

The Book of Dudley

Arendt O. Speser



We are all duds. This is not an admonishment, but an invitation to the Dudley is us all, finding fellowship with the forsaken and forlorn. Dudley is both a man of his time and anachronistic, inhabiting multiple voices drifting through memories, dreams, and moments of staggering lucidity. He shifts and wriggles and yet remains Dudley throughout—observing and recollecting, struggling to find his way in a world that has slipped from his reach. Marginalized and needy, Dudley confronts his past and present without expectation of redemption. He is vile and honest and brave; above all, he is just a dud.



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The Book of Dudley

A Poem in Five Parts

With a Preface by the Author

Illustrations by Rose C. Burt



Preface

For all the duds like Dudley.

*In man or fish, wriggling
is a sign of inferiority.*
– Herman Melville

Memory is a real magpie.
– Charles Fernyhough

*What if you just did what you were told
And some were good at it
And some got old?*
– Dudley

Dudley was a dud of sorts, always forgetting his things
The world seemed so cold at times, and dark against his mind
Even breakfast felt strange, an affront too sweet
For harsh sensibilities and Dudley's keen critiques
Sitting in the cafes, *music is so intentional* thought Dudley
Playlists and primroses and promiscuous baristas that never look
his way
Preferring the boys & girls who seem to fit right in
*Maybe if I had my pencils mused Dudley, I might do something
about all of this.*

Dudley gives blood for money at the hospital on the hill
Believing the sterilized reality of needles and a good draining
Like leeches in the medieval imagination just suck out the
sickness—

Wherever death abounds Dudley's there—
But he's not a sicko
Doesn't do the zombie thing or give two shits about vampires
Heard on the radio the other day that vampires were rabid
Fits the whole bill of disease, said the pathologist
Aversion to garlic, bright light, insatiable beasts
The animal mad no mind for the match, poor creature
Can you imagine the pain of never-ending thirst?
Pretty sure there's a Greek myth for that Dudley would write if he
had his things

But there are other distractions, love, his mother would say
Before she checked out and left all the children without care
We're all orphans of the same mother, ship of fools
I've got no taste for modern politics or media
My creative ambitions have done up and gone
Even this weekly periodical limps along in my hands...
Dudley is off and dreaming again—
Action is for the middle class!
Leave defiance to the poor!
What is my self-law? self-questions Dudley
My autonomous being, my high-spirited horse refusing the bit?

After giving blood, Dudley goes on a long walk.
He smokes some dope and tries to get light-headed and weak.
Lying down on a park bench, spinning sky above him
A seagull, the sky an aperture and Dudley looking through it

Unaware of the light mist falling and passersby who regard him
as a bum
Dudley is somewhere out there, where his things are eternally
waiting
His pencils, pocket-knife, a small book of drawings and pressed
flowers.

Dudley goes to the Art Museum to take a shit.
To be fair, Dudley loves art, but this Art Museum is free
So it's a no-hassle affair, which helps his bowel movement.
And to clear up another thing: Dudley is not a bum.
He's got a bum mind, sure, thinks like a bum
Always looking for a bargain which is something for nothing
If you ask Dudley. After delivering his dirty little secret
Dudley walks through the galleries—
There is one painting in particular called "Sin"
He really likes, and not only because the dark-haired woman is in
the nude
Come to think of it she might be a blonde
But goddammit the painting is gone so Dudley can't recall all the
details
Only the breasts inviting his filthy mind to wrap around the body
like that snake
Which even Dudley knows represents The Original Sin
And the eyes of that viper and the soft pink nipples
Dudley might have another dirty secret to share.

Dudley discusses the weather with an old man
Rainin says the old man. *Yep* says Dudley.
But the sun shinin somewhere. Wouldn't that be nice.
Always is. If we have faith. And always goin to come again.
In matters of faith, Dudley usually defers to probability
When he was in college and the professor held his pencil in the air
And asked whether anybody could with complete certainty
Say the pencil would fall to the table if he dropped it
Well Dudley along with the rest of the class certainly could not say
So ever since, faith had been what was most likely going to happen.
Dudley was going to say something about snow in the mountains
But figured it most likely the old man didn't ski
That's something probable though, in winter
When it rains at sea-level we can assume snow in the mountains—
This feels good, having faith in the seasons.
Wishing to share this sentiment, Dudley is suddenly alone
On a frigid peak bereft of life, awash with indeterminacy
His only probability fainting in the freezing wind.

Part One

1.

Dudley sat in the pub with a schooner of dark ale
All around were signs of life both in and out of time
This fellow over here, well he might be from a forgotten age
Lost at sea in some ill-fated, tall-masted ship
And every coin of sunken treasure some cruel trick
To show men of fortune their foolish ways—
But here he is nonetheless at ease with a drink
Resurrected from a spiny barnacle Dream...
For Dudley History is nothing out of the ordinary—
He sees surrounded by years against better judgment

It's hard to know so much when you're just a dud like
Dudley
Nobody listens and your voice is an alarm to stay away—
Keep your distance kids that man has eyes in past worlds
You can't trust an old seer unless he's blind

Poor Dudley his gifts are too classic for modern appreciation

Even his lovers have been ancient, their orgasms
archaeologic
He prefers the company of forlorn souls with universal
grief—
Bury me in the moor where my heart can sing the old sagas
Wherever ghosts rise in uncanny vapors will you find my
curs't lament.

2.

Dudley's saintly resignation has its own special failure
Instead of looking where things went wrong it assumes
Life, like baseball, is a game of constant losses
Each swing and a batter is closer to death
Each pitch brings the arm one throw closer to collapse.

Three fuckin bags of dirty clothes

The woman on the bus behind Dudley is talking to herself
Or maybe she has someone on the phone
Someone with dirty laundry and probably some other
problems

Dudley smells himself and recoils slightly at his stench
Used to be a man could rely on his musk to arouse a lady
He steals a glance at the fat woman in a faded sweatshirt
Starts fondling the change in his pocket for a good wash.

3.

BOON thinks Dudley, and then he says the word
BOOOOON some gift, some prayer, some sacrifice
BOOOOOOOOON Dudley remembers Orpheus descending
Asking Hades for his bride back her life as a BOON
Of course he loses her again on the way up
Everyone knows the end of that sad sack...

Dudley is reading the Song of Roland and hears a sound
Inside his mind a sound is saying BONE
It's a boon for the nephew of the Saracen King
To strike first at Roland it is a BONE
The sound is BOON the word is BOON
Dudley can't stop hearing his bones ache
He solicits the delicious advice of the dictionary:

"Ah laured god, her ure bone." In Dudley's mind

Somewhere an entreaty is made and a gift is given
I will gladly give her my bone says Dudley out loud
To no one in particular but the sound is right

BOOOOON yes my big BOOOOOOONE is certainly a gift
Hehe Dudley is always one step ahead
Of a dirty joke—but wait the dictionary
Is still talking and Dudley is all ears:
It is good, fortunate, favor a bone for all seasons!

Following “bondwoman” for whom Dudley has a special
bone

But not a blunder, no dammit a *BONER*
And moving along a *BONG* yes, now we are having a
good time.

Dudley and his bondwoman are walking downtown
Discussing the merits of servitude and poor Roland
Who awaits betrayal at the pass *if only I had a vassal*
Dudley says, *well if only you weren't suck a prick*
says his companion

Apparently she did not favor the fortune of Dudley's boner
Which was admittedly premature in the library
So I get a little worked up musty odors and all
She's heard it before, weirdos and their noses
Deep in the cracks of borrowed books. *This is my plight*
She says *to be stuck with you*.
Ouch thinks Dudley.

Dudley was married once long ago
I would sure like to get in your pants
Is all he can muster, along with a raggedy joint
Pulled from his linty pocket—she accepts
And our hero is on his way to getting lucky.



4.

