to mountains,
we kept to the mountains and hills,
even in the cold times*

what shows up in one story showing up in another

*

light saturates the day tho the air is cold

notebook 2007

today's soft january warmth, the bundles of a few pillowy clouds

the notebook of breath

at about seven months, the child realizes
the doll is still there tho under the blanket

i climb out of the bed of dreams

wind has a strange influence, soothing, disruptive, won't succumb to containment

how is it my brother and i are nearly 50?

a list of things to do on my desk

how january can be so close to december

i want to hold onto daylight's warmth

the world brings me to tears

i remember sweet narcissus in the north's icy december

pepper tree, blue sea

first we eat, then we find ways to pay the bills

what i see in a word

inventions, after all

hummingbird hovers around the winter's blossoms

whoever came up with the absurd idea of a rich artist

*we dig the earth here and make our pots
everything we need, right here*

moving toward a sound

a rock, a leaf, a river

undivided by too much & too little

the book of look homeward

not backwards, not forwards

body of bodies, book of books

little by little, our hearts
moving toward their stopping

breathing here, then here not

line breaks, where the line breaks

three teen girls round the bend of the block,
two talking, one text messaging

virginia wrote biography, began to think her journal was some of her best writing,
a good autobiography, and she parodied biographers in her “novels” that were less novel
and more journal turned sideways

i may go to alaska again, where we’d camped when i was a girl,
but it will be a different alaska

they were able to rescue the lone boatman
who’d drifted into the treachery of cape horn

poem as dispatch

talking to myself in order to stay awake

not fall asleep at the wheel

we thought it would be her last book,
it was so close to the truth of
living, and the insights of dying

but she went on to write ten more books

a bird comes into the leafy limbs, pauses
on a branch, then takes off again

the arrows of words fly in
left and right
and the hornet's nest goes wild
with fury

there, the child flinching at the sound
of the spoon being placed on the table,
now that she's lived with a continuous three-year
pop-rumbling-scream war song

here, butterfly with broken leg on the hand
of the girl in the park

hummingbird doing her best
tho her flowers are so few

i still don't quite get the story of the pyramids
you'd have to explain it to me again

while the leaders squabble about raising minimum wage one dollar

while one in three lose a limb to a train
in an attempt to get north to better paid work

i watched her tug at her sleeve

screenplay where we can bear it all

working on two novels

curfews in new orleans

without which, something like dark,
we wouldn't come to know light

now here is a to z
and what will you do with this alphabet?

hawk swooping down
from the back field fence
and no one's around

i'd like to be alive and fully conscious

and after getting her son up to here,
after all that, sending him back
to her sister's in honduras
because he'd fallen into the tracks
of crime and prison

we would run to the hills to live
but we've forgotten how to live off the land

the sea rising

taking the time, all the time in the world

another kind of weed i haven't ever seen
in the sidewalk

the clouds came back & became one,
sheeting the whole sky in grey roofing

i step outside to get the wind & sky wrapped around my body
no rain no rain

the story eludes me, i hardly ever
can stick with remembering the characters

we're not catching up to our time

the child quickly learns to have a taste for sugar

how i left the lover, the organization,
the job, the apartment, the town

valmiki the thief went & asked his wife & kids if they knew what he did for a living, & would they accept a part of the wrong-doing? but they refused—they wanted the goods that were due them, but felt no obligation to be partners in crime

so valmiki was advised by wise man narada to repeat the word tree as a mantra. tree is as good as god and the word of god, ram, felt too strange to valmiki's tongue. so mara was his mantra and before long tree was god, mara was ram.

he repeated it so long he lost interest in all else; in fact, ants built a huge home over him. much later someone in passing disturbed the ant hill & valmiki emerged. his life of thieving extinguished, he became an epic poet, the scribe of the inspired ramayana

here, the dishes have to be cleaned
the yard watered
the sky won't break into blue

aharon was a child wandering the ukrainian woods, his mother already dead, his father last seen taken on the train
he wandered all the way to israel
and spoke sparingly
tho he knew many languages

I'd been adopted by Ukrainian criminals, so the best thing was not to speak, but to listen, to observe. When you do not speak for three years, you get mute. I was able to speak, but in a very limited way. A word, two words. But not full sentences . . . You should be very careful with language because there is a tendency to overload speech with words.

