

# BRAIDED CREEK

*A Conversation in Poetry*

Ted Kooser and Jim Harrison





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*To Dan Gerber*

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How one old tire leans up against  
another, the breath gone out of both.

Old friend,  
perhaps we work too hard  
at being remembered.

Which way will the creek  
run when time ends?  
Don't ask me until  
this wine bottle is empty.

While my bowl is still half full,  
you can eat out of it too,  
and when it is empty,  
just bury it out in the flowers.

All those years  
I had in my pocket.  
I spent them,  
nickel-and-dime.



Each clock tick falls  
like a raindrop,  
right through the floor  
as if it were nothing.

In the morning light,  
the doorknob, cold with dew.

The Pilot razor-point pen is my  
compass, watch, and soul chaser.  
Thousands of miles of black squiggles.

Under the storyteller's hat  
are many heads, all troubled.

At dawn, a rabbit stretches tall  
to eat the red asparagus berries.

The big fat garter snake  
emerged from the gas-stove burner  
where she had coiled around the pilot light

for warmth on a cold night.

Straining on the toilet  
we learn how  
the lightning bug feels.

For sixty-three years I've ground myself  
within this karmic mortar. Yesterday I washed  
it out and put it high on the pantry shelf.

All I want to be  
is a thousand blackbirds  
bursting from a tree,  
seeding the sky.

Republicans think that all over the world  
darker-skinned people are having more fun  
than they are. It's largely true.

Faucet dripping into a pan,  
dog lapping water,  
the same sweet music.

The nuthatch is in business  
on the tree trunk,  
fortunes up and down.

Oh what dew  
these mortals be.  
Dawn to dark.  
One long breath.

The wit of the corpse  
is lost on the lid of the coffin.

A book on the arm of my chair  
and the morning before me.

Everyone thought I'd die  
in my twenties, thirties, forties, fifties.  
This can't go on forever.

There are mornings  
when everything brims with promise,  
even my empty cup.

Two squirrels fight  
to near death,  
red blood flecking green grass,  
while chipmunks continue feeding.

What pleasure: a new straw hat  
with a green brim to look through!

Rowing across the lake  
all the dragonflies are screwing.  
Stop it. It's Sunday.

Throw out the anchor  
unattached to a rope.  
Heart lifts as it sinks.  
Out of my mind at last.

On every topographic map,  
the fingerprints of God.

When we were very poor one spring

I fished a snowy river and caught  
a big trout. It changed our lives  
that day: eating, drinking, singing, dancing.

Lost: Ambition.  
Found: A good book,  
an old sweater,  
loose shoes.

Years ago  
when I became tough as a nail  
I became a nail.

An old song from my youth:  
“I’m going to live, live, live  
until I die.” Well, perhaps not.

Still at times I’m a dumb little boy  
fishing from a rowboat in the rain  
wanting to give the family a fish dinner.

Only today  
I heard

the river  
within the river.

Clear summer dawn,  
first sun steams moisture  
redly off the cabin roof,  
a cold fire. Passing raven  
eyeballs it with a *quawk*.

The rabbit is born  
prepared for listening,  
the poet just for talk.

As a boy when desperate I'd pray with bare knees  
on the cold floor. I still do,  
but from the window I look like an old man.

Two buzzards  
perched on a hay bale  
and a third just gliding in.

I want to describe my life in hushed tones  
like a TV nature program. *Dawn in the north*.



*His nose stalks the air for newborn coffee.*

Turtle has just one plan  
at a time, and every cell  
buys into it.

The biomass of ants,  
their total weight on earth,  
exceeds our own.  
They welcome us to their world  
of small homes, hard work, big women.

But the seventeen-year cicada  
has only one syllable.

What prizes and awards will I get for revealing  
the location of the human soul? As Nixon said,  
I know how to win the war but I'm not telling.

Some days  
one needs to hide  
from possibility.

She climbed the green-leafed apple tree  
in her green Sunday dress. Her white panties  
were white as the moon above brown legs.

Is this poem a pebble,  
or a raindrop coated with dust?

Each time I go outside the world  
is different. This has happened  
all my life.

When I found my tracks in the snow  
I followed, thinking that they might  
lead me back to where I was. But  
they turned the wrong way and went on.

I schlump around the farm  
in dirty, insulated coveralls  
checking the private lives of mice.