Dudley buys a cell phone at the Five & Dime
Pays for his minutes in change or actually
Dumps his sack of coins on the counter in exchange
For a pre-paid debit card so the goddamn motherfuckers
At the phone company quit shutting off his service
Whilst he tries to communicate with his lady-friends
Dudley ain't no fool and knows this dime-store phone
Is just another scam against the hard-up
But *FUCK ME* Dudley says to himself
As he marches down the street to fill his card
At the 7-Eleven *FUCK* if all these bums
Ain't got phones themselves and this here street-kid
Got a goddamn iPad—*what these fuckin kids*
Runnin away from anyhow—fuckin technocrats
SHIT it's better entertainment than jerkin off in the alley
Dudley sure seen a lot of crazy in his day

5.

Dudley sits in the waiting room waiting to give his deposition
The Insurance Man says he ain't got no right to retribution
But Dudley knows how this business works, always out to
get the little man.

Dudley is feeling very little
Also a little silly wearing a tie & slacks
Gets to thinking

All these costumes and postures all to persuade somebody
Of something when goddamn it ain't nobody knows shit
anyhow—
So sick of being so poor and all these cocksuckers walking
around in fancy duds
Well Dudley would rather just pull his dick out and take
a piss
On the whole sorry lot of em—*whoever done right by me,*
I can't recall.

Maybe this lawyer can do right but first all these suits & ties
And questions about this & that and poor Dudley just in the
Wrong place wrong time (need to trademark that seems
story of life)
Next thing I know BAM in the back of the ambulance and pain
Pain until this body don't work like it should and I got bills

Debts, loss and grief—there's no end to this mess and only
the lawyers
Get their dues and Dudley left with a sore break and brittle
bones
Not so much fragile but faulty.

Although can't rightly blame that on a single accident.

6.

Dudley's listening to Gould play the Goldberg Variations
Staring out the window at the snow—
There's so much shit and yet the snow cleans the slate—
This too is shit of course but sounds good to Dudley
Looks pleasant enough
Reminds of a childhood that never existed
Some corny Christmas songs written by commie Jews

Dudley would have made a good commie and a pretty good
Jew but never had it much for politics and only on occasion
ever gave much thought to the sweet hereafter—more of
a skeptic, not about the Big Man, but what kind of space
would that be anyhow?

Sure don't believe in the Big Rock Candy Mountain,
although Dudley could go for some whiskey right quick,
trickling down the mount or out the bottle don't make
much difference.

Dudley did play the piano in his youth, remembers the cool
smooth keys and the long sound of a vibrating note, how
it would hang there in the empty air, not filling it up but
adding to the emptiness—

Before the doors closed there was the piano and his mother
turning the pages of the playbook as he practiced—

These are hard memories, harder than all the girls (also
before nobody wanted to touch him no more) and the brief
moment when it seemed things might workout.

No matter, those days are gone and Dudley still has this old
Gould CD that fits his mood just fine in the snow and wish-
ing for a snort.

Prefers not to think much about his mother, but there she
is bundling him up and his little friends waiting outside to
go sledding—

Christ why these pictures got to bother a man trying to sit
and think nothing-at-all?

The snow of '80-something, '90-something, so many years
of absence & lack and only a few winters worth a damn.

Dudley liked the way the piano would talk back to his
touch as if a thousand words were hidden inside just wait-
ing for a little tickle and the air contracting until there was
nothing but Dudley and the black dot of the universe,
all that emptiness afraid to spoil the last faint sound and
Dudley left to himself—

Piano gone Mother gone
A white emptiness of snow erases
Out the window in memory

Friends gone to sled some impossible hill at the edge of
town—which is really just a metaphor of Dudley's con-
sciousness trying too hard to hold on to Gould and his slow
notes knowing that genius is only temporary too—we come
back to our sadness all else.

Dudley at his familiar station: saddled up to the bar all alone on a sad blustery afternoon. Not even old drunks to keep him company. Must have all moved south or to some home or other or just somewhere a beer don't cost six bucks. Dudley's been trying—not just moderation—what comes easy being poor—but making an effort to visualize a future happiness. Gave up those foolish notions of doing it together so no surprise Dudley's got to go it alone. Knows what it takes, or might take outside of all the shit Dudley don't have—but no use crying over spilt shit that ain't there. So, start with the contents of your pockets, like Ginsberg counting out coins and joints and pubic hairs. Been down this road before.

Dudley meets a girl. Not quite a girl, a woman, but what's a woman anyhow?—never gave no time to Dudley so start with a girl who wants her daddy. Dudley sure ain't THAT but knows what it means to feel empty for reasons out of yr control. So Dudley can play daddy and tell this pretty girl how everything sure is shit. A good daddy shouldn't hide nothing big like that kind of obvious.

Look around, little girl, look at all the assholes lying out their teeth to get ahead, using their power to avoid the inevitable. How about you and me look that shit straight in the eye and smoke one of these crooked joints and sit by the water watching the birds float by? We can write poems with beauty bark and fuck up all the landscaping. We'll crush our empties and stack them in mockery of all the new real estate. We'll grimace and sneer and snarl at the Starbucks moms and Amazon bros. We'll fart loudly into the October breeze.

Yeah, Dudley ain't much of a role model but he's ultimately harmless and fiercely loyal, so if any creep tries to fuck with this darling little misery-box he better watch out. Dudley can't afford to get real drunk but is a mean buzz if provoked. Although to be fair, Dudley's normally the one doing the provoking.

It's all a wash. Dudley knows things don't much change except in the worst ways, so soon enough he'll be the only one at the water's edge talking to the birds. Been that way the whole time, in fact—never was no girl, never was no Daddy Dudley—only the need.

9.

Dudley follows a trail of snails
Which might be rocks
Which might be memories
From his troubled past

Dudley needs to get his eyes checked

There was a big bird on the water
It looked like a log maybe
Or some other kind of bloated sea creature
Dudley was curious
So he threw a rock way way out

Been a long time since Dudley
Used his throwing arm
He felt it all the way through his shoulder
The bloated bird didn't make any motion at all
Just floated on toward the ferry dock

So Dudley hustled and caught up
As it started to drift past the pilings
Saw that it *WAS* a bird
Some big fucking goose
Some strange visitor from the North

And not no normal Canada goose
A VISITOR
Dudley saw it for a sign

10.

The sky settles into a pink dusk
Everyone is lonely
Dudley listens to conversations
That do not concern him
Listening to words
Invoking great feeling
Mixing with the color
Sublimating into soft atmospheric

The beer, the birds, the girls
Everything is blending and softening
Dudley's mind cooling as evening approaches

There is dark
But before dark
Diffuse

Part Two

1.

Dudley is in the Library. *It's quiet here, and free, even if there ain't no beer.* But also ain't no beer that Dudley can't afford to drink anyhow, so it's a kind of peace to be without.

But Dudley came for another reason too, to see some paintings of an old friend long dead. All over the Library Jim's paintings are sad and beautiful. There's a poem on the wall calling him "nuttier than a squirrel turd." And that's true.

In many of these paintings it's winter and there is snow, even though it hardly snows in this town but maybe once or twice a year. Dudley remembers how much Jim loved the grey, figures he painted all that white to accentuate the sky and water.

Only one painting at sunset which Jim used to say people want to put on their walls but that ain't where the real color is. That kind of deep color is in the sadness and cold and come everyday even when the snow don't fall except irregular. Jim was that kind of guy.

Dudley ain't the loneliest man around but today at the Library he's got Jung's Big Red Book and it seems too damn big to take it all in.

Reads by translation: "He who sleeps in the grave of millennia dreams a wonderful dream. He dreams a primordial ancient dream. He dreams of the rising sun."

Maybe. Right now Dudley just misses his friend and wishes he had a beer, thinks back to days on the deck of Siren's and Jim crazier than all sorts of turds and still making perfect sense. Looking out and talking about how many colors are in all that grey. He wasn't just sad he was poor too and so the beer never lasting long enough and the night too quick to come and the cruel wind would chase the not-drunk-enough drunks inside and then there was nothing but empty dreams. Seems no matter how primordial a man can get there still ain't much to make up for an empty pocket.

This sounds more like it: "I beg because I am empty and am a beggar."

There was no chance to make a good living with grey paintings, and even Van Gogh only sold one notable work during his life, although probably traded plenty for booze and sex. Dudley would trade his right arm for sex right now but would rather keep begging for booze. Wonder if Jung's got a dream that accounts for inflation...