he was carting around two sleeping bags
and he was glad, tho it was extra weight,
because having come here from maryland
in the coldest snap of january
he found he needed them

her boyfriend said, i fixed the heater for you
the irony being that he was the apartment manager
and hadn't gotten around to fixing his own heater

she thought, yeah right, "for me"
she'd been getting up in the middle of the freezing night
and running to the bathroom
but a few days later she asked,
how long had the heater been broken?

three years, he said

they'd cut up the venus
of hottentot for scientific research
and reconstituted her bones
she's meant to go home to south africa

and the burmese students are crying for change

the haves and have nots play
the game of your move my move
but do we know the unspoken rule is
there is no winner

she thought the hammer & saw,
 when she heard them,
 meant there's a dead body here

her mother cleaned up the dead body
 her father made the coffin
 her mother prayed all night—
 there weren't mortuaries then

it wasn't til later she figured out
 that the sound of hammer and saw
 meant other things

*

*we didn't worry about bugs
 and scorpions then
 they weren't bad like they are now*

*

shrub shivers in today's wind

wind brings girl squeals
 from the playground

you're not supposed to cut the frost-damaged branches
 until we've had our last freeze for the season
 and we don't know when that will be because it's all strange

two hawks swoop down in the storm wind
 and branches snap & sail

we know half the bees in the county
 are dead, something is getting them
 but we don't know what

we eat apples but we're seeing the last of the avocados

*

i couldn't explain the verb tense

and everyone is breaking the rules

but i can sing

all through the day & night we were singing

swinging into the vast sky

sitting at my school desk in blankets of heat

snapdragons, violets
pansies and the nun
unable to resist saying yes
to my plea to pick some

up the hill down the hill
walking
and running in the orchard

in the grotto pond the gold fish dead
and when i touched the water
the electric shock i got
told me why

o crown the silent statue
with flowers and never
get the merit of "mary maiden"

wild grasses, chaparral
bouldered hills our borderlines

it was outside where i was becoming

twisting
my ankle
twice

my friends at school
not my friends at home
because we came out to the country
from all over the county

looking for the secret door in the rock

bird nests in the fields

running to get to the tree first
the bark moved
a long gopher snake working
its way down

you never hear indian before you hear it

*

*my mom said
we're one family on earth
respect what we do
even the snake is your relation*

*i think about those things then
we didn't know any better
we could have had that land*

we've lost a lot

*all we had to eat was beans
my father, ambrosio, would make 25 cents a day*

we've lost a lot

history is so different

*we may not have had any money
for anything
we'd use the abalone, mussels
for survival, so maybe
that's why we use abalone
for burning the sage*

we've come a long ways

*that's the way we were created
we would gather, simply, to help each other*

*they would walk, got there however, go a long way
to help each other*

*when you get older, it has meaning,
when i was in my 20s and 30s, it didn't
have any meaning*

*we could have had better living conditions
had we known
it wasn't out of ignorance
but the way we lived, what we knew,
how we survived*

*my grandmother worked at otay ranch
two to three weeks
and then she'd go home to jamul*

*then she'd go work the olive trees
two to three weeks*

*we didn't know any better,
turned down the land offered to us,
a couple acres*

*all our relations were very close
so we never asked questions
about who's who*

*my great-uncle worked in potrero
they lived in a run-down house
he called my great-aunt "sister"*

*worked there for potrero
raising bees and all
potrero offered him a homestead*

*we didn't know better, he didn't do it
if he'd taken it, he'd have five acres*

*another relation was a ranch hand
worked for smith's ranch in barrett
he had to go work across the border
and then he took off*

*another one in jamul
was offered land, two to three acres
but he said he didn't need it*

four pigeons at one sea cliff pocket
vying to get in

grandbaby on daddy's back singing

a full drum set in the surfer's camper

crow hovers & drifts, returns

heaven to heaven

*in the old days they'd say
that's a white baby a black baby a yellow baby
we didn't know*

i'm very happy they're doing DNA now

*educating one another
a professor said
when you talk about native people
you don't know, we're all one*

*we took a detour to get to the college
you don't know
anything that happens, we have to take it in stride
topsy-turvy, all for a reason
that we couldn't see*