I heard the lake cheeping  
under the ice, too weak

to break through the shell.

Nothing to do.

Nowhere to go.

The moth just drowned  
in the whiskey glass.

This is heaven.

Wind in the chimney  
turns on its heel  
without crushing the ashes.

Way out in the local wilderness  
the only human tracks are mine, left foot  
pigeon-toed, aimless.

Trust snow to keep a secret.

Old white soup bowl  
chipped like a tooth,  
one of us is always empty.

I used to have time by the ass  
but now I share it in common  
and it's going away.

These legs  
are wearing out.  
Uphill, downhill.  
They'll love  
their flat earth rest.

Old centipede  
can't keep himself  
from leaving.

My dog girlfriend Rose was lost  
for three endless days and nights  
during which I uncontrollably sobbed.

Fear is a swallow  
in a boarded-up warehouse,  
seeking a window out.

The brown stumps

of my old teeth  
don't send up shoots  
in spring.

In New York  
on a wet  
and bitter street  
I heard a crow from home.

Mouse nest in the toe of my boot,  
have I been gone that long?

I haven't forgotten  
to look in the mirror,  
I just don't  
do it anymore.

When Time picks apples,  
it eats them with the yellow teeth  
of bees.

We flap our gums, our wattles, our  
featherless wings in non-native air

to avoid being planted in earth,  
watching the bellies of passing birds.

On its stand on the empty stage  
the tuba with its big brass ear  
enjoys the silence.

So what if women  
no longer smile to see me?  
I smile to see them!

Why do I behave so badly?  
Just because. That's still  
a good answer.

Now an outlander, once a poet in N.Y.  
crisscrossing Gotham for food and drink,  
the souls of Lorca and Crane a daily solstice.

Open the shoe-store door  
and a bell rings:  
two shoehorns on a shoelace.



Let go of the mind, the thousand blue  
story fragments we tell ourselves  
each day to keep the world underfoot.

How foolish the houseplant looks  
as it offers its droopy leaves  
like hands to be kissed.

I trace my noble ancestry back  
to the first seed, the first cell  
that emerged reluctantly from the void.

The crow comes from  
a broken home.  
She is so loud because  
no one will listen.

Dog days  
for me and the dogs,  
afloat clockwise  
in the river's eddy.

The deer hung flapping  
high on the buffalo fence,  
pushed by an inner wind.

The pigeon  
has swallowed a fountain!  
Listen!

The goofy young bald eagle  
is ignored by the seagulls and ravens  
as these enemies share  
a barrel of fish heads and guts.

On Everest there are pink concealed  
gnats that when falling  
learn decisively that they can't fly.

Surely someone will help  
the mourning mourning dove,  
but who, but who?

Trees stay in place.  
Fish spend a lifetime underwater.

Our last track is a skull.

A coffin handle  
leaves a lasting impression  
on a hand.

Oh the dark, rank, brackish rut  
of money. The news from the inside  
is fine. Outside, a sucking cold vacuum.

A nephew rubs the sore feet  
of his aunt,  
and the rope that lifts us all toward grace  
creaks in the pulley.

The cups of the tulips  
tip forward, spilling their snow.

Sometimes my big front teeth bite  
my lower lip and my food gets bloody.  
What is this argument all about?

“Do you feel your age?” she asked,  
so I squeezed my age till it hurt,  
then set it free.

Rising from a cramped position  
before the fireplace I discover  
that there's blood in my legs.

So much to live for.  
Each rope rings  
a different bell.

Fifty-two degrees at noon, July 2.  
At the senior citizens' carwash  
all the oldsters try to look vigorous.

The mirror, backed in black,  
and grief behind each face.

When you drink from dawn's light  
you see the bottom of the cup.

I am wherever I find myself to be,  
of all places. At 6 A.M. the Paris lights  
shine through the cool November rain.  
Only a few hours ago there was a moon.

My new trifocals hurt my nose.  
All that lifting them up and down  
just to find my way.

The fat snake's gone this year.  
She's been transplanted to a place  
she won't hear my startled yelp  
when she emerges from the stove top.

Winter knows  
when a man's pockets  
are empty.

Old willow  
taps the river  
with his cane.

I was paralyzed from the waist up

for three months. My feet walked me.  
The birds all turned brown. I fell  
out of a tree I hadn't climbed.

An empty boat  
will volunteer for anything.