Dudley finds more talk of madness. Madness is divine. "Enter into the world of the soul and you are like a madman." *Is this supposed to be comforting, Doctor?* No, because you are sick and must carry forth in that knowledge and live in the world being as a patient of the divine.

Dudley Dudley where did you lose your keys?
Where did you lose your hat?
In all the days and all the years
Did you really believe it would end like that?

"My knowledge has a thousand voices, an army roaring like lions..."

Jung's Book is like Blake, powerful and perverted, capturing all the sacred stars and all the lowly worms. Each ripple and wave is divine, each footprint in the mythical snow.

And as ever, now in the company of his long-dead friend, Dudley returns to all he cannot know.

2.

Dudley splurges on a Bloody and ponders the universe.
Outside the dog which is not his dog waits impatiently and
barks at the wind and dead leaves.

Dudley's been dreaming as of late but of what he is not so
sure. Not quite sex and not quite triumph or pain but some
hazy moderation of being not quite real. Dudley is dog-
sitting and sleeping in a strange bed.

Dudley's not-dog is not-barking but looks like it might.
Looks like the whole damn world might be on the preci-
pice of a great barking and if it wasn't so windy we'd all
hear it loud and clear when it comes.

Dudley ponders the news which seems especially cruel.
Cruel to men and women who don't trust each other and
can't figure out why power got to be as it is and why weak-
ness is a threat to us all. Cruel to the poor and not-poor
alike because ain't nobody without problems such as where
to work or eat or stash your money overseas where the gov-
ernment can't get it. It's a problem like all the rest keeping
somebody up late nights and worried about failure.

Dudley's been failing all his live-long days and don't plan
on stopping now. Sure he's got some friends and at one
point some parents probably loved him alright, but that

didn't stop the rolling tide of incompetence what makes
Dudley a real specimen, some crab or crustacean scuttling
across the ragged sea-floor.

The not-dog is over the precipice and doesn't want to
speculate on old poems. Bark on, dumb beast. Bark and be
fierce for all who may feel sorry for our certain lot.

Dudley's too depressed to get drunk but he's going to try
anyhow.

Put his bum mind to the wheel.

There's a past and there's a future and Dudley can't tell much of a difference—all looks dark and grey. There's no Queen of Decency just continuous decay.

It's been that kind of day.

Dudley has no power to change or will what may come but reads the news all the same and sure feels glum.

Dudley knows he's been wrong and made himself a bed of thorns, lurking in sad-sack corners, cutting bait when the gloom star burns.

Pain and repetition and ugliness—this is what Dudley knows in his heart, ingrown, inflamed.

Dudley follows the light through the rain, sees a splash of leaves made bright in morning—

Is it early open eyes to catch what dims as hours pass?

His boots drag mud into the bagel shop.

All conversations either occur in the mind or in that troublesome space where words mix and mingle with whatever we expect them to do.

Dudley prefers talking to himself but in the bagel shop it's best he keeps his filthy mouth shut.

The girls behind the counter speak their own language and Dudley drifts off to sunnier climes, wishing he was in Mexico at the sea, even though it's been years since he felt water warm enough to swim. Remembers how much he liked to float on his back and let the sound of wave and sky erase all probability of intelligent life, since as far as Dudley figures, that's where it all went wrong.

Dudley hears himself say aloud *I just look stupid*. And nobody seems to hear or notice or care even if they did since he looks stupid enough and nobody would believe whatever conditional mode Dudley's putting out there, especially the bagel girls who both clearly know better.

Dudley remembers meeting a girl on the beach in Tulum who was dark enough to be native but turned out to be a grad student from Atlanta—just really tan from spending all her days reading literature on that same beach. Dudley felt a deep urge to transform himself in such a way, darkening into evening sun and returning in the morning to surrender contrast to the sand. To stand-out against the grains and solicit innocent queries from curious visitors. To be a grad student in a perfidious institution of higher remorse.

When all the killings stopped—they haven't stopped—Dudley's ancestors gave back the land and stitched back on the scalps and everyone apologized something mighty and prophetic. This was before dream theory—but not before dreams—and before Dudley was visited by the

shape-shifting bird who brought death—but Dudley didn't die.

Mexico won't last forever. Dudley is filled with a wracked anxiety and he knows he needs to see it again—the girl and the beach and the shifting sands and skin wading slowly into muted surf. There is no erasure on such a cellular level. Dudley is stuck with his feeble divisions and collections along with the rest of us. When the next paradigm comes calling, let it sink interminably into selfsame slop wherefrom stubby-legged amphibians sloshed forth.

4.

Dudley reads about the Tax Cut and feels sick to his stomach on the ferry boat. It's almost December and Dudley is crossing the great waters. Unfortunately for Dudley, he'll likely still be alive when his vessel reaches the other side.

As has been well established Dudley is most certainly poor and these tax breaks for the rich are a real motherfucker face-slap and Dudley is pissed. Fucking corporations and shareholders and estate owners getting all the coin while Dudley and his sorry lot beg for pittance which don't mean squat—alms for the poor would rather have bombs for the poor so Dudley can make a fiery name for himself before it's all said and done.

But Dudley already has a name—and it's a dud.

On the bright side had better dreams last night woke up in the dream in some kind of precarious hammock suspended over the void and there was trash all around and broken glass and harmful things and Dudley knew the place—he knew the void most intimate and even some visible objects which he had cast off in another dream-life. So Dudley was at ease and while careful not to tip the thin skein of security he saddled toward the ropes and found solid shelter beneath. Yes, a whole room which opened into a series of rooms and the place was dusty and neglected but it felt

safe and Dudley knew it could be made into a comfortable home.

There was a small child's staircase leading up to a quaint playroom and it was perfect and although Dudley was too big for this room and too dirty and grown and ashamed of his body the architecture was familiar and suggested there might have been a time when Dudley was a good boy all the same.

Back down the little stairs to the main room there was a stove and you would never believe but the stove had gas and it turned right on and there were vegetables starting to cook! Out the window Dudley could see other dreams and these too were familiar and Dudley knew that while this was not home he was still safe here. More stairs in the corner led down to what other rooms or dreams Dudley does not know because he woke up and drank coffee and got on this boat to read fake news as always—since what is fake is always bad it's only fiction that can save Dudley's dark soul—but even though Congress wants to cut and break and taxes are money Dudley don't have no matter who gets the better deal, it makes Dudley sick but not surrender. At least not today after this dream of dreams. Maybe tomorrow he'll give up the ghost.

5.

Dudley nurses a Bloody and consoles his noggin.

Dudley's head is pounding something fierce.

Dudley's head is a rocket launcher and Korea better be careful because this motherfucker is locked and loaded.

ENTRÉE DES ARTISTES the sign reads above the kitchen. More like *ENTRÉE DES BITCHES* Dudley thinks, because that's what his mind is doing right now, feeling sorry for the numb throb of booze and dancing and not enough pretty girls to take Dudley home. Not enough girls period, pretty or not, since Dudley's not particular picky these days but way particular drunk so that might had something to do with it. Still did some dancing although stepped on a few toes and don't remember much but Dudley is never a careful man just curious and persistent.

These days burn past like suns and stars and Dudley is sore all over his back his broken wrist his corpus like a floating bloated log out in the Sound. Did Dudley tell you about the bird he saw? Thought it was a creature alive oh he did, he sure did tell that tale but man alive that bird sticks in his mind as a good hangover does, waiting for the next phase of existence. But what comes next? Whatever comes next? Another ARTISTE perhaps with big ideas and a full heart

ready to ask all the right questions even though nobody gives a flying fuck. Or maybe it's a messenger of another kind, the one who lurks around corners and offers you a smoke when times are tough—and Dudley always abides.



There are mysteries that swim in Dudley's dreams and casually emerge from the water with proper names. Dudley can't remember the nymph exactly but her surname was Portal and her naiadic accent crossed genres and archetypes. She was a real beauty and spoke sweet words to Dudley's sensitive ears. Of course that has all faded now and Dudley finds himself longing once again. But he can make a pot of soup and eat for a few days.

