

Evan Premo's Songs from a Mountain Recluse

"Come Inside Now" from *Happy Life*

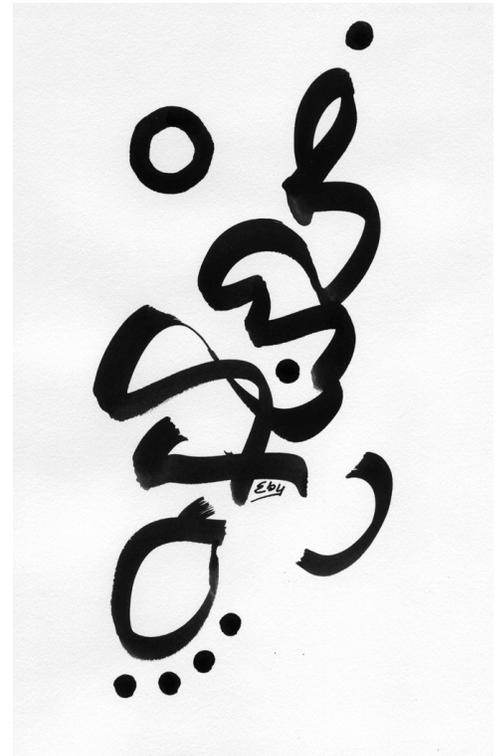
Come inside now.
Stand beside the warming stove.
Watch out through the windows as
a cold rain tears down
the last leaves.

The larder full of dried herbs,
hot peppers, chutneys,
jellies, jams, dill pickles,
pickled relishes,
pickled beets.

The freezer full of frozen greens—
chard and spinach, collards, kale—
green beans, basil, red sauces,
applesauce, and
smoked meats.

The woodshed dry and full of wood,
winter squashes stashed away.
Down cellar: potatoes, carrots,
crook of sauerkraut.

Come inside now.
Stand beside the warming stove.
Listen. Wait.



"Dilemma" from *Moment to Moment*

I want to be
famous
so I can be
humble
about being
famous.

What good is my
humility
when I am
stuck
in this
obscurity?

"That Night" from *Happy Life*

Finally now, down at the bottom of the hill, near the brook,
in the bottomland in the swampy place
among the alders—nothing left.

Raven tracks everywhere. Over here two hind legs joined together
by some hide, over there the forelegs
scattered about, and in between, as if it were the

centerpiece for the dining room table: ribcage, spine,
and skull, all picked clean, nothing left, only a little
red flesh clinging to the ribs, jaw, eye socket, vertebrae,

the bloody snow packed down by tracks of dog, coyote,
turkey, raven, bear, blue jay, fisher, raccoon, bobcat:
the whole forest come to dine.

"You False Masters of Serenity" from *Moment to Moment*

Damn all you
false masters of serenity,
gurus of the happy.

Struggle
is what it means
to be alive and free.

"Happy Life" from *Happy Life*

At my desk all morning.
In the woods all afternoon.
Headed home now through the yellow light,

Yang Wan-li said,
There's enough to eat.
Who needs a lot of money?

I've led a happy life
doing what I want to do.
How could I be so lucky?

Erik Nielsen's Reflections on the Way

"The Sixth of January" from *Moment to Moment*

The cat sits on the back of the sofa, looking
out the window through the softly falling snow
at the last bit of gray light.

I can't say the sun is going down.
We haven't seen the sun for two months.
Who cares?

I am sitting in the blue chair listening to this stillness.
The only sound: the occasional gurgle of tea
coming out of the pot and into the cup.

How can this be?
Such calm, such peace, such solitude,
in this world of woe.

"Bugs in a Bowl" from *Moment to Moment*

Han Shan, that great and crazy, wonder-filled
Chinese poet of a thousand years ago, said:

*We're just like bugs in a bowl. All day
going around, never leaving their bowl.*

I say: That's right! Every day climbing up
the steep sides, sliding back.

Over and over again. Around and around.
Up and back down.

Sit in the bottom of the bowl, head in your hands,
cry, moan, feel sorry for yourself.

Or, look around. See your fellow bugs.
Walk around.

Say, Hey, how you doin'?
Say, nice bowl!

