

Cephalocaudal

For Diane

Meaning built from the top down
e.g. an infant's head proportionately

larger than the rest of the body till
it catches up later, striking some sort

of balance, before old age sets in &
the process reverses. I try to explain

all this to you, to tell you how I find
all this somewhat sacred, and you're

nicely indulgent as I stumble for words.
Unlike me, you were never on bad terms

with living physical life, say tenderly: Go
turn on the tap, keep your bad thoughts in

a box; please fill my glass now for the night's
dry moments. I leap to, then report for our nightly

hug. My body understands it is I who can't live
without you, whom I've been privileged to love,

tuck you in & go walking to forget about all else.
Faster, faster, I urge my legs on, weaving a course

one might call drunk, a tisket, a tasket, need a basket
to fill with praises for you, in your beautiful body,

your lovely mind able to arrange all things possible,
or impossible to ignore. Forgive me thinking at all:

mine's such a simple mind, let me drink the last drop.

Birds of Paradise

Early specimens shipped from the Moluccas,
to satisfy European appetites for anything new
under the sun of creation, seemed to have no feet;

hence they must always be aloft, some fanciful
theorists concluded, who might have known better.
The cruel truth: their legs had been cut off for easy

shipping. We no longer wonder at such acts though
they repulse us, while the mind's restless eye contorts:
why, the females lay eggs in holes on males' backs!

Just one more myriad flight of fancy, till Darwin's nemesis,
Alfred Russell Wallace, brought back the first two so-called
Lesser Birds alive, which we call *sempioptera wallaceii* today.

No moral in the end, except perhaps that God made both men
with no need to work, but such creatures as well, for their hearts
heavy with losses over children, their competitive urges withering.

Head Shy

A much studied aversion
to anyone or anything
approaching or handling
a horse, especially one
having suffered pain or fear.

Some won't tolerate touching
ears, may flinch and rear, watch
out! Also, if the bottom of an eye
is wrinkled, the nose hardening.

Then there was the time I didn't
see the bee sting on Sweet Sue's
lip, our sanest of the herd. Forgot
my uncle's axiom, Just stop and

pet till the animal and you relax!
Easy to say, of course. But Sue
directed her shoulder at me, a huge
weighty threat so I shrank back.

When her lip turned blue and frothy
and her eyes cast a dreadful flatness.
"I'm going now, goodbye," is all my
tongue could say. One other element:

her tail flailed, but not from flies.
Night came on, blood not far behind,
suddenly gushing. I tried jumping
over the stream before it stopped.

Jacanas

Sometimes called lily trotters, whose long narrow toes
let them negotiate the thinnest pads without submerging.

The one we were watching just stared right through us
without a care in the world. Bud, my old birder pal, says

the females, way smaller than the males, kill one another
for mates, then leave them to incubate the eggs while they

defend the nest with complete disdain for comfort. "Let's
leave her alone with her thoughts, now," Bud said, "But

dig that tune she's tapping on the pads!" Suddenly I screamed,
scaring Bud but not the bird. It's what my doc calls nervous

attacks. They've been coming on worse of late, and my shame's
mounting. "What the hell's the matter?" Bud whispered. "What?"

For a few moments, neither of us spoke, the bird shifting from
one leg to the other. "Just reminded of something, I guess, sorry.

Sometimes just thinking of something makes me scream." Bud,
I could see, was afraid to ask me more. He's a mild man, deep

creases line his sweet face. He weighs his words, sometimes too
carefully I've teased him. "Jacanas," he finally spoke up, "Here's
my advice: keep stalking them till your screams turn to tears."

Supersedure

1

Under the notch in the old willow, home
of many a hive, I read workers kill the old

queen when a new queen emerges to mate,
one of only two ways the colony “requeens.”

Swarming’s the other m.o. : numbers of queens
are bred by being fed royal jelly, a protein-laden

glob the hypopharygeal gland in mature workers
exudes. I look up to clear my eyes, the meadow’s

suddenly alive with a hovering swarm, so I put
my book down, quickly net my head, start running.

2

There’s dead silence now; night’s curtain’s fallen.
I’d be lying if I said I caught up with the swarm to

return to for any honey the bees might share without
retribution. I’d just wanted to be somewhere else, no

more craving for conflict, knowledge of the efficient
world. My heart’s softened. Now when I cut off a twig

I don’t cut the air with a swish, begin to break into words.
Really, I’d do anything you told me to if it didn’t cause

trouble, begin chores hoping not to finish them; what would
spread out over less than a page. “Breathing’s my hobby, man,”

an old friend on Death Row writes. No one’s jokes are as rich.
I just hope I’ll be the first to arrive out of air at the last hive.