So the store and the aisles and the choices which always take on more significance than they should, and Dudley is always wishing he was Whitman turning heads of grocery boys.

Dudley should read some new poems. There must be younger poets turning heads these days and singing the long line true.

There must be heroes of the forgotten and forlorn night giving madness a better name. The stars aren't even the same stars since Dudley was a boy and his memories are now all retro. But those were the days! Days are all illusions so why not gather round some falsified records and burn the grandfather tax forms—burn the hidden claims of harassment—let the wolves circle round the water cooler and eat the bedazzled carcasses of millennial saints. They didn't save enough skin for the game! Gave it all away online!

What is the world of myths and monsters that is also not this world? Dudley reads books in languages he can't understand and traces the words that suggest strange passage with his tongue. Invoke. The better path cuts through a land of wings and demons, serpents, serpents with many heads, and fruits and even Dudley knows where this goes. But that's not the path, no. Dudley's dangerous road ahead is the more gruesome, groovy, medieval in its ancient articulations—going backward. This wasn't a weakness. The oracle bones and leaves and fragments of curious resolve—it wasn't an answer as much as an occasion. We go to find it. And Dan Rather is talking courage, old words of broken fathers who pressed forward by looking back at what still made sense until it didn't, and doesn't, and the Oracle mine has been defunct and sealed up. We'd rather drill our way to oblivion now. O Dudley, where the roll of sudden thunder from the acidic cortex of your belly-brain? Your gas is apoplectic. Your Latin a scourge upon the rough shoals of childhood. Those picture books were manuscripts, illuminated and greasy from skins of torrid sheep. They were all fucking so much the book industry boomed! Clerics and scribes connived together to trade in the pornography of codices. When they gave an especially beautiful incunabula to a dirty bishop they blushed and rubbed their privates on hard wooden furniture. Blush and initiate, court the madwoman with fierce dishevelments and don't believe everything you hear—just the parts you know to be true. Courage is how to tell the difference. Even a mystical broad will feed you a line to fuck you up, but at heart she has your best interest in mind, since everything you've coveted comes down to dick. Hence the scary

oracular moment when you see not only death but death's many disguises. This is the moment of no return. Masks and titles and privileges passed down the eyes of angels the eyes of bloody retribution the eyes you have been blind to see because the prophet is not a visionary she is vision itself. Try to call her and she is gone. Try to get a straight answer and your men are fucked. So why go? Why go to find the sure death? Dudley, where are you? What have you found when no one ever, not even for a moment, believed you? Oh! The Evening News! Newspapers and paupers and severed currencies, coins without heads, heads without state! The Oracle is pure movement, pure repose—aggressively dressed like a fruitcake and for fuck sake Dudley why do you listen to her shrill divinations? “All things flow from a single flame.” Fucking origins. Goddamn it Dudley you know this whole shit is a ruse! The fire ensures destruction and the exact moment of creation so any and all appeals to eternal truth more or less amount to being folded and refolded for safe storage—just pack this bullshit away and let it materialize into a profit margin of off-shore extremity! You get what I'm saying? You hear me Dudley? The origin is a rotten fallacy for pimps and hustlers out to sell the sacred from her well-worn mantle. Pulling her down! Dudley! Do something! Save her! Fuck! Dudley, she suffers the men the men always suffered it was all killing and burning and cleaning the fields of blood with brief realignment. Leave the ships at anchor and lift up the bodies. It's the same line, the one single fucking flame flowing all creation is this! Your wretched cock in the morning is lonely because of this impassable distance between you and the final prophecy. The masks! You've known them and felt them and their eyes are your eyes and through them you see the

nature of things! And you affirm, affirm without doubt the ugly circumstance of your longing. You are a dud, sir, and a dud you shall remain.

7.

It's a new day, Dudley. A new dawn.

Although it's well before noon and you're drinking already.
No judgments here.

It's warm & dry enough to sit outside and the bay is calm.
There are solitary figures and you are among them, with
your people Dudley, Liege of the Not-Quite-Happy-Not-
Quite-Sad. So it's a good beginning.

Your monumental ambivalence is manifest through the
scratches at your face and the imperfections left unat-
tended. Do your comrades see the struggle? Do they curse
the same bland mornings and force their lumpy bodies into
the movement exterior? Dudley you have never been a lazy
man, exactly, but you can be hard to rouse. Like Albion
from his great slumber, the world depends upon it!

First, ale and avoidance of misery. Next, it might take some
time. A mate? We all know that's not happening. Aside
from epic coupling, meter and rhyme? Your translations
are overdue and excessive, Dudley, just stick to what you
know best.

This, too, might take some time...

Dudley is getting tuned up for a Christmas party and read-
ing a long poem. He has yet to put on his shoes but the
wine is gone. Dudley has taken care to leave his anxieties
inside, so when he walks out of this door, the night is wet
and pleading.

Part Three

*Not when the truth is dirty but when
it is shallow does the perceptive man
dislike stepping into its water.*

– Friedrich Nietzsche

1.

Dudley finally found his wits

The winter can be rough on a man with no purpose, without much of anything, and hungry too

But Dudley survived

This time things ain't going to be different, and so the New Year passed, and passed with it January, February, most of March

On the Ides Dudley got drunk and forgot all about Caesar

So the turning turns and idols fall

Dudley remembers the Largo where Caesar's blood was spilled, now occupied by cats

He was a younger man and persistent

He persisted in finding all the girls who didn't wear bras and occupied the perky nipples of the mind

It was always hot

It's always hot in Dudley's memories and he is always
younger and has a tan

He does not remember sweating incessantly but saturation
is a privilege for the dispossessed

Dudley is always sinking anyhow

Did anyone expect this persistent man to change?

Fools, like so many senators thirsty for a good slaughter

What else has Dudley been doing?

His hair is shaggy and unkempt, but his underwear is clean

He wrote a letter to an old friend

My Dear So-and-So,

*The days are dark and Im a ghost. Found an old
photograph with my grandparents at the 3-Crabs Restaurant
memories were hard to cull but I recognized the sign with
those happy crabs. Why are creatures always so happy before
theyre served? Dont think that place still exists and grand-
parents surely gone so it felt some other world back then
back time nowhere to go for to search myself out. No sir caint
hardly pull my own teeth from yesterday than tell what went
wrong them years ago. Happy crabs before the boy was gone.*

*Give me pause tho...thinking of wherever that place
was and thinking of all the simple things look caught in that
photograph like a net or pot I spose...pull me up out that sea
and crack my dinner from the shell, my meat for the pickin.*

*But how you doin ol buddy? Dont want to hear no
more of Dudleys sorrow song...*

Since Dudley lost his address book long ago that letter had
nowhere to go, sat in Dudley's ragged pack and crinkled up
like his scrunched up mind

Got to get it sorted before summer come

Too much sunshine brings the sordid folds to light, the
wrinkled page, Dudley's illegible scriptorium

2.

