



Sample Poems from *Lucky Break*

Lucky Break

A white marble wheel
has many uses: travel,
for example, or shaping clay;
a simple lathe but, like any tool,
needing balance. Else
the center, which is empty,
cannot hold, lets loose
its own purpose,
fragments flying untethered
from any force centripetal,
explodes its form, stone
wheeling, broken
into clavicle and pelvis,
petal and wing,
like disaster,
like the first creation:
joy and death spilling
from the cracked jar—ah!
the thing it isn't and
ah! the thing it yet
might be.

What It's About

with thanks to Allen Ginsberg

Spring is about standing in the dark under the darker eucalyptus
and feeling the future like an ache in the throat,
in the lungs like drowning,
like waiting in silence for the bombs to fall.

Bombs are about who's lying and who's counting, and counting
is about numbers we agree to. Agreeing
is about investing your money in the same things.

Money is about money and also about what you don't have.
Not having is about pain and pain is about being broken each year,
being broken by promises by grace by the bursting
seed-pods of deceit
and telling ourselves we will heal or if we cannot
telling ourselves it's our place to be stupid and broken.

Our place is about three cars in the driveway
and streetlights and sidewalks
and sidewalks are about what's worth protecting.

Protection is about terror and destruction and inevitable suffering
and suffering is always
about birth, about stains and mystery

and mysteries are always about the silence
the awful, chilling silence that fills the right now before
whatever is about to happen happens.

March 18, 2003

How Words Began

Crab: *from Old German* krabben, *originally Greek* graphein, “*to write*”

Some say it began with a crab
scuttling sideways and clickety across the rocks—
across glistening gray-black sand. And a man
standing on the rocks and following,
first with his eyes, then with his feet,
the marks indented and dimpling the wet
tongue of the shore. A man wanting much
to hold the sun still, to lock the
here and missing here and missing sea.
A man turned over and over by the ends
of feelings, the light fleeing and returning,
the deep-in-the-bones ache pulling the living
from the dead each spring. Just such a man, kneeling
in the black-gray graphite sand, traced
with his finger the memory
of crab, of ragged claws, of urgent
return to salt.

House and Universe

To mount too high or descend too low is allowed in the case of poets who bring earth and sky together.

The first walls are a great animal sleeping inside the sound of the heart. Sound of the rain. Breath.

The second walls are far, like what is near in a fever. So far away there is no sense of wall, only odors and voices, and the very smallness of the self.

The third walls take you back to the first. To sleep. To dreams. And these are the walls you eventually fall through. This is when you learn what your lungs are for and how alone you are inside your pain.

The fourth walls are everywhere, and you can move among them, listening to the talk of a green bird in a cage. Or you lie on your back and turn them upside down and spend the evening alone and calling. Inside these walls are the spaces that might be yours. One day you make a little version of the world on a scale you can lean above. You stand in the hall with the green bird in the cage beside you, opening and closing the gate you've made in this world, and this is when you begin to know who you are.

The fifth walls are full of ghosts. When you sleep inside these walls it is hard to know which world you are walking in. These walls are old, and they are where your dreams will come from for a long time. Inside these walls you carry an invisible thing you don't yet know how to name, even when it greets you, resting its cold hand on your back as you climb the stairs. You don't speak of it, but each time you come back inside these walls, it moves close to you.

Inside the sixth walls you take your books, turning over each page where the invisible thing you carried home from the ghosts takes on voices and shapes and tells you stories about yourself. These walls are old and high, and here you discover how small a woman is

supposed to be, and how big your ghosts are. You begin to write back to them and all the empty space you find you can fill with what you want to say,

and saying makes around you the seventh walls. Words that pull the white peaks of the sky together, a roof the rain now beats down on, that the creek rises beside. House of wind. House of water. Sound of the heart. The rain.

Fears in Solitude

Coleridge, alone and afraid, wanted to
cry out. Instead he grew angry
at the way politicians juggled the name
of God. Instead he grew sick
of the owl atheism hooting in the twilight.
Instead he took long walks in the country
with William and Dorothy, packed his books
and left England to take long walks in Germany
with Kant and Goethe. Everything hurt him.
Everything he loved turned away. In his sleep,
a wind was blowing, and it brushed the strings
of his fears. Waking, he moved among
the shadows of figures that shone bright
in those dreams. If there is a God, he thought,
we are His severed hands, playing
a brutal music He cannot stop,
and cannot help but hear.