

DESCANT

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## I. Works of Grace

The Voice

It is the rain  
touching the window in the next room  
a door slamming in another part of the house  
  
chimes in the lightest of breezes  
the memory of a music box  
the stirring of birds  
before dawn

Trees

Great arms of earth

held for years against arched blankness

## Fishing

Lake mirrors early morning  
one sky sure and light  
one gently rocking

Your first cast sings out  
split arcs spin across water

Somewhere in trees along the shore  
a bird's cry breaks the stillness  
pulls you into its image

Lines to my Mother

Sitting outdoors in late evening  
we mark familiar shapes in darkness

There is no moon

only the sound of our voices  
faint record of stronger ties  
of memory dispensed as knowledge  
and kept hidden in a hollow of the earth



## Rosary

Your heels click stacatto on the cement  
click through puddles of red and blue light

A drunk sleeps by one wall  
his face stained  
glassy colors

You approach  
steady click click  
click and sharp intake of breath

That night you dream dark dreams

Moonlight  
a knife  
sliding across your throat

feeling you  
swallowing

words

Inherit

Watch my father watch me sing  
feeling me his and gone

heart's depth  
made stress, release

to green  
slopes dropping

watch my father  
watch me sing

## Elegy

This year  
for the first time  
watching you bend  
like grass in April  
wind I believe  
feel the season's push  
the jealous earth that gathers  
the roots of the living

## Lullaby

dogs barking  
yard to yard  
down the block

mosquito sprayer's mist  
hissing through dimly  
lit streets

radio from the next room  
laughter over clatter of dishes

someone practicing the piano

slam of the screen door  
leading outside

Works of Grace

I

high tide in late autumn  
endless gray motion  
faint taste of salt

II

a child's voice  
muted and indistinct  
through an open window

III

dog on a country road  
barking at the moon

IV

slow work of spiders  
relentless as rain

V

whiteness shoulders the tent  
rises up from the bench  
smooth under your hands  
hard against your back

## VI

fists pressed to eyes  
till color breaks the dark  
stopping breath

## VII

always back to this  
rising and falling  
trembling like leaves  
that won't let go

## VIII

tree of flame  
stone  
white-hot  
touched to your lips

## II. Turning

Tent Meeting, Beaumont 1963

I lean against my aunt  
look past the back and forth  
of thin paper fans  
as words fall through summer heat  
and whir of cicadas

I fall asleep watching  
old Mrs. Ford  
her upraised hands  
the color of the pale night sky



## An Uncle's Funeral

Magnolia

July heat

cattle pressed to barbed wire

dry sod ruffling

falling

old farmer who taught my uncle the land

says through tears he should have gone first

June Night (called in from play)

warm air

humming with summer

light falling around shadow

balanced in the doorway

silhouette calling me home

running toward the house

I picture our fan's movement

its cool breath

## Watching for Planes

My father did not fight  
but watched his brothers go  
brave in uniform

I see him

All day he has tended  
the green rows he walks  
straining to hear  
rattle of guns  
screams of men and metal tearing

Only once the plow stops  
He squints at the sky  
watching

To My Grandfather

Your hands crushing  
lifting me up  
our single shared memory  
that pull

be glad you are gone  
into earth  
into darkness be glad

still this pull of blood  
you hover in the cool night air  
you cling to my skin like rain

Meeting

Conversations blur  
in the room's width

She watches him speak  
his jaw's supple motion

That night  
watching her sleep  
he recalls her silhouette  
framed in the window

hears again  
the sound from the moonlit yard  
that startled him  
as their glances met

New

Your feet  
touching earth

Smooth stone  
in your palm

memory a turning  
a listening

## Field

Hilltop Unit, Texas Department of Corrections

The men work the field  
like one man with a hundred arms  
all swinging together  
all wearing white

a hundred hoes flash in the sun  
up and down  
rhythm perfect

sound of metal  
biting sod

Driving East

Brittle blue sky

changing earth  
red from black

I hover between what I see  
and what carries it to me



Happening

He was on the roof  
with a gun  
thought she was an animal  
so he said

The dark of his body  
blocked out the starlight  
the stars

He waited till they came for him  
her weeping all the while

June bugs bump the screen  
in the silence after the telling

Truth is stranger than fiction we say  
as we walk toward the door

stranger than fiction

Midnight, Holding Court

for M. A.