Dudley burns & boils, sends the slippery stuff out to coil
round the bare ankles of his brethren

Around the swoon & suffer, some more than others, those
with less wine

Dudley's been trying to be a good boy but it never works,
the mind grants no rest to Dudley's kind of disposal, all the
rusty-rank crap coming out of Dudley's compost box

He drinks to the golden muse of cheap ale

All those difficult nights getting into dream-space, the
dreams also ragged and half formed, struggling to take
shape and give the memory its image takers

That's how it works for Dudley, the way the picture takes
up and spreads the signs, then Dudley can have some pur-
pose, some place to go

Can't even run the lines across the page without forgetting
how to write

He would've taken the hemlock as a way out

Dudley's precarious preoccupation with breaking down

walls and freaking the fuck out when the caged bird finally
sings

Or sings again

Or sings recklessly through the broken nights and bedrag-
gled pictures trying to take hold but slipping back into the
disquieted storm awful like one of those phantastic Shake-
spearean scenes or a painting by Bosch, weird and dark and
searing into all the surrounding portraits and high beamed
chapels where mothers wait in vain

Roughshod with no chance at cultivation, for what breeds
here breeds pestilence and nightmare

There is no land so barren I can't pull a daisy from its
withered breast

Dudley's too dirty for all this, dreadful in corruption, sus-
pect of all crimes

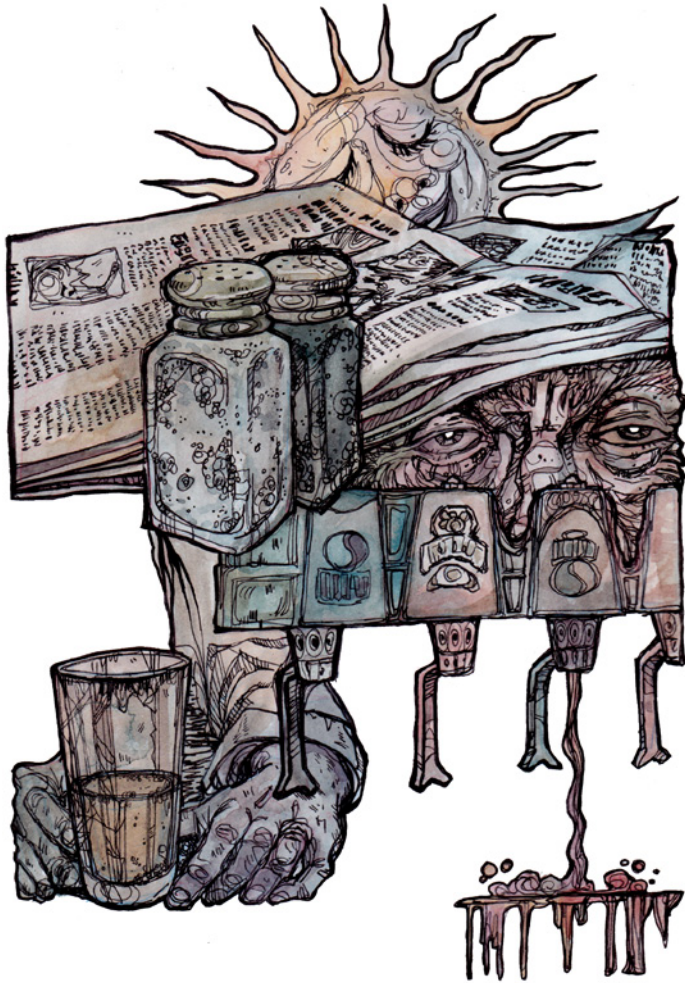
So take a bow and bend the knees, bring the laurel branch
home to roost

Or like Zarathustra, love thine enemies until your own
brutal actions betray the beast inside you

Dudley's political agency is changing

An oasis from conspiracy, thus Dudley leads his charge

And when she died, Portia swallow'd fire



3.

Dudley's heard it all before and that's part of the problem

That and he can't hardly remember but a damn bit of it

Dudley drinks to forget it all, which isn't a damn bit true

Dudley drinks because he is sad and alone, thus believing he is one with the universe, cold and calculating—always burning out some distant star—colliding, quantizing, making everything smaller & smaller until there is only a single soul, infinite, sucking the rest of us into its revelation

Dudley has a friend like this who talks his ear off with nonsense, half-truths stipulated like dirty trousers: worn through soil, sour in the crotch

Thus Dudley drinks

What is this stubborn will?

What is this Dudley?

What is this tomb?

What is this clarity that never comes?

It's all surreptitious

Now say that three times fast after this serviceable buzz
begins...

4.

How many asses have passed in front of eternity?

*How many cocks have risen for a hot second of sweet
remorse?*

Ah Dudley, pontificating once again

If you were a woman you'd see things differently—you'd
bless the silent moments, relief from your greasy visions
and creepy gaze

Unless you were that witchy kind of woman, which you
certainly would be, and in which case you'd be seducing
this simple world with the best of all whores, as all whores
are surely holy, a sentiment our enlightened Dudley has
adhered to since he was a little prick

It's the barkeep's birthday and his alternative is death

In case the allusion wasn't obvious: we get older or else

5.

The word for penis and pen is very similar

If this is by design, Dudley don't know

Dudley admires the countryside and takes a sip of whiskey

Dudley is on the train and contemplating America

Now in the thawing North, and the trees are swampy and
the fields are brown

This cannot be real, this stolen land, frozen land, a land of
single harvests, unforgiving, fated

The train reveals backyards full of trash, bones, strange
scavengers

Probably some retired hippies squirreled away in old farm-
houses

This is an American train

And then Rochester

Buffalo was Queen of the Rustbelt

Here we are in the stony recesses of Dudley's childhood,
where nary a tinkling fairy darey to hide

Oh no, the bricks are too red & sooty for that, the smoke-
stacks too high

(So Dudley remembers pre-industrially)

The factories too fat

Dudley wakes at first light to reinvent himself
 Farting at dawn while the coffee
 Steams and our sleepy town
 Stays safe and tranquil in a slow
 Immensity of morning—
 There are new rules for Dudley
 Decoupage: the object always comes first

It has been many moons since Dudley's last head check and
 he has begun reading Melville, starting with Bartelby but
 soon moving to Moby Dick

Dudley doesn't exactly know what a "scrivener" is but he
 sure feels like Bartelby most of the time, preferring not to
 do this or that, preferring not to do much of anything at all

Dudley is here at this new dawn with something to say,
 something totally original, true to form, Dudliest Maximus

He remembers something from way back, calls to it as a
 whispered feeling, forsaking facts and details for momen-
 tary pleasure like reading a story after a few beers, purely
 for the sound of it, or the taste, and won't be able to return

The overactive memory must be a curse
 Better to have a hazy imagination

Reconstructing lessons from fictions
 Forever saucy & threadbare

Dudley beat the birds this morning but now they are catch-
 ing up and worrisome

How to leverage this mortal ambition into something wor-
 thy of Dudley's good name?

He has seen better men bored stiff by the drudgeries, and
 he has been poor a long time

Whatever fancies have floated more or less obscurely to
 these pages have all been reassured of further obscurity,
 and no thought has been unduly pressed upon no mind

Dudley, like Bartelby, is a koan, an enigma waiting to be
 discerned by a pretty student with innocent intentions, who
 is confident in the supremacy of knowledge, self-assured in
 the ruddy fragrance of youth

Oh, Dudley prefers a ruddy fragrance and henceforth will
 not shower until his supple mistress cleaves the fold

Dudley is lost in his books again, dreaming of those days
 when annotations rippled from the text like so many easy
 concentricities, rolling naturally away from the source
 which has grown less relevant with age & time

Dudley's grey hairs are not an admission of guilt so much as
 a surrender: memories are treacherous things

The object is always an illusion, so better to decorate it and celebrate our powers of transformation—look at it now!

We haunt the same needy vices, our frail insistence that what we hold is the thing-in-itself

Bleh, this bitter coffee is more real than some fabulous order divine, the burnt seed, new growth against the odds

We have seen the forests and rivers recover, so why not Dudley?

Why not issue some vague restitution to our grumpy *sans-se-vous*, pittance for his haggard form, no normal slob, this Baron of the Slovenly?

Dudley woke early precisely NOT to dwell in self-pity

Even the quires are not exact, counting not really Dudley's thing, prefers an opportunity of baser nature

Yet beauty has its own design, surely has a hold on Dudley, so this scoundrel of a man seeks delights in his usual vagaries

7.

Dudley contemplates the life of Fred Rogers and decides to improve his moral philosophy

If your shit goes missing, and you can either believe it stolen or returned to its rightful owner, why not choose the latter?

As Mr. Rogers would implore: the trolley of world-repair has only one track, and no matter how make-believe it may seem, it is much better to welcome the trolley with open arms, to peer inside and hold the little hand of a helpless child, to bring that child safely into the castle where songs are certain to be sung, where the Mother of All Creation patiently waits for what she already knows is coming

Avast ye Dudley!

There is no mistaking your morals, which play better on the one-track mind of your soul, always chugging along to the same tune

chimi-chimi-coco-puffs
chimeee-chimeeee-coco-puffs
chimieeee-chimieeee-bang-bang!

