

Richard Jarrette

from **It Is Never Finished**

*what do you remember as you ride your one note
on its dark sunbeam out into the daylight*

— W.S. Merwin

**Crawling Away From Home In My Diaper At Ten Months
I Was Found On A Street In Los Angeles By A Truck Driver
Who Began Knocking On Doors**

A living weathercock crow studies the crossroads —
people heading in directions laid out for them.

Magnolia blossoms show the sky what they've made of root wa-
ters.

Mourning doves sparrows at their business wheeling
hawks and vultures test the borders of heaven.

I've been on the way to this flowering acacia all my life
hanging on to the reins of a cabbage butterfly.

(W.S. Merwin, "The Scarab Questions")

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**Feeling That My Rage Is Too Complicated I Visit Mei Yao-Ch'en
Hoping to Pick Through the Artless Simplicity Of His Mind
To Find The Profound Spiritual Insight He's Known For**

He's annoyed with the shit-maggot stuffed crows
crying omens to the west wind from his treetops.

Calls me a broken-legged goose a sitting duck says
it's one thing to put your war weapons down another

to savor white garlic pan-fried in dew — *Look it's just
a tired horse that knows his way home in the dark.*

(Mei Yao-Ch'en, "8th Month, 9th Sun: Getting Up In The Morning, I
Go Out To The Latrine And Find Crows Feeding On Maggots There"
and "Farmers," translated by David Hinton)

**105 Degrees Already This Morning I'm Startled
By A Phainopepla Never Seen This Far North
And Wonder Why I'm Still Alive**

One bird or trillions more
I feel the reach of my life in them.

Some shoot into the skew-jawed barn
through lit dust to shadows.

By the time I was eight years old
I had a ground nest in Cats' Forest —

dropped out of a window to sleep there
no one ever knew no one to tell.

Something like an emperor penguin
guarding the egg on his feet.

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**Old Friends Say They Would Stop And Visit But
the Appointment The Meeting The Wife**

You've got a foot in the land
of the dead and you're ghosting.

Invitations ceased long ago
people you've uplifted turn away.

*So what do you do when you want
nothing from this human world?*

Undertones of desire in this dear
asking an indifferent truth.

No matter the season I seem to
write nothing but autumn songs.

(Po Chü-I, "Off-Hand Chant," translated by David Hinton)

**A Few Months After Finding My Father Dead At Home Edmund
Kara Gives Me Lessons In Theology While Carving The Phoenix
For The Nepenthe Courtyard In Big Sur**

The master said he's all about hair and folding waves of cloth let
a shock-mute boy drift near who finally said the block the unfinished

hand of the outstretched left arm of Moses the right holding tablets the
ten commandments would be *a damning fist* — No, he said, *a blessing
palm*

turned to the Phoenix with mallet and chisel to bite into ancient water
cells inside her redwood burl that spat at him — *She's mocking me.*

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**Studying Clouds Mixed With The Smoke Of Another
Fifty Homes Burning In Fires South Of Here**

Ravaged long ago my heart can still open
a little and sorrows all over the sky.

Some mosquitos fed on my blood last night
but it's not in my heart to blame them.

**A Fifty Dollar Bill Flutters Out Of A Book I think Has The Poem
In It I'm Looking For and Letters From William Stafford
Robert Aitken And Baba Ram Dass**

I made the monk's vow of poetry —
penniless anonymity.

Besides
money's had a phobia about me from the beginning.

Four or five people seem to enjoy my company
and a scrub jay who perches on the patio
chair afternoons.

My barista doesn't charge me.

Was it seven or eight dragonflies
on my son's shoulders that time he sunned himself
on a rock in the creek?

Ram Dass says that a particularly
contemplative one will say hello for him.

I don't drink much anymore — it's no painkiller.
I wash my face in crows.

I'll trade a book for a bottle of wine.

Stafford says he'll try all the harder.
Grandmotherly Aitken asks —

Do you have a teacher?

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After Reading Yang Wan-li's line
suddenly he's a lone goose balanced on a bent reed

A crow roots in the flower box with his beak
bees express sincere interest in my right ear —

maybe the tinnitus so loud they believe that's
a lush summer meadow in there singing.

I thought I'd row out on a lake of melancholy
but I always hear my daughter asking about

that melon collie howling in the graveyard
and why it made Huck and Tom so nervous.

The demon drilling like a devil in my spine
clocks out — the jay could find an emerald ring.

(Yang Wan-li, "Crossing Open-Anew Lake," translated by David Hinton)

**To The Woman Who Made A Wide Detour
To Avoid Me Just The Two Of Us Walking
On Pfeiffer Beach Big Sur**

Storm clouds opened one blue eye looking
at a lake of light on the charcoal grey sea.

Sea ducks struggled under monster waves
carving the coast — years later I realized

the birds fed on food stirred up by Aleutian
storms twenty four hundred miles northwest.

Not hard to imagine why you would avoid
a lone man so far off the highway in winter.

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**After Idling On My Porch For Awhile Pondering
Lines Of Tu Fu I Open A Used Copy Of Federico
García Lorca Translations By Sarah Arvio**

Tu Fu asks

*How many times in one man's life
can he listen to heaven's music?*

Neither sad nor happy the moon
makes its simple journey.

The bright stars and planets —
it all seems like a gesture to keep up.

I won't be late.

Then come dreams of forgetting
taking the fall
enemies.

In the morning
a yellow and black oriole in the pink myrtle
and bees.

Evils of the world draw their rasps.

I open a book —

*Wind shapes the dust
into silver prow*

underlined by someone else.

(Tu Fu, "Song For A Young General," translated by Sam Hamill;
Federico García Lorca, "Bells for the Dead," translated by Sarah
Arvio)

I Turn To My Grandmother's Things For Succor

My master said

*On the last day of the world
I would want to plant a tree*

and the roots touch deep water
the dead

leaves in the clouds.

And what would you do?
he asked.

Plant my grandmother I said
my mother's mother

though my youngest son touching
the casket said

She's with the smooth god.

I keep her things by my bed — her #12
thimble, Ibis scissors,

bone crochet hooks from before
the war

the Civil War —

when I wake in the dark hours
I touch them

secure as a tree
in your garden?

(W.S. Merwin, "Place")

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**Mad Thug President Seeks To Roll Back Clean
Emission Rules Even Against Industry Advice
As Battle With Violent Thoughts Lurches On**

A salmon-breasted hummingbird locks eyes
with Stevie-the-Calico-Kitten transfixed.

Smokey-the-Cat drifts by to confer nose to nose —
they settle on lying down on a cool path stone.

The sun takes its startling heat over rooftops
and then behind the withered western hills.