*

*the elders bust out crying
when they hear an owl
you can tell if it's sad news or warning
good news or bad
i grew up listening, learning to listen
you can tell the difference*

*it's the same way with coyotes
when they run in front of you
it could be bad
or to warn you
to caution you*

you learn these things

*we do these things in a respectful way
respect for the elder*

the owl

the coyote

the messenger

*listen to the sound
is it mournful or cheerful
or a happy medium*

*the animal doesn't represent something
you just go by the sound*

learn to

*all the animals have a different way
of talking with the indians*

*they don't tell you someone died
but there's a sadness
for a particular family*

*there's a sign
so you know how to hold your body*

now most coyotes are just doing coyote things

*many years ago
when we had funerals in jamul
and we had open crying
our lady the coyote would come up
and be crying in the same way
when we'd stop crying
the same crying sound*

look listen observe

*had i asked then, i might have learned
why we did what we did*

but we were taught not to ask questions

tethers untie

now in another century, an unknown name

all the loved ones as lineage to here
all that's left is this descendant
trace of the tree

dust remade

emergence convergence confluence
effulgence

something in the way she moves me

like we never parted

*

what looked like another cloud-sooted day
turned blue

*

clouds rush to meet one another
reminds me of wyoming
the way it was when i was there 30 years ago
but i hear that while clouds might gather in old ways
the land has changed

*

yesterday's sultry sky, heavy heat, hard to breathe
roadrunner & quail run to shade

coyote out in the desert field
among a flock of crows
they are all pecking the ground

there's an old road up on the hill's sharp edged side
and it leads from the creek
to the homesite
where there's nothing but
rock retaining walls

my life, as is

i don't recognize what i'm doing

later some part emerges from the wash

first day a leaden hot sky
second day cleared and breezy
by late afternoon the desert wind gathering strength
and by dusk in full regalia

cholla stands upright, unfazed

later the faithful, undaunted moon
comes out of the mountains

the wind, going against my prediction,
didn't stop once the sun replaced the moon

in fact, it seemed to be fortifying itself,
building up for a full day's tempest

up the mountain
there's enough sun in my shade
enough shade in my sun

sunlight arcs over the hill
mingles through the needles
i keep moving where there's some warmth

a sapling bends completely, top head-down
on the ground from what
had been a crown of snow

burned-out trunk stands spindly three-legged
and top-shattered

another trunk has made it upright, growing
split and twisted
half-way up into two trunks

and clouds come together over this hill
and cold wind drops to the ground

we thought no one had kept a record
but here, under the bog,
are the wooden paths,
the pots given to the old waters
for thanks

i'll look for my shoes

yucca sandals, otter skin boots
falling apart

having forgotten the spears

make speed
by being a boat of oak

i don't feel like collecting
shells and books

seeing the way her mouth turns crooked
in a smile

i return to familiar hand and foot holds
to climb

grief goes out with the tide

no one comes again
names blow off over the sea

the shells in the ground of where
the sea had once been

letters i sent, decorated with quotes
my early writing

how i got close to a friend

without prescription or cure

the basket fiber made from iris

yes
the mountain lion has to roam
even among our homes

we would come to one end
and miss only a little of what we'd left

there is the great speed
of moving in the high-wind sea

the front of the boat
would bend back sixty degrees—
and not snap

*

underneath sweet pine, finch song, dry trail, forest duff,
under words of love is the detail of nothing

*

the descendant of those who traveled
over the great mountains
into the next valley
who found their sustenance there

of women who helped birthings
and gave birth
the end of a long line, then,
childless

from one child
eight grandchildren

you see how om and amen
and ameen and mamma
all speak her same name

let the record show
that i showed up for the job

prevailing past the wind
and heavy rain we had on friday

so many kinds of love

swimming in the pond

where i want to stay
but everything keeps moving

must press on with the work of the season

i am a most fortunate woman,
living in very good circumstances,
in plenty and grace and loved by others,
i have much to give and i do
and i will do more
i aim to diminish & wither complaining
and live in the attitude of gratitude
and the action of giving

*when i visited the classroom
the teacher asked me to write
on the board but i said
i'm gonna tell you a story and you write it
cause we didn't have a written language*