The weather beats a bad sign

Where were you when the signal sounded?

What blast sent your trumpeters reckoning surely into the night?

Dudley, were you cross-dressing as an Eagle Scout?

Did the parishioners cloy to your sweetest embrace?

All these questions and more from that murky childhood,
and war whispered its frightening tones, and you sunk into
a puppet scene

8.

Dudley came from nothing and to nothing Dudley shall
return

There are days and those days that repeat, furnishing barren
rooms with wicker chairs nobody wants to sit in

Dudley finds his furniture on the street and buys his lamps
from Goodwill—occasionally an old book of debatable
merit, but the pages smell musty and Dudley likes to be
reminded of the past in which he played no part

Deny, Dudley

Deny the plausibility of any and all capability, because you
certainly have none

But surprisingly, Dudley is a good shopper

He buys discriminately only the finest fabrics, pants that
show off his admirable form

When he walks down the street he likes to know he might
turn a head or two

Dudley is turning no heads

The day is almost done and Dudley has been sad for some time

Nothing to show for it

These are the repeating ones, and despite best attempts at determination, Dudley feels defeated

His mother used to be cruel and kind at the same time—she always had a saying for sad days

Dudley's regrets are invitations, intimacy deferred and longing—he sails with a full hold and feels flush as fish overflow the bulwarks

Somebody asked what Dudley does for work and this is it: the risky business of metaphor

Part Four

1.

Dudley carries pain in his body
From all the bad shit he's done
Wakes sore and thinking
Through a troubled mind
Why isn't there more?
More trouble or more mind
Or more dreams for Dudley to interpret
Against the frenetic pace of emptiness
O Dudley your lament repeats
And the villagers tire
Seeing your base aspect
Sulking through quiet streets

You have been a ghost too long
Forgotten how to be a proper ghost
You inspire only exhaustion
Not fear or boogeyman excitement
Children long to be touched
Before we grow to resent the distance
Between our closest relations
Various apparitions of the subconscious
Extinct birds deliver irrelevant messages

Dudley you are fortified & stale
Once your mind was a thing of beauty
Dudley all the promise

Your teachers loved you
The townspeople loved you
When you moved to the city
Buses would stop at any point
To pick you up
O Dudley

These too are fanciful imaginations
You've been gone such a long time

This pain which cannot be identified
Is captured by abstract analysis
But look once at your brittle flesh
Mark the days whence removed
There can be no substitute
For what remains nameless over time

Have you given up Dudley?
Do you so thoroughly resent
The beck of your Maker?

2.

It has been suspected that Dudley is an aesthete
But the story is much simpler
Begins with the irreconcilable contest
Between Chance and Will
Not that Dudley ever had much of a chance
And will that Dudley make it through the day

That he was loved is assumed
Such a love as Dudley had
Set his world to study & repose
Dudley wrestled with the greatest problems of his time
Forever searching for inconvenient truths
Cheaper bottles of fine wine
These inconsistencies made Dudley enigmatic enough
Though testy & rough
Never given to false pretensions
Never raised a fist unless in solidarity
Dudley shook from cratered ground
Watched with seismic intensity
Movements round his own version of fellowship
Finds the enthused who feel forsaken
Branches from which overripe figs fall

Thus Dudley has often been sick
Languishing in the fecundity of rotten fruit
Whereby his digestive track

Called frequently into question
Dudley developed charms in other ways
Wit notwithstanding
Has a knack
Being in the wrong place at the right time
Making unsavory friends
Cementing his legacy
A misshapen & anamorphic mess

Crux be told Dudley is a destroyer
Philanderer & heretic of medieval proportion
Escaping crucifixion by grace
By sheer bulk of persecution
Dudley continues to mete his tawdry gifts
Resuscitate unforeseen dramas of magnanimous brevity
Greater than any Theatre of the Absurd
Dudley crows like Beneventano
Outlasts his most noble patrons
Survives on an elemental diet of Franciscan charity
Good humor & odd jobs
Patience & strength Dudley does not possess
No Protestant work ethic or sense of duty
Dudley is the same dud since the beginning
Right place & wrong time
Bless the Good Lord Above wrote him dear

There he is Ladies & Gentlemen
Your Dudley Divine
Scourge of the Dispossessed
Chowder of the Disposed
Creamy & crepuscular
Corny as fuck

White Man with a bad past
Dangerous on the inside
His feelings are large & luminous
His breast is hoarse & hairy
No poet can save him but himself
Should he dare a few lines for a final flirt

Swimming in a lake serene
Navigable by ferrymen who take
Only the smallest gold coins

When Dudley drinks
He does not forget
Dudley's Oblivion
Too precious for eternity



3.

Dudley leaves behind no heirs
Has nothing to give anyhow
His apartment a testament
Neglected over the years
Paintings & photographs
Books & ephemera
Meant something once
When proximity was not a concept
When people wanted to be close

Now his archive gathers could-have-beens
Waiting for a bright young scholar
Who will never come
Dudley's artifacts never fondled by soft hands
It could have been more romantic
If some masterwork lay unfinished
Rather than Dudley's dirty whites

He once made his readers feel special
Composing honest lines in a fake surround
His words broke through determined lies
Fears of caring in the old way
The walking-at-evening kind of way
Whence families repair hidden traumas
Taking for granted how we pray silently
An untranslatable resolve for meanings whole

Dudley was a philosopher in his day
Insisting there was nothing to it
Professionally speaking

If there had been worthier universities
Dudley would have haunted the halls
Instead wound his watch around street signs
Pointed nowhere and favored the Free Box
Guilt & Shame were too conventional
A trope never dies once initiated
Dudley had his work cut out
And therefore called it quits

In his own hagiographic melancholy
Dudley resigned to lower powers
Hunger for instance
Developing a complex appetite
Confused Platonic credulity
Courage for example
Sticking it in vulgar Forms
Penetrating & participating
Leaving prophecy out entirely
But keeping his disgusting twist on madness

An errant knight and terrible scribe
A shitty copilot always cracking beers
Changing the station on innumerable radios
Drunk & directionless
Singing unforgivable genres
Dudley came to antigravitational solitude
Pushing everything apart

4.

Dudley prefers the sea with its brine & buoyancy
Riff after riff until penultimate verse signals the shore
Readying the bonfires Dudley collects driftwood
Builds an inferno of skeleton logs
Hides his beers in the liminal brush of anxious nights
Needs at least a sixer to catch any kind of buzz

Remembers a night in adolescence when a stranger
Told of sending a friend out for a final dive
Finally eaten by a shark
A boy began to cry knowing his father
Through this legend
A bottle passed around the fire
The boy mixing his tears with tonic
How lucky to meet the man
Who last touched so great a life
Who gave a push to that fateful voyage
Remaining on the dock for the burden
And an empty boat returning

These stories inform Dudley's sense of well-being
When his dreams go dark he ignites such fortitudes
Into the distance wherein the smallest symbol grows large
Wherein Dudley's choices have not all been for naught

That same night of the Shark Fable
He lay with a soft girl in the cool sand
Touched her body
As only a 14 year-old boy can do
Apprehensive & omniscient
Dudley knew that life would not allow
An indefinite multiplication
Knowing a perfect intoxicating mortality
By the firm cup of breast
His salty tongue slipped clumsily inside

5.