Her grandbaby sleeps  
on a pallet on the floor.

Evening strolls by,  
no rush. Her people  
stop in, passing time.

She sips her drink  
and watches the cafe.

Behind a blue haze of smoke  
she waits steady.

This Dark Night

the moon is an eye  
laced into the fragile tops of trees

Lake holds its wooded rim  
in watery images

Slow release  
the trees begin to move  
begin to edge toward the water  
toward the shimmering faraway moon

Arrival

Call it up

it falls to rhythm

clothes itself

in sound

in rings around the moon

which mean rain

in an owl's call

in gray autumn ocean

twisted wreath of hair

around the bone

Dream

Stars like pin-pricks  
in fabric stretched  
across light

I dream the moon  
is something poured out  
and raise my hands to it

the deeper into the night I am taken  
the brighter the spots of light  
the darker the fabric  
the darker

### III. Echoes

Echo

Speak across this valley

Hear earth

throw back your voice

## River

My father's father baptized in this river. Muddy water swirling around his chest, he eased the people one by one into the current. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost he raised them dripping from their shadows.

Today I stand at the water's edge, and what washes over my feet is the issue of the darkness lying cradled in the river's deepest heart. What I scoop up in my hands, what I carry now to my lips, is its memory.



October, Fishing on Galveston Bay

I watch from the jetty

sunrise through mist

line like hair

across glass

below the surface

drawn by memory

fish move against tide

November, Reading in the Afternoon

Someone walks by  
just outside the window

leaves crunch underfoot  
clothing rustles

even the sound of breathing  
rides on the wind

carries to you  
laced with the burnt smell  
of autumn

### Racing Home

I look back over my shoulder  
and urge the horse to a gallop

My heels  
touch his flanks

He lengthens his stride  
his wind-whipped mane  
stinging my arms  
my face

Together we hear the car  
topping the hill behind us  
We feel it find the road's ruts

From the porch they cheer us on  
Their cries fly to us on the wind

Dream

Through sleep  
music or your voice  
faint as trains  
in late evening

I will not let you go  
words relentless as rain

behind a door that I must open  
someone waits

Concert, Two Pianos

I count  
measures

My hands  
touch keys

blur music  
like color

on canvas  
Sound touches

sound over  
glossy surface

like hands  
that welcome

each other's  
touch

White

wall of purest light  
bending image to sound  
to touch

Dance

This Christmas Eve  
like any other  
she wants to dance

Her son opens his arms  
smiling  
and she slips  
into the music

Her gray head  
rests on his chest  
as they waltz  
to soft-hummed blues

The Truth Concerning Rabbi Ben Ezra

Minutes are piling up  
too many to hide  
too many to step over

Our doorways and windows are filled  
totally blocked

The street is cluttered with them  
There is no place where they do not accumulate  
no place to keep them all

We burn them  
Their ash hovers over us

We throw them out  
Their brothers find us

We ignore them  
They will take us

not with strength  
but with numbers



Ocean Dream

You are miles out  
past the channel  
past sight of shore

The only sound  
light slap of waves  
against the hull

The only taste  
thin layer of salt  
left on your lips  
by the wind

Fishing on the Way Back

for M. A.

Heels and all my last day  
I slid down the banks of the Ohio  
White bass were running

Girl

it was a sight  
Earl hollering you better move  
It's nearly five now

and me still slipping off to the water  
its promise of one good catch  
before going back

## Reunion

The old men play dominoes  
at a card table in the shade  
The old women walk the graveyard  
recalling each stone

Mandolin guitar and banjo play Saturday night  
Music issues from the place itself  
from the roots of the faded grass

Driving home I still feel it  
The hills wear it like they wear trees  
particular to this part of the country

A Sense of Place

Riverside Unit, TDC

Sunset framed in fence

cigarette glow passes between two women  
two women's hands

overhead

birds play in razor wire

Children

Someday it will amaze you  
that smiling out from pictures  
they never dream of you

You look into a closed world  
and wonder what gave structure and content  
if not your gestures  
your cries

We wondered the same of our parents  
looking out at us from a place we could not touch

Wind

The horse floats  
effortless circles

I turn with him  
calling his name

Sharp crack  
of whip  
marks loss  
of words  
to wind

## Horses

White horses  
falling  
through mind  
eye the screen  
that is  
the world  
echoes  
the hoof-rung  
rock