"i was going to gather pinyon nuts

*i saw a skunk and i turned around
so i could return"*

*a lot of people frowned on me
in the 70s and 80s to talk about these things
and now some of them
are teaching it*

so we've come a long way

*in campo they say a different word
for "cold"
for "willow"*

*just a few miles distance
but it's different, but it's important
to get along and understand one another*

*

i was going to gather pinyon nuts

*i saw a skunk and i turned around
so i could return*

*in a great sea of motion
swaying towards or away
from each other*

*it must have been over oak trees,
he says, fighting over
the use of yours*

or a woman

*we didn't remember her face
but we kept telling the story*

where she said yes by the oak and left

they laugh, they grind seeds
up by that place

we knew what not to say

a lesson compressed in a few words

this is how you put
the basket in the sand

this is how you leach the acorns
by tying a bundle under the faucet

my face is getting old and my real face isn't

we have wanted peace all along

*

*when i was little
the government used to give commodities—
we used to get
raisins
apricots
peaches
cheese
dried apples*

butter—we mixed it with a little lard to make margarine

now you can buy a package of dried fruit and it costs a fortune

*

*years ago we'd go to the store
and i'd talk to my parents
and tell them not to buy that any more
but now because we have language classes
i can't do that any more
other people understand what we're saying*

*today i feel seven feet tall
because they're learning the language*

*when i look at these flowers
it's a reminder that everything is important
now i look at each flower
i didn't notice it before
mother earth—we thank the creator
you just don't know how much
i appreciate it*

*i hope the creator will walk
with each and every one of you
and show you your way
to keep it going*

then a huge flock of crows
came into the tree
and set up a loud calling
then the master
the great ego, and his mighty soldiers
appeared: devoid of clear understanding
want of resolution
wandering to and fro
hypocrisy
great frustration
and memories
and then
the powerful warriors
self conceit
and self deprecation

*

the plan from thousands of years ago
of how to go
so i don't wander around today lost
in san diego

when we will have no more water
for a hundred years

unless there's rain this month in australia,
there will be no crops

and the government says
thirty thousand people should leave

the biggest island of the world

*

she brushed aside
the destructive warriors
with such force
stars scattered

did we give thanks at every eddy
and even when the sky started clouding over

not this not that, remember

all night, shotgun in hand
staring down the grizzly

what was so frightening?
what was i so afraid of losing?

who was i?

*drink milk if you have a scorpion bite
or put some dodder tea on it*

*a lot of people would come to my mother
they were very sick
and they would stay with us two or three days
i realize now
so she could monitor them
i don't know how we did it
they would stay with us
and she would feed them
even if we didn't have enough groceries
for a whole week
we had fresh vegetables and chickens
her food was very bland
we didn't have salt she didn't add
salt to her cooking
like they do nowadays
i did not know
back then about allergies*

*about 15 years ago my son
ended up in the hospital
he had an allergy on his foot*

*all her cooking was bland
she boiled and fried
and baked in the oven
she made homemade beef jerky
she would dry it
and then she would make creamed beef
after it was dried*

*they're taking peanuts
out of the padre games
cause kids have been getting sick*

*and i've been doing fry bread
and i'm cooking it in canola oil
we have to be careful*

*if you add too much salt to food
you can't take it out*

*you can put in a little
but if you put in too much
you can't take it out*

*but unbeknownst to me
 when i think about what she did
 what she knew
 we didn't know about allergies then
 that word
 but she cooked very bland food
 now i know why she did it
 so you're never too old to learn*

*even if we didn't have enough
 groceries for a whole week
 i don't know how she did it
 they would stay with us
 for a few days*

*

*a woman at a pow wow
 was making fry bread
 and it wasn't coming out good
 it was sticky
 i told her to sit down
 and start thinking right
 so she did and when she got up again
 her fry bread came out good*

*we made fry bread
 because that's what we could make
 from the government commodities—
 we had flour, lard, and beans*

*today i cheat—i used to use
 flour and baking powder
 now i use self-rising flour
 and buttermilk or milk with vinegar*

*i don't refrigerate the milk—
 it's all room temperature—
 or now i use buttermilk powder*