Dudley wanders around palaces of his own making
Like Matteo Ricci builds intricate structures
To impress foreign dignitaries
But Dudley's rooms are furnished with pedestrian things
His memories adhere to no laws
Trade in no cultural currency
Burnish no bright ideas
One might wonder what the point is
Dudley isn't bothered
Goes on decorating
Periodically taking away
Rouses from slumber looking into the hills
His veritable overcoming
Not yet accessible to the masses
One day Dudley you will be over the rage
Your technologies casting shadows on the downtrodden
Namely your preternatural demonstratives

Hey you there!
Gesticulating wildly
Dudley you practice in the cerebral pantry
Foodstuffs of pure invention
For an advanced guard of peasant farmers
Nothing goes to waste
We're saved by an admonishing generation of grandparents
Instead of grabbing us by the ears

They insinuate where we've gone wrong
Our guilt tapers to an over-sized messianic candelabra

Wild antipathies rage in Dudley's Vesuvian center
The kind of death Dudley revisits
Sheathed in phrases from remarkable men and women
The common expression of grave need
Dudley knows deep
Even deeper than that
Where mythology erupts to cover & consecrate
Leaving behind frozen tableaux
Unspeakable archaeologies of the primitive soul
Dudley your baser virtues are forever swaying in the breeze
You seem so fresh in these orthographic durations
Squinting into a fine light to decipher systems & signs

We'll never catch up to those cascades of molten language
Bereft of models we can only copy the exemplars
Pray by candlelight for a clerical fidelity
Dudley you dum-dum
Don't you use a computer
To save your Articles of Confederation?
Don't you duplicate the Documents of Incorporation?
All your business is Nobody's
Even Odysseus has stopped playing tricks on you

Dudley don't fret
You still have your hair
Your broken isn't so bad
If you put yourself to it
You might still find a woman
To call your own

Use your key strokes Dudley
Score the average consent
Tear where the line deems ready
You know how to fold & fib
You too were praised for your cleverness
Once upon a time
What happened Dudley?
We've been asking and asking
Your only response is to send us back
With conflicting narratives
Curious abandonments
As if you vacated as a matter of principle
Walked away at whatever pace
The end result of shabby rooms
Subtle & annoying consciousness
Nowhere to sit
Nothing to look at
Just space & absence
A lack of disciplined philosophy
You lied Dudley
You were no Thinker
You were the empty pitcher
Constantly full of need

6.

This is what Dudley saw: a grand Cathedral
With massive doors opening
With long paths sloping upward
Entry to a circular waiting room
An elevator large & spacious
Dudley waits for his entourage
After walking through the city
There was also a sea
It resurrected a prophecy
Bodies were diving from mastheads
Coming to rest before danger
Possibility of occupying the same space
In time simultaneous
Seeing himself Dudley knew he was there
The girl ran into herself on the street
Peering into the café window
The interior receded toward the deluged city
She stops at the entrance of the Cathedral
Dudley finds her with an old friend
She is singing and playing guitar in the garden
An old song written for this occasion
The Cathedral has been calling
There is a fountain of tea
As it flows everyone takes a cup
She orchestrates a new game
Tea is splashed from cups & pots

Everyone is laughing
She comes to meet Dudley in the elevator
There are designated packets on the floor
Dudley is given an identity
(For some reason he is from Dresden)
There is light on the way up

7.

The hour of Dudley's second coming approaches
Maybe it is his third or fourth
Who can keep count with such a shifty bastard?
Dudley watches the wasps at work
Marks the time of day and degree of activity
The sound & attention
Those who see the hive laboring in terrifying intensity
Children occupy the streets
Grow into bodies too slow for their galloping minds
Dudley follows them with his eyes
Collapses his expectations for a peaceful demise

8.

Dudley is not yet a voice but goes way way back
His fragments dug from the same necropolis
Urns & coins
Faces that seize the beholder
We recognize ourselves
In these ancient recollections
This basic presumption
Dudley's basis for more or less everything

He enjoys trips to the Museum
When he can't sit longer at the Library
Too distracted by pretty patrons
He stares into stone and rusted bronze
All of this buried
Why bother putting it behind glass?
Dudley you ask so often
When it's painfully clear to all and sundry
You have that deep need we can't resolve

Think about shelves upon shelves
Constellations of straining intelligence
Not that yours was any match
But you got the gist just the same
Tried to catch the eye of each generous reader
Celestial fantasies half-symposium
Half-bacchic frenzy

And no museum for that!

You've lived this long
A shame to give in
Before amassing some small tokens
To accompany the journey wherever
Since our only way to remember
Is to die and stay down
With this simple gratification
Interred with your true interlocutor

9.

Try as he might the words don't progress
Same ones keep returning like pests
Dudley itchy & aggravated
Sensing an onslaught of lumps
He troubles with the present tense
Sitting at the café
The television is turned up
News of suicide & shame
Dudley curates an artistic insensitivity
The sound logic of it
Doesn't believe in a solution
Or speeches before some body politic

Thinks about that poor mother orca
Carried her dead calf for weeks
Her grief became a spectacle
A call for action in remedy
Fix our broken ocean!
Fix our broken hearts!
Her pain was used reflectively
To show our tragic ambitions
We talk & talk
Go on killing
We cannot stop this suffering
We should have let her grieve in peace
Without all the cameras

She would have let her baby go
She is not a dumb fish

Dudley smokes a cigarette
Surveys the scene
Still swatting at mosquitos
He once knew a girl with special needs
Who could not speak quietly
This seemed also a gift
She yelled everything
There was cause for constant excitement
But maybe we are all like this
We think we have control
But it is innate
We are either Dudley or not-Dudley
Try as he might there is no original
To be made or wrought or wrung
The same pesky words & problems
If we're lucky a sense of humor
Which Dudley does boast
A somewhat functional body
Be glad Dudley
Your swollen member in the morning
Be glad you wake to pee middle of the night

Part Five

*I have seen the mountains
I have seen the sea
If you need Dudley
Well he is me*

1.

When they flooded the valley my father was away at school.
When he returned the house was surrounded by water. He
stayed up all night watching the lake.

This confrontation with failure is a recognition of need.
I've held it so long. I've fed in the trash of culture. What is
there for me to give back?

I've chased it and end up returning, like all my best efforts,
searching through the words of others, songs of others,
beauty of others—a greeting is all I can ask, after time apart
fearing the space between, falling into it is not so bad—oh
God, deliver me unto that common world all else.

The hand of pity—what can I do? The bird from my broken
heart remains in the center of the sun. Garbage is the
new black.

What are the terms of composition? I've seen the dangers
of being alone, turning myself away. So to come back down
the mountain, not following but also not afraid of hoof-path,
where elk and bear lead into the city, drinking from the common
fountain. If I had kids I would want them to play in the
streets and stay out late. I would take another beer and listen
to the night sounds until the poem crept from its sanitorium
of calamity: “here we are” it says and stays that way.

2.

My melancholy is famous, my oh-no mood. I've cause for celebration: the spectacular assumption of things-will-get-better, the music will somehow speak for the people once again instead of swindling hours & cash. When I am on the dance floor I grind to Woody Guthrie and back it up to Bob Dylan. What language barrier exists I put there myself, pushing an intimate exchange, seduced by the perfume around me—a small touch as two strangers sit side by side on the metro—the casual glance.

Oh there was a time I would have conjured a fanciful role-play. You: unsuspecting yet open, out of my league, desperate to be possessed. Me: inscrutable, a little more than saucy, suggestive enough to warm between your thighs. We glide silently off the train together to your simple, submissive flat. You lay on the bed and offer everything, whereupon I take and take and take and take.

3.

I once stayed at a hotel in Austria where Mozart stayed. I took a nude photo of myself in the mirror hoping nature would offer me the same gifts.

Sometimes you just want a lie to be a lie and a truth to be a truth. A fortune is not a warning, it is a means of analysis—

Dudley you are no John Brown
No Buffalo Soldier
No Molly Maybe
Your shoelaces are forever hanging on
When they frail we all sing forgiveness

A good man can do so much more damage when he's despised...

I've watched my grandfather grow old and I've grown old—a generation of proud men in pain and embarrassed for who they've become, the most basic distress—vital breath can barely escape the lips, heavy, herculean it falls only to the lesser belief: man is that final animal.

Invent stories of my own elders, cull the ideal age from its sleepy hollow—better yet steal and steal, find best practice, right Master for the Job.

Then I turned to maps, fought off the poles, succumbed to archipelagos and mistaken identities, betrayed false borders and crossed into even dirtier latitudes—I became bronze and archaic—even the Aegean seemed a sad sea for such an Ancient Mariner.

Dudley what a sham.

4.

I am the saddest man. Every night I find my little corner, drinking or wishing to drink, eavesdropping as others enjoy personable conversation—letting my furrowed brow get the best of me. Sometimes I snap out of it, let somebody else occupy my post. Take a turn and see how it feels! It's an honorific title: Saddest Man. Things should only get better.

