



Essential Tremor

poems

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SASKATOON TO COALDALE, JULY, HIGHWAY

Not Winnifred the town we couldn't see.
The fox we weren't sure was a fox but might
have been if not a mutt. Not the way we—
the air-conditioning—not a fight
but cordially, frequently turning on and off.
Each farm lay more abandoned than the next
but curiously well-tended; neat but left.
There was a house we didn't pass that's fixed
itself nevertheless as seen by one looking
back—seen-through, its thin frame all pane-
less windows so it's that day—sun blinking,
light cloud and blue we're accustomed to, fine,
alone, impossibly far the porous house
as we drove on, impervious.

ANGEL GLACIER, MOUNT EDITH CAVELL

Your hanging
body
is not you
all
but spilled
ages ago from the hidden bowl
above when marmots hid in these caves
and do still.

But we can pretend
you've descended
to us on purpose,
that the turquoise
lake at your toe, my boy
denying his fear
of your calving's thunder
always will be,
pretend that you won't
in his lifetime
(almost sure)
shrink,
misshapen,
disappear.

July 2011

PASSPORT

A sign in the corridor will lead
you to his room. It also leads
him to his room. (He's added
his mid-initial—P—with pen.
It irks him when the P is left behind.)

It's moving day, from Pineview Manor to
the west. Clear out the rancid butter, roll
the chesterfield away. (The west is where
you don't need furniture.) Where to, this cedar
chest? (It's guarding annals of a church

no longer there, baptisms kept in fine
Germanic script.) Where to, the family files,
the genealogies, this thin book?
(Next to his chest in Zanzibar, Calcutta,
Liechtenstein, Bombay, it opens

to a decade's travel. Linger—the streets
flutter with colour, flags hung for the great
festival, that ornate wooden door, bells
tolling in the dusk letting out
like a hem as a child hightails it across

the square; these pages lined with exits,
entries.) Bring it with the diapers and the clock
to admit its bearer (P intact) past
the tick-tock runway, docks, all moorings
recognizable or not, on the way to lost.

ESSENTIAL TREMOR

Her shaking hands; he cuts her meat,
lifts and stows the tumblers (lipstick-stained,
dishwasher warm) and pulls the needle out
and pushes in the morphine for her migraines.
Essential is the car and God, the egg
farm's daily stench sent by the daily weather,
Trimipramine, Tim Hortons, there's a leg
of highway just a cinch, an easy half hour.
There's a drawer full of Hallmark cards,
each other's fondest wishes; the top one fresh
with embossed lilies from the anniversary
(their 51st) when, under her spoon collection,
he addressed himself, *Dear Dave, dear husband,*
signed *love* and her name in his steady hand.

NICKEL MINES

Nickel Mines, Pennsylvania, October 2, 2006

You can't see
the small bones
of the five girls
who stopped
growing that day,
nor the worms
of their decay,
nor their mothers'
arms warm
around their killer's

beloved.
The eldest said
shoot me first,
stood in harm's
way unafraid of death
wearing
an apron, like
her mother,
baking bread
for the one
with the
handgun,
shotgun
and rifle.

ESSENTIAL TREMOR

If only it were that: a little
trembling in the hand. If we could tell
your leg be still and still it would. Be it-
self before we heard the news, reeling,
before the shift and the settle into our restless
bed, the shudder as you roll—
here and gone and here momentous
as aurora and nothing I can hold.
Ends always with me spoon-feeding
and push-chairing, the secret life
of drool which maybe isn't half so bad as it looms;
in our room would gather the minuscule
beauties, for instance wind flickering the aspen,
every quaver I'm given from your hand.