When the dollhouse was built in a month's work  
a red ghost was trapped in a tiny closet.  
You can hear its breathing a thousand miles.

Gentle readers, tomorrow I undergo  
radical brain surgery, but don't worry.  
Win some. Lose some. Mostly ties.

Wanted: Looking for owl roosts  
for pellets for Science project.  
Call Marli.

In each of my cells Dad and Mom  
are still doing their jobs. As always,  
Dad says *yes*, Mom *no*. I split the difference  
and feel deep sympathy for my children.



At the tip of memory's  
great funnel-cloud  
is the nib of a pen.

At my cabin  
to write a poem  
is to throw an egg across  
the narrow river into the trees.

A dozen dead houseflies,  
bits of green glass from the bottle  
of summer, smashed on the sill.

Getting older I'm much better at watching  
rain. I skip counting individual drops  
in favor of the general feeling of rain.

Like a fist, the toad  
knocks on the dirt road  
wanting in.

Strange world indeed:  
a poet keeping himself awake  
to write about insomnia.

The sparrow is not busy,  
but hungry.

I remember being a cellular oyster  
in a tiny geode before being prodded  
into a world of lilacs and blood.

Next to a gravestone,  
a green tin cup  
brimful of shadows.  
Must we drink?

There is just one of us.  
Already you are what you are.  
Old rooster crowing with a stretched neck.

I might have been a welder,  
kneeling at a fountain of sparks  
in my mask of stars.

The moon put her white hands  
on my shoulders, looked into my face,  
and without a word  
sent me on into the night.

Coming home late from the tavern.  
A mouse has drowned in the toilet.  
A metaphor of the poet, I think.  
But no, the death of a glorious mouse.

The drunken man  
spills most of his importance  
on his shoes.

After carefully listing my 10,000 illusions  
I noticed that nearly all that I found  
in the depths was lost in the shallows.

Raindrops on your glasses;  
there you go again,  
reading the clouds.

Dewdrops are the dreams  
of the grass. They linger, shining,  
into the morning.

If you can awaken  
inside the familiar  
and discover it strange  
you need never leave home.

The birds,  
confused by rain clouds,  
think it's evening.

Another spring,  
and a long trail of grease ants  
over the breadboard.

The girl with blue shorts and brown legs  
the color of the dog beside her  
ran through the green orchard  
kicking her butt with her own heels.

Lost for a while,

I found her name  
when I scratched through  
my hair.

To prevent leakage,  
immerse yourself in clouds and birds,  
a jubilant drift downward.

With her brush, the artist  
touches one part of her life  
with another.

You told me you couldn't see  
a better day coming,  
so I gave you my eyes.

How can Lorca say he's only the pulse  
of a wound that probes to the opposite side?  
I'm wondering if he ever rowed a boat backwards.

The black sleeve falls back  
from the scalded fist:  
a turkey vulture.

At 62 I've outlived 95 percent  
of the world. I'll be home  
just before dark.

All my life  
I've been in the caboose  
with blind glands  
running the locomotive.

Letters from beautiful women.  
What do they tell me?

Woodpecker,  
why so much effort  
for such little gain?

In Mexico the big, lovely  
woman took off her blue outfit  
becoming a normal woman  
only more so.



The way a springer spaniel  
hops through deep grass,  
I was once a lover like that.

When she left me  
I stood out in the thunderstorm,  
hoping to be destroyed by lightning.  
It missed, first left, then right.

When a hammer sings  
its head is loose.

Actresses I've known grow younger  
while I don't, but after my Vietnam head  
wounds, I won three Olympic gold medals.

The one-eyed man must be fearful  
of being taken for a birdhouse.

As a child I loved to square-dance,  
a junior beast sniffing my fingers  
after it touched a new girl's hand.

Reading poetry late at night  
to try to come back to life.  
Almost but not quite.

Now it's the body's dog, pain,  
barking and barking.  
A stranger has come to the gate  
with an empty sack.

The hay in the loft  
misses the night sky,  
so the old roof  
leaks a few stars.

Rain clouds gone,  
and muddy paw prints  
on the moon.

I've never learned from experience.  
*What else is there?* you ask.  
How about ninety billion galaxies.

What is it the wind has lost  
that she keeps looking for  
under each leaf?

I grow older.  
I still like women, but mostly  
I like Mexican food.