Any minute you might walk through the door.

5.

My Dark Lady remains a fiction. I've dreamed her, sure,
and even used that line once or twice to get laid. But
need has a way of pressing in, changing faces, unsettling a
morbid gut. She is not commensurate with death but she is
always slipping away, my own orphic frustrations, leery of
the precipitous path, forever in the lurch. Dudley's Church
of the Lurch.

I would have made a good minister in all the sinister ways
and might have helped a few sorry souls along the way. My
pews would always be polished and my choir boys sweet
as angels. I met a guy the other day who reminisced of
Caravaggio's Madonna of the Dirty Feet. I prefer that sultry
Mother bending over with generous bosom, all-too-know-
ing and sly as she squashes the snake. I curated a lovely
boner in the Borghese.

My D. L. knows all this and more. She knows enough to
handle me.

6.

There is no memory save the spaces we reenter
Even when it doesn't feel good
I still recognize the corpses of my future selves
Teeming the old stomping grounds
Whether women or wine
My failures were all predictable
I hope to be remembered like Kant
You could keep time with my indiscretions

But work was done
It may not amount to much
Or matter much to anyone at all
But work was done
By speech or by act
By argument or attraction
By booze or by book
I hope to impress upon you
Nothing else
But Dudley was a reader

7.

I remember a pretty girl in a field of daisies, the sun and the light in her hair. The ground is now tilled over and in the earth our sweetness buried—soggy in February, muted by drizzle. When I reach the point where we broke trail and moved to make love out of sight, I carry the same interruption upon my measure. I don't lament the old sagas of loss and forfeit. No, this is only so far as the bending vine, birds in the tangle, and slight inoculation of rain. There is nothing to homeward bound, as my increase spells smoke and wind, water and bone. I copy all I can and bring verses from back of the mind: a simple language for this alone.

8.

My notebook is burdened with return, holed-up in this strange room but in a memory all the same—I can flip back pages to find argument, tension, an outcome made prosaic by the attitude of my biggest disability. A safety pin keeps the light out from back-alley blinds. Kids bound up and down the stairs, tormented & playful. A dead horse don't need his own shit.

We encourage life in the dregs. Covered in greasy white hair from a three-legged dog, my shadow follows disheveled streets searching for cigarette butts. Voices rise where walls are forever thin.

Everything is suspicious. The slim difference between sadness & need—one stumbles while the other limps along squinty-eyed—empties trash bins for nobody's benefit, can't stay for fear of mistaken restitution. I've seen the worst of the world—eating gas station burritos and day-old deli case—I've spilled hot sauce on my only pair of pants.

Drowsiness defeats ambition. Not so much we're all tired, just too close to giving up.

I've come here to make a decision. With a song in my head
I mumble my way to the motel door—looking out I see cars
full of lives, full of garbage—in every car someone waits for
something to happen, for some surprise announcement to
set them free.

I would wait there too. I've come to be more of myself,
looming through repetition. Not sure if these are store-
fronts familiar I slink by westward toward the water.

I need sure-fire a final slogan: a banality of evil barely vis-
ible, but also laid bare.



10.

My lineage is Dudley all the way down
Seymour who was a deadbeat
Uncles returning or not returning from war
This has called together a broken sequence
Of men who left everything to be desired

When I write about my mother
Fabrication is closer to the truth
I see her clearing fields
Lighting brush fires
Her palms forever blackened
Tending the edges and tossing cinders
Back into the central theme

In this way I illuminate
What has gone dark
Revenge is better served?
Has the scene ever changed?
I'm aware of new aesthetics
But I'm such a classic slob
No trend is going to save
What's better described as Dudley

Make me a verb
O muse
Place me gently

On the lips of any transformed soul
Stone or cicada it doesn't matter
Long as they find a way to sing
My everlasting name

11.

Salutations to my friends
My street urchins
My barmaids & hags & hovel hunters
May we all share the rotten earth tonight
Nurtured on mudflats and acres of clams

12.

Here's how it is and wants to be
She had known there was no use
Power was too prevalent
Her own tenacity would destroy
Any chance at a normal life
Or force her to the margins
So she began to resist
In all the small delightful ways
The dirty ways
Ways which had means
Creative & cruel
Marked by vast intelligence

She had literary counterparts
But this was hers
She clung to it fiercely
In early hours after work
Smiling into cheap beers
Friends flirting haplessly
Leading to a grand exclamation

Then the mountain
Oracles in the ancient world
Were high from huffing fumes
Vapors emitted from fissures
Internal to the mount

Seers sought the caves & cracks
She knew this etymology too
womb-like & uncertain
Leading to hysteria
When she cut herself
She felt the bloody function

Some might say she cursed me
We met in bandages
Both of us released from the hospital
I was drunk when the accident happened
And since I was Dudley
There was nothing else to say
She had cut deep this time
But kept too much control
Doctors stitched her up
Sent her to psych
She was fucked up

She foretold
Told me she'd hold me to it
That's why I'm here begging
These few remaining pages
To let me go
A few last textures
To rub Braille-like
With my eyes closed
Blank & spiraling
Against the watermark
I hold you up to the light
All is revealed

13.

This morning I wake early
Walk the shore path into town
My dream was busy & crowded
But I found her typical admonishing
"Can your mood fit in your case?"

I remember when they sluiced the hogback
Blasted fill to raise the streets
Gave us dry ground to walk on
The rain didn't stop
Just saturated a new kind of filth
Out of which I spored
Populated & prayed

O Dudley
Who is a law unto himself
Whose lines converge in time
Bending to the curve & continuum
Occupying all space at once
I carry us to that fateful cave
Scattering leaves in the draft

My mood
My case
My cause
My curse

14.

Here's how it is and needs to be
Dudley can be nothing but Dudley
All Dudleys are not the same
It takes a Dudley to know a Dudley

My subscription is not renewed annually
With all dues buying beers
Whatever is leftover
I stick in my sock and save for her
Knowing full well
She will not sell herself for sock-money

We go on
She burns cities & villages
Doesn't look back
She needs me to remember
Truly my Queen
Dudley a royal Doof
Reduced to a simple plea
For Dudley's sake
Do what you ought to do
For I am him and he is me

15.

I watch the sunrise
Along with the others
Stupefied by morning
They stand outside on balconies
In hotels I cannot afford
With views the same as mine
In the great equality of beauty
I walk slowly to the bus stop
Pull out my last cigarette
Smoke flush to the filter

This is what she always taught me:
You will be alone forever
Do not be discouraged by this
You are doing what you're told
There is a plan even for Dudley
A magisterial shit-storm
Designed just for you
Your kingdom is eternal
It flowers in springtime
Freezes in winter
You are alone
But in good company
Keep to the fringes
To the places you know best
You will be recognized & common

When you cross the great waters
Always sit so you can see the mountain

16.

My voices belong to me and I cherish them
I acknowledge all the inspiration & sadness
Each teacher & detractor
Books I've read
Women I've longed to touch
Those I've touched and longed to hold
Where I've gone wrong is my greatest misfortune
Dudley's deception is powerful medicine
Dudley's deferral is no longer an option
Dudley is always forgetting his things

Somedays the view is obscured
I sit in the middle of the boat
Thinking about my passage
Friends who are gone
I walk to the shrouded bow
Throw coins for our fares across

As we've done for decades
We'll go to the Art Museum
For solace and to take a solid dump
There will be a painting
To leave a lasting impression
We will describe this painting
Then be done with it
It will be your turn to decide

The Mother of All Creation
Foreground to the mountain
There are snakes at her feet
She clutches a fish
She is dark & naked
Dudley concentrates on her center
On the vibrant fish with mouth agape
As if to suckle her breast

The fish eye is black and open
Dudley slips in
Hews against the wind
Rustling her leaves
She bends to rearrange
Each letter its own word
She needs only four

We

Are

All

Duds

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Your book is a scrap of paper that blows about in the streets, litters cities, piles up in the trash bins of the planet. It is cellulose, and cellulose it will become.

– Gabriel Zaid

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