"Melancholy Thoughts" from *Moment to Moment*

Today while walking through the rainy woods heading home
all I can think about is how all too soon I will be gone
and never will I walk again beneath

these barren, rain-soaked trees, never will I pad again
over these soft and quiet leaves, never return
home again to stand beside the warming stove,

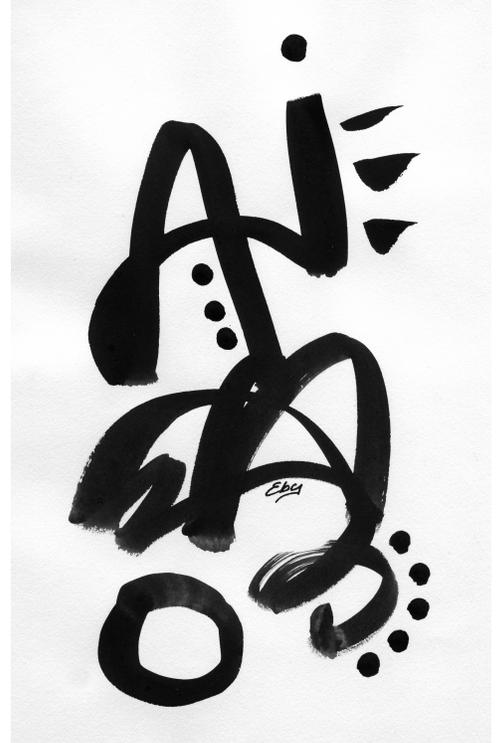
never again be drunk on sadness or on wine.
If only I would never reach the end!
If I could always only be on the Way.

"What Issa Heard" from *Moment to Moment*

Two hundred years ago Issa heard the morning birds
singing sutras to this suffering world.

I heard them too, this morning, which must mean,

since we will always have a suffering world,
we must also always have a song.



Sutras Ensemble's *While We've Still Got Feet: The Poetry of David Budbill*

"Litany for the Emperor" from *While We've Still Got Feet*

I don't want to fight your war.
I want to make applesauce.
I don't want to fight your war.
I want to make the bed.
I don't want to fight your war.
I want to make cookies.
I don't want to fight your war.
I want to make love.
I don't want to fight your war.
I want to make it over to my friend's house.
I don't want to fight your war.
I want to make a poem.
I don't want to fight your war.
I want to make it to work tomorrow.
I don't want to fight your war.
I want to make a salad.

"On the Other Side of Anger" from *While We've Still Got Feet*

On the other side of anger,
on the other side of ridicule and sarcasm,
beyond words:

an opening, a field
and in the center of the field
sitting on a stone:

a great sad beast
his head in his hands
weeping

for all of us.

"Yellow Leaves—Red Leaves" from *While We've Still Got Feet*

Yellow leaves,
red leaves,
brown leaves,
chrysanthemums,

and day and night

geese
pointing north
and crying:
Good bye!

"Gama Sennin" from *While We've Still Got Feet*

Gut hangin' out.
Stick on shoulder.
Toad up on me
head.

Singin' me songs
on Red Dust Road,
headed toward
dead.

“The World Left Behind” from *While We’ve Still Got Feet*

Those memories of
what never was:

who is strong enough,
wise enough,

not to look back, and
wonder over all those

other places, other lives
that might have been?

“All this Ego” from *While We’ve Still Got Feet*

All this ego
all this drive
to get somewhere
when
at the finish line
death sits

one leg
over the other
hands folded
in his lap
a little smirk
on his face.

“Birth and Death in the Dooryard” from *While We’ve Still Got Feet*

For two weeks we watched
as mother downy woodpecker

fed her young. Then today
under the apple tree I found

the rotting corpse of her child,
already insects crawling on it,

a clear liquid oozing from
its breast, its eyes a dull blue-gray

and sinking back into its head
as all of it sinks back into the earth.

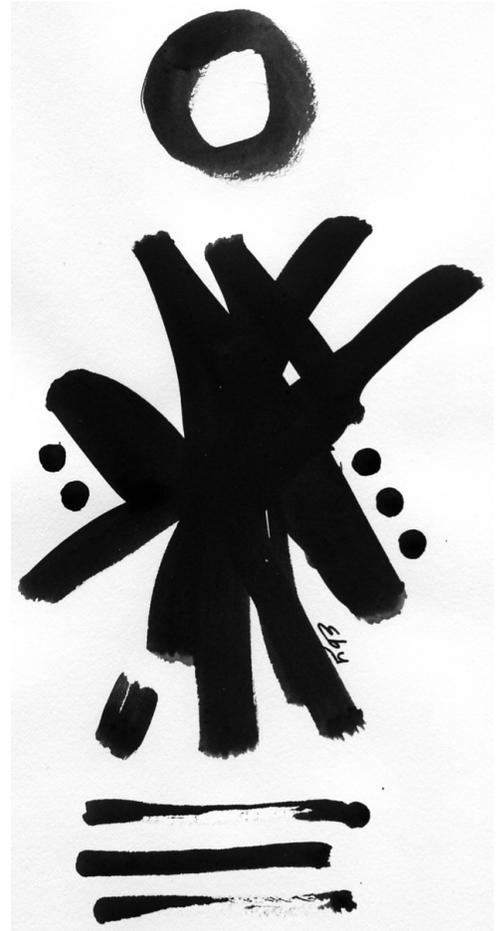
“Do Something with Your Body” from *While We’ve Still Got Feet*