Sleeping on my right side I think  
of God. On my left side, sex.  
On my back I snore with my dog.

Some nights are three nights long,  
some days a mere noon hour, then whistled  
back to work, the heart dredging sludge.

The nightmare we waken from,  
grateful, is somebody else's life.

Mirrors have always given the wrong  
impression of me. So do other people.  
So do I. Let's stop this right now.

The face you look out of  
is never the face  
your lover looks into.

The crumpled candy wrapper  
is just another flower  
to the rain.

How can I disappoint myself?  
How many are within this brown  
and wrinkled skin? Just one in pieces.

The stones turn their backs to us.  
Our lives are light as flyspecks.

What has become  
of the great hunter?  
Today he won't kill flies.

Out in a field, an immense empty  
pasture, clouds of leaves fell  
from no visible trees. I was scared.

God's hand is cupped  
over the crickety heart  
of the turtle.

At the cabin I left the canola bottle open  
and eleven mice drowned in this oil bath.  
I had invented the mouse atom bomb.

The firefly's one word:  
darkness!

A bumblebee,  
a straggly rosebush  
staining the air with her scent.  
A blue and black butterfly—  
too many *Bs* but life is like that.

How tall would I be  
without my enemies  
to measure me?

One grows tired of the hoax of up  
and down. Jesus descended into a universe  
of neither perfect lines, squares, nor circles.

You step in the same river once only  
for an instant. Panhandle time with  
the bruised fingers of what might have been.

“Charred beyond recognition” is bad news.  
Yet it happens to us all. Ashes  
have never returned to wood.

In an egg yolk,  
an artery fine as the touch  
of a feather.

The cowdogs caught their first jackrabbit.  
Ace, the big male, is curled in the dirt  
growling to protect his trophy, the bloody ears.

First deerfly emerged solstice morning  
bent on hell, creature torture. But like Bush  
among his fly friends he’s a nice guy.

How lucky in one life to see  
the sun lift a cloud from a pool!

This slender blue thread,  
if anything,  
connects everything.

The ninth time I screwed Ophelia  
in a row I was still a garden hose  
but then I woke up in Nebraska.

The Great Gourmand rows his boat  
all day on a peanut butter sandwich  
and warm water.

At my age,  
even in airports,  
why would you wish  
time to move faster?

The clock stopped at 5:30 for three months.

Now it's always time to quit work,  
have a drink, cook dinner.

The butterfly  
jots a note on the wind  
to remind itself of something.

How can it be  
that everyone my age  
is older than I?

Twisted my ankle  
until it's blue.  
Now I can feel my heart  
beating in my foot.

How attentive the big bear resting his chin  
on the bird feeder, an eye rolling toward my window  
to see if he has permission for sunflower seeds.

On my desk two  
indisputably great creations:  
duct tape and saltine crackers.



The red-naped sapsucker  
doesn't know its name is silly.  
Oh you white guys, again.

In a pasture, wild turkeys  
flip cow pies, looking for bugs.

Suddenly my clocks agree.  
One has been stopped for several  
months, but twice a day  
they have this tender moment.

In deer season,  
walking in the woods,  
I sing like Pavarotti.

"What I would do for wisdom,"  
I cried out as a young man.  
Evidently not much. Or so it seems.  
Even on walks I follow the dog.

The owl is a bronze urn of ashes  
till one of the round seals blinks.

Crow with a red beak  
looks over his shoulder.

After rowing my blue and brown boat  
for three hours I liked the world again,  
the two loons close by, the theory of red wine.

Waited all day for the moon to rise.  
It just happened.  
I can't believe my luck.

I saw a black butterfly  
as big as a raven  
flapping through the night.  
Maybe it was an owl.

Ten mousetraps in the cellar  
and one dead mouse.  
Pretty good odds for living.

In 1947 a single gold nugget was found  
hereabouts. Old men still look for a second one.  
In between life has passed.

In my garden  
the late sun glows  
through a rabbit's ears.

Midday silence is different  
from nighttime silence.  
I can't tell you how.

Between the four pads  
of a dog's foot,  
the fragrance of grass.

July, and fat black flies  
so slow you can bat them  
right out of the air.

Dead raccoon, legs in the air,  
washes his paws in the sky.

Flecks of foam  
on the fountain's lips  
as it reads aloud from  
the scripture of water.

