# My Child's Recovery from a Fall

I can barely stand to regard your skinned knee
a grinning lesion with dirt-encrusted lips.
Your wail of shaken confidence, your reddened eyes
judge my parental inadequacy
silently accuse me of betrayal,
the failure to warn,
my lack of skill to prevent this collision,
and of course my inability to instantly heal.

A fatal question accompanies the heartbeat in my chest:
can I be trusted anymore?
I can only press my leg next to your heaving side
and wrap your small unsettled fingers in mine
praying that your discomfort be dissolved
by my unguent-glazed assurances:
"You'll be alright, sweetheart."
Silly words of comfort and false certainty that you rightfully ignore.

Relieved, I detect no other welts
no additional inadvertent swellings
arising from this clash between you and the ground
instigated by merciless gravity (with whom I intend to have words later).
But soon the return of your vigor is granted as you regain measured breathing
Followed by your re-engagement with curiosity
you dashing away in a child's agile, antic, helter-skelter
rebutting all permanence of the last affright.

With your departure a rueful normalcy returns
for you have again discarded me
in your relentless pursuit of independence
leaving behind in your wake
a lingering hodge-podge of charm, intention, and promise
that I can't help but ingest into memory:
Your well-being the fulfillment left etched on my beaming dome.

# The Life I Really Don't Desire

(With a nod to H. Melville)

I have been traveling from chair to bed
with weariness as my impatient companion
and an unaccountable compulsion to collapse
like a slow hiss of air from a punctured balloon
This is totally at odds with the hardy figure
that I swear looks back at me from my inner mirror.
Yet young people seem to address me as "Sir"
and hold doors open for me to pass through
or offer their seats on the bus
kindness and pity imprinted on their faces.

Some other facts to consider:

In the dark hours
When I cannot avoid awakening
I perch on the edge of my bed
twitching a bit uneasily
at the smaller version of myself
that I have become
and I consider various options
the impulse to search for new iPhone messages or
the wiser instinct to return my head to the pillow
risking that I will only lie hollow-eyed
wasting the night.
But with a sigh I relent
to an omnipresent and universal urge,
and traipse down the darkened hall
where the bathroom awaits
doing there what I always knew I must.

Believe me, I am absolutely certain
that I can figure all of this out.
But I prefer not to.

# We Planted the Moon

We planted the moon and our age
Together in the early morning
Bundled up in our common effort
To shut out the frost.

Looking at your countenance,
I called the clock a liar
And you laughed
turning the timepiece face down on the bed-table.

Then patting a new position in the mound of quilts,
You declared us perfect for the task ahead
And we burrowed deep into pillowed nooks and crannies
Throwing aside our garments in the effort
Ageless in our curiosity
The lunar shadow forgotten for a time.

It was hard work
But carried out in the spirit of childhood
Like snowball fights (boys against girls)
And necking in the back seat of a jalopy,
windows steaming
Hair damp and legs akimbo.

And when we completed our blanket-bound toil
drained and tired
The sun peeked through the window and grinned
As if surprised to see your naked breasts.
You slipped your mouth over my ear, and whispered,
'The grandchildren are awake now downstairs.'
'How old will they think we are?'

# Her Practice Partner

(for Judy Price 1943-2023)

When he arrived,
She was already in the dim lit basement,
Helping spread the pizza slices on a side table,
Her blouse tucked into black capri pants,
Snug looking to a thirteen-year-old boy,
Himself posing in insolent jeans, collar up,
Concerned about bad breath,
An unwrapped mint in his pocket,
Knowing better than to taste the pizza.

So why so dark in the room?
He could barely see her brown eyes
Did she know he'd be here?
Was he her favorite?
Or "just a good enough dancer,"
To be added at the last moment,
Living in the neighborhood and all.

Someone set the turntable's needle
On a 45 platter that popped and pizzled,
then sent out a drowsy, dropsy,
doo woppy message,
And pairs began bumping about in the dimmed light.
She slid—maybe swayed—over,
And uncertainly he held out his hand,
palm to ceiling,
and she took it showing that he was right to offer.

It was their first dance,
he worried about stepping on her suede flats (she wore no socks)
Or tripping on himself and stumbling,
But she had put her arm behind his neck,
And suddenly he was flying
Arms softly pumping
to master the rhythm,
gliding in silent conspiracy with the music,
Like the dancing teacher promised.

As the drowsy doo wops trailed off,
He wondered
Should he let go of her hand?

(stanza continued)

But a new song on the turntable urged:
"Stay, just a little bit longer,"
And she took up where they had been,
her arm around his neck where it belonged,
And that left him—just a good enough dancer—
Feeling that he had been her first choice all along.

(Maurice Williams and The Zodiacs)