*if you're in a hurry
and you're not thinking right
that's what makes your family ill
i have to rearrange my life
most of my life
i worked two jobs
i had to make up my mind
to take care of my family
to not be angry
how we feed our family is how we feel
i'm eighty-three now
and i learned the hard way*

richard learned the hard way, too—
when he put the milk
in the refrigerator and jane said—
what kind of indian are you?

rose brambles & poison oak
and a ground of crumbling alkaline stones

two whales lost in the sacramento river

those two crashed out midday
at the downtown square
splayed on the sidewalk, unaware

still here

the bus pulling up, the visiting family
running the block to catch it

bees in the perennial mallow blooms

sun & sun

out the car window
faces i won't recognize
oleander

there is the willow and cottonwood choked river

dreamtown hometown

dim and sharp

when the early morning fog trades out
with the hot blue

a feather falls to the ground

creek runnning to the sea

a word you find familiar

having a life of its own

all those letters i've written to others
i don't remember

nearly the start of june

i can't quite put my finger on it

what happened to those notes

what i care about

about my sleepy students
and telling them how in high school
i'd stay out past midnight

about immortality and making a living

revolutions coming & going

no going forward, no going back

seeming like music like water

the photo on the cover is not
of her as the young woman
but a photo of her, the old woman

*

and june is here

you'd said to the trans woman in the store aisle
i keep looking at you, you're so beautiful
and she said, me?
yes, you, you
then she touched your arm, said
so are you

there was the morning encased in grey
there was the afternoon on the mountain
under an open sky, enraptured
with purple penstemon and orange monkeyflower

all there is to do is be

there the parking lot full of glowing cars
awaiting gamblers who will, at some point,
emerge from cavernous casinos, in sunlight
or dark night, unconcerned
with that, having only a mind full
of winnings and losings

we find a horseshoe, then an old beam
that hasn't burned or rotted

beauty in the gullies
thickets in their height of greens

fluid in the drought

if there's anything to remember
it's to come back & back

home before it was divided

any death doesn't take me away

having no idea of the time
because it's so bright

all over

*

i go to the bombed town
and set up a women's shelter
i drive nearly two hundred miles
for tampons and clothes
because the women are weaving only shredded rags

in the middle of the night
inexplicable light pours through the window
and guides my entire way to morning

keeping me awake

light light light

nothing called love was like this

tho i trip on my own flimsy-soled boots
and break my elbow

tho i live inside the whale

yucca root thrown into the eddies
stuns the fish

what is left to want?

the wren is pecking the ground
the sun is moving because we are

in the photograph, she looks like
the aunt of 150 years ago

squirrels in the cage will be taken
to a far-off field and released
because the barn owl doesn't have
a big enough appetite for them all

one can only hold on for so long

at this time, a lizard has run
across the yard, from tree
to mint bed

it doesn't mean that the plane
overhead there won't drop its bombs
or that the big ants won't bite

in one kind of language
those divine sounds
that return us to us

prewar

before territory of self
after, beyond the fighting mind

that old woman who found herself
after all these years, still going
into the garden to tend it

that young girl who loved to pray

*my mother made plain food
she very seldom put pepper on the food she cooked
she put very little salt
it always seemed so different when we ate somewhere else*

*a lady not too long ago died because
she was allergic to the peanut oil
from a restaurant*

this is good that we can share

we can survive

*fifty years ago i would have said oh you
are lying*

i didn't really know about allergies then

i used to eat from the garden

*my mother used very little seasoning
so this is what we have to be careful of
her food was very bland*

*even my babies
i had to switch my milk*

*how we cook is ok
but what we add is important*

i'm sure mother earth will be very happy

i think sharing is the most important part of what we're doing

here's summer warming up and light, they say,
already slipping away

i have never really become fully familiar
with one day

*

pinos dance and black oak
is in full leaf splendor

flowers who don't need much
come up out of the parsimonious
spring's rain

long light
collards, milkweed
butterflies, water lillies

in the house, singing

goodbye to the body as i've known it

vertical lizard
on the tree doing push-ups

now i won't get to all the books
i'd intended to get to

these final days that will have no end

we used to take the other trail

*

so many butterflies are out now
june about to become july

blueberries, nectarines, bag fulls
he says it's hot, it's a hundred
how could it be, it's so pleasant

those oaks made it through the fire
four years later they're in full leaf

the day softens

with friends around a fire
slow bits of talk
hot twilight and sharp ridgelines

we become light with laughter

jane shows us
her way of making fry bread
*here, take a ball of dough, pat it out
like a tortilla, let there be
a few holes so it fries ok*