This morning,  
fish bleed into nacreous clouds  
and an iron bird walks to town  
on the bottom of the river.

I'm so pleased that Yeats  
never got off his stilts  
though I have only one.

I have used up more than  
20,000 days waiting to see  
what the next would bring.

It's hard to believe there's a skeleton  
inside us, not certainly in the beautiful  
girl getting out of her red car.

Elaborate is the courtliness  
of the imagination, on one sore knee  
before beauty.

When I touched her long feet  
I stopped walking.  
When I tasted her mouth  
I quit eating.

When I watched her hands  
as she peeled a potato,  
I gave up everything I owned.

I have grown old, and know  
how an owl feels,  
seeing a man with a lantern.

November cold. Hey, grasshopper!  
What goes? Once all that armor  
weighed nothing!

In winter, don't ever  
touch your tongue

to someone cold.

Fresh snow standing deep  
on the phone wire. If you call me,  
speak softly.

Well before dawn I woke  
up crying because my teeth hurt.  
Lucky for me there was soothing rain  
on the cabin roof.

I woke up as nothing. Now start piling  
it on. No. Yes. No. Maybe. Indoors.  
Outdoors. Me. You. Her corpse said stop.

Birds and bugs  
flying left and right.  
Always the question,  
What to do next?

The wasp  
has built his palace  
in a bell.

Life has always yelled at me,  
“Get your work done.” At least  
that’s what I think she says.

The patience of the spider’s web  
is not disturbed by dew.

Time makes us suppliant whores.  
Ray Carver told me he was missing years.  
The bottle’s iron mouth suckles the brain dry.

The old Finn (85) walks  
twenty-five miles to see his brother.  
Why? “I don’t have no car.”

Look again: that’s not  
a yellow oak leaf on the path,  
but the breastplate from a turtle.

The robins are back,  
so weary from flying that they walk

wherever they go.

When we were young we talked  
about bottomless lakes, which meant to us  
the same lakes were bottomless in China.

You had to milk the cows at 5 A.M.  
and 5 P.M. or they'd start bawling.  
Even udders can become brutal clocks.

That winter the night fell seven  
times a day and horses learned  
to run under the ground.

Time flew in and out of the window  
until she dropped dead in the kitchen.

At the end, just a pinch of the world  
is all we have left to hold on to,  
the hem of a sheet.

What if everyone you've loved



were still alive? That's the province  
of the young, who don't know it.

A new spring and it's still 5:30  
on the cabin's clock. It's always dawn  
or time for dinner. My favorites.

If a camel can stretch its muzzle  
out of its own stink  
so can I.

Lazed on the floor like an old baby  
for three hours, then rowed my blue  
and brown boat.

Oh, to be in love,  
with all five buckets  
of the senses  
overflowing!

On the shoulder, the turtle  
warily holds out his head  
on the end of a stick.

The moon, all lordly white,  
an anti-rose embedded  
at dawn in a thin veil  
of red clouds.

Their balls were so swollen they collided  
their motorcycles at 70 mph  
with only momentary regret.

It's nice to think that when  
we're fossils we'll all be in the same  
thin layer of rock.

Oh, to write just one poem  
that would last as long as that rose  
tattooed on her butt!

The imagination's kisses  
are a cloud of butterflies.

We should

sit like a cat  
and wait for the door  
to open.

In our farthest field,  
between one walk  
and the next,  
the arrival of ten billion  
grasshoppers.

How sharp must be the fletcher's knife  
to split a feather  
and leave in both halves flight.

The old hen scratches  
then looks, scratches then looks.  
My life.

Every time I've had a sea change  
I thought I was dying.  
I probably was.

My stopped clock is always

jumping ahead,  
a sure winner in the race with time,  
with every day as long as I wish it to be.

A vermilion flycatcher flew too far north  
and died in Montana. The same for a Michigan wolf  
in Missouri. I get butchered in New York  
but don't mind it. I rise again the third day.

Bucket in the rain,  
rejoice!

Deerflies die by the billions, the cool air  
so clear you drink it in gulps  
and the moon drifts closer to the cabin door.

Sometimes fate will steal a baby  
and leave an old man  
soft as a bundle of rags.

So happy with my fat old body,  
still quick enough to slap a fly.

Black dog on white snow  
beside the flooding, brown river.  
This is where I live!