Yak. Yak. Yak.
All these intellectuals ever want to do is talk.
They think words will get them somewhere.

Why don’t they take a hike or catch a fish
or cook a meal or cut and split some wood
or make love or dance?

Why don’t they do something
with their bodies? Maybe then they’d
begin to know what to talk about,

the poet said as he sat there
talking to his paper.
Yak. Yak. Yak.



"What We Need" from *While We've Still Got Feet*

The Emperor,
his bullies
and henchmen
terrorize the world
every day,

which is why
every day

we need

a little poem
of kindness,

a small song
of peace

a brief moment
of joy.

"Inward" from *While We've Still Got Feet*

Inward to that
wilderness
pathless wood
opening
reaching out
into infinity
boundless
bigger than
anything out there
in the world

bigger than

anything
the mind can
comprehend
and all that
inside
your own self
in a place
so small
it
isn't there.

“Need, Necessity, Delight,
or,
A Washing Machine for a Flowerpot”

from *JUDEVINE*

Every summer morning at fifteen minutes to seven
Jerry descends the stairs from his apartment above The Garage,
unlocks the store, turns off the nighttime lights,
turns on the gas pumps and the air compressor,
then moves to the lunchroom, plugs in the coffeepot
and, while he waits for his morning coffee,
he goes outside and wheels an ancient washing machine,
the kind that is a tub on legs, the legs on casters,
the wringer and the agitator long since gone,
away from the side of the building
and out to one end of the gas pumps.

The washing machine is full of dirt
and in the dirt grow giant orange and yellow marigolds.
He pinches off what blossoms may be dying, any withered leaves,
does the necessary weeding, and then, if they need it,
waters them with the battered, galvanized can
he uses to fill radiators.

In Jerry's old washing machine metaphored to flowerpot
I see the whole history of what I know of human art and thought.
Thales and Anaximander, thinking, trying to find that one thing
out of which all else comes, Pythagoras, slowly or
KA-BLAM! (as in Archimedes in the tub) when he discovers
a universal truth about certain kinds of triangles,
Anselm and Abelard as they debate the function of our words,
Hegel and the process of our thought,
or Einstein, fingers to his lower lip, dreaming
on the nature of time and space and energy.

Is it ridiculous to compare Jerry's flowerpot
to Einstein or Hegel, Abelard or Pythagoras?
They all took the old, the given, the known
and found in it something new,
that satisfying, exciting, delightful leap
of human sense and mind
from known to unknown.
Whether it is a washing machine for a flowerpot,
a pickup truck transmogrified to a specific need
or a poem
in which a ramshackle, tumbledown ratty pile of boards
known as a welding shop becomes a Gothic hymn to God,
it is the making of a metaphor, a bridge, that leap
from known to unknown.

To see the thing not for what it is or is thought to be
but for what it could be
because you must and must because
you are driven to delight by necessity, by need—
is imagination.

Some people look at Judevine and only see decay
because they don't remember necessity *or* need.
The words are lost somewhere inside them, pickled
in the sauce of affluence, atrophied by the tenure of security.
They don't remember that the decay they see is need
and need is the ground in which necessity
gives birth to the imagination.

When necessity gets pickled her child packs up and leaves,
goes some place else where she can find her mother.
Judevine is such a place.
Imagination lives here because her mamma lives here too.

In the midst of what some think is squalor,
necessity and the imagination yield delight—
like Roy's truck and shop, or Jerry's flowerpot,
these metaphors,
for the eternal, elemental searching of the human soul—
and they bloom,
because this ground is rich with need.

Closing poem

"Tomorrow" from *While We've Still Got Feet*

Tomorrow
we are
bones and ash,
the roots of weeds
poking through
our skulls.

Today,
simple clothes,
empty mind,
full stomach,
alive, aware,
right here,
right now.

Drunk on music,
who needs wine?

Come on,
Sweetheart,
let's go dancing
while we've still
got feet.



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