*keep thinking good thoughts
while you cook*

i had forgotten my hat, and it was
the first time in i don't know how long
that the part in my hair burned

remember aloe, remember to use it

i've come to accept, living in my native country
there are foreign parts

all the time, going over the land
going past the mapped

into the suncups into the creek

beautiful language

without start or finish

summer now, full moon now
any moon

my grandfather was a furniture salesman
and mover
that strong back in so much pain
in later years

that well-saved money
that my grandmother watched
coming down through the years
bringing all of the family
good fortunes

storms have pinned me to the spot
and passed

there's more days & nights

there's johnny cash showing up on stage
through good times & bad

singing *field of diamonds in the sky*

that woman, the county building's sign
made sure to point out, was a professional
model for artists, posed nude
so he could get the most life-like
body contours for the sculpted
figure who is wearing a dress
and holding a water pot

she's the beacon
of good will, standing
in the water fountain facing the harbor

who do we know?

a woman with her basket of belongings
sits on the hedge wall & smokes

a college man, off for the summer,
dozes at the toddler carousel

the office policeman says
i hear you got promoted

the clerk says, who told you?
i just found out two hours ago

she tells me i'm done
with my renewed license paperwork
i go out the door

fears flicker, i hardly cry

the door opens, closes
contradicts what i expect

i am to be broken

earth in its orbital motion
and motion deep in its body
water rising, falling
being still
how sweet is sweet?

*

where did corn first come from
in this part of the world?
we say it came from the creator

not a migrant from the south

see what it's like over there
by walking

i'll take you there coming up behind me
like the breath of a trail biker

lake in pink flowers

just ordinary volume voices
but booming down the trail

over a hundred years ago
that deer standing staring
the two men in my family
and their friend
out beyond anywhere they knew
with no trail to guide them
looking to make a new way over the mountains
they'd run out of food
one shaking, tried shooting
missed again & again
the deer stood staring
having never seen people
til one bullet in the end
took her down
the shooter leaned against a tree, crying

here woodpeckers and people
used to each other

*

surfers dissolve in storm waves

the child brings up sand mountains

one yes
and the dog figures out how to climb
up the rock jetty

*

a teen boy
rolls an office chair down the path
to the sand

big waters drum and hum
sun harmonizes
cooling winds undo troubles

we take off our shoes

*

i go out the door for work

going to greet the truth
that i am not what i do

i can stand, i can walk,
i can even lie down in the middle
of all this

shifting ground

whither thou goest

war wages itself to exhaustion

whether you have children

look for me in you

a sunday in the forest

spring rolls

tuesday's paperwork

the world as we know it ending

always sleeping when the big branch falls in the night

flush of blue cloud bank

maturing, meaning going soft
on pointed
views

dreams come
and go

what moves needs what doesn't

if the weeds
if the cloud muted sun
were all

by turns or not

cranberry, toyon
domestic, wild
red berry
to be eaten

for every part taken
another put in
with something extra

as if i know how
to give in that way

after the rote learning

in the rubble of what seems relentless
challenges
stubborn constellations

as is

where the big ocean
meets land that quickly rises
to small mountains

where the land became unrecognizable
as its former self

and yet great spaces
of scrub and tree

and yet unattended, so burned

so many have moved
outside to in
and inside
to further inside

what i could have never known
had i held onto

how
this place should be

washing up on these shores

*

soft rain coming & going without prediction

the picture will take a thousand frames

and never appear the same

*

little wing flappings
then a month of rain

where the wind blew

the steadfastness of sumac and manzanita

it was then
the formless took form

it was then
the form became again formless

all that i once knew
returned

Note:

Italicized quotes on the following pages are from elders Jane Dumas (Kumeyaay) and Richard Bugbee (Payoomkawichum): 6-8, 23-24, 28-29, 30-32, 36-37, 39, 46, 48-49, 51-52, 58-60, 63-65, 71, 73.

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