I feel  
the bear's heart  
in her footprints.

To have reverence for life  
you must have reverence for death.  
The dogs we love are not taken from us  
but leave when summoned by the gods.

You asked, *What makes you sure?*  
*I have the faith of the blind,*  
I answered.

Wish-wash. Ten thousand tons of peanuts  
free to us monkeys for 10,000 years.  
Oh taste and see, but not in a hurry.

One barred owl harried by

eight loud crows.  
A thief besieged by thieves.

A light snow shows  
that even the old wagon track  
is new.

I hope there's time  
for this and that,  
and not just this.

Pout and drift. The poet self-sunk  
for three months looks up at the dark  
heavens, puzzled by moon and stars.

The butterfly's brain,  
the size of a grain of salt,  
guides her to Mexico.

Buddhists say everything is led by mind.  
My doubts are healed by drinking  
a bottle of red wine in thirty-three minutes.

DNA shows that I'm the Unknown Soldier.  
I can't hear the birds down here,  
only politicians shitting out of their mouths.

The water spider  
bounces on his legs  
but cannot shake the lake.

The low ceiling grazes  
the tops of the tall pines  
encircling the yard.  
Even the air feels crushed.

Peach sky  
at sunset,  
then (for god's sake)  
one leaf across  
the big October moon.

Dust too  
is drawn on wings  
to light.

Last year the snake  
left her skin on the floor,  
diaphanous like the name  
of a lovely girl you've forgotten—  
but not her flesh.

I'm sixty-two and can drop dead  
at any moment. Thinking this in August  
I kissed the river's cold moving lips.

The colder the raindrops  
the harder they knock  
on the door.

Come to think of it,  
there's no reason to decide  
who you are.

Stars from horizon to horizon.  
A whole half universe  
just to light the path.

Rilke says the new year brings things that have



never been, forgetting “won’t be again.”  
Even a dog is never lost in the same place.

Awake in Paris all night listening to rain.  
It’s lucky there’s nothing to eat, a fat dog  
waiting for the luck of a roadkill possum.

I prefer the skyline  
of a shelf of books.

Imagine a gallery  
where all the paintings  
opened and closed their wings!

In Brazil I leapt  
out of my skin, then back  
into it, a onetime-only trick.

Sometimes all it takes  
to be happy  
is a dime on the sidewalk.

When women pleasure themselves, I heard  
at age twelve, they tweak their left ear  
then move on to greatness.

Her voice had a deep resonance  
that must have made her pubic hair  
buzz.

The moon put her hand  
over my mouth and told me  
to shut up and watch.

I surely understand paper and how poets  
disappear despite it. These days I write  
so lightly I don't quite touch it.

A man pays court with his poems.  
A woman dismisses him with hers.

Monkeys search each other  
and so do we. Another sign  
of our advancement.

All those spin butchers drooling  
public pus. Save your first  
bullet for television.

Rate the hours. One and 5 A.M.  
are fine while 3 is the harshest.  
The fool always feels safe at noon.

I thought my friend was drinking  
too much, but it was the vodka  
that was drinking him.

An uncommon number of us die  
on our birthdays. You turn a bend  
and abruptly you're back home.

Now that I'm older I perfectly  
recall the elephant's eye  
and the whale's eye that blinked.

That little red eye behind the toilet?  
And we think poets

have a baleful look.

This is the county fair  
and everything has a bull's ring  
through its nose.  
Who is leading?

After fifty years of tracking clouds  
I've become cold rain upon my life.  
How odd to see the mist so clearly.

Autumn dusk, and in the grass  
the spiders' gray funnels  
drain off the light.

In the electric chair's harness,  
one man hauls all the darkness.

Our lives as highlights on tv:  
our best lays and meals,  
our backward flights of drunken  
fancy down the stairs.

These house-trailer fires kill thousands  
who will no longer suffer  
the opinions and scorn of the rich.

Coming home from the tavern—  
I see the pile of dirty clothes  
on the cabin floor move.  
Doglike, the snake is getting comfortable.

The path disappeared. There was a field  
with no edges over which I walked  
through the sky which blanketed the ground.

In this lowbrow wilderness  
in the area of the black-phase wolf,  
I give up my opinions.

A house will turn itself  
to catch a little moonlight  
on a bedpost.

It's the Devil's

blessing  
that flies sleep  
at night.

In the house the lizard's enemy  
is porcelain. They struggle in the sink.  
Warren, the cat, finds them there.

The tree also died the exact  
moment the old raven fell off  
a lower branch.

A frosty morning,  
and one mosquito  
at rest on the lip  
of the tub.

Sometimes the teakettle rattles  
over the flame with the *And! And! And!*  
of a child telling a story too big  
to pour out all at once.

So the Greeks had amphorae

with friezes of nymphs.  
We have coffee mugs with ads  
for farm equipment!

How evil all priesthoods.  
All over the earth Holy Places  
soaked with extra blood.

The handle of its neck  
clucks back and forth  
and ratchets the turkey  
forward.

How is it the rich always know  
what is best for the poor?

Trelawny burned Shelley's heart  
while thousands of poets  
were waiting for transplants.

Lush petals  
and glistening thorns—  
this college

full of experts.

The poet holds the podium  
in both hands  
like a garbage bag of words.

See how the rich and famous  
sniff the tips of their fingers.  
What have they been touching?

Ikkyū was awakened by a crow's caw,  
which is not the same as an alarm clock.  
He adored the whore dressed in gold brocade.  
O master, why count flowers that are gone?

On the nightstand,  
a copy of *Prevention* magazine  
and the night coming on.

Like an old dog  
I slowly lower and arrange myself  
in a heap of sighs.



Scientists say the moon grows 1½ inches  
farther away every year. I'll fight  
this cosmic terrorism hand to hand.

What I learned: Dogs walk upstairs  
for nothing. Don't eat with your nose.  
Tonight the moon owns this river.

Often I travel at night and am surprised  
where I end up at dawn. All road signs and maps  
are hoaxes. Don't forget the earth is round.

Earth touched Moon  
with his shadow, and Moon  
blushed. Everyone saw it.

"When the roll is called up yonder  
I'll be there," they sang. Hopefully.  
Maybe. But maybe not.

Foolish me,  
to think my wine

would never turn.

Come close to death  
and you begin to see  
what's under your nose.

On the cabin floor a trapped mouse  
covers maggots that writhe.  
With this in sight,  
allow me to squeak.

I've been married since birth.  
All other women sense the bottomless  
depth of my insincerity.

She owns a perfect butt  
but her loutish husband calls  
it his "reserved seat."

Without her scarves  
the weeping willow  
has a twisted body.

They're putting a new green tin roof  
on my moss-covered cabin.  
Bang, what violence.

It rained so hard the sky became water  
and under a mantle of trees I gulped for air.  
Here on the bottom the water rose to my chin,  
and my face ached to grow gills.

A welcome mat of moonlight  
on the floor. Wipe your feet  
before getting into bed.

Bullfrog groans.  
He is the wooden floor  
under the cold feet of the night.

The full moon often rises  
in the wrong place. Tonight I sense  
activity up there, a general unrest.

My wife's lovely dog, Mary, kills

butterflies. They're easier than birds.  
I wonder if Buddha had dog nature.

Three teeth pulled including  
a prime buck. Tongue probes  
the jaw's lonesome holes.

Alone in the car  
we try to tell ourselves  
some good news.

These headlights  
swim right through  
the seine of falling snow.

In our October windfall time red  
apples on frostbitten green grass.  
You learn to eat around the wormholes.

As long as the woodpecker  
taps on my roof I'll be fine,  
a little life left in the shell.

The blind man navigates  
by stars behind the daylight.

Just before I fly out of myself  
I'll say a puzzled goodbye.  
Our bodies are women who were never  
meant to be faithful to us.

I was born a baby.  
What has been  
added?

Treasure what you find  
already in your pocket, friend.

Today a pink rose in a vase  
on the table.  
Tomorrow, petals.

The pastures grow up  
with red cedars  
once the horses are gone.

## About the Authors

Ted Kooser and Jim Harrison live in Nebraska, Montana, Michigan, and on the U.S.–Mexico border. This book is a rather avian triangulation of their brotherhood.

Books by Ted Kooser

Delights and Shadows

Braided Creek

A Happy Birthday

Bank Fishing for Bluegills

Books by Jim Harrison

The Shape of the Journey

Saving Daylight

Letters to Yesenin

In Search of Small Gods

Songs of Unreason

Links

<http://www.tedkooser.net/>

[More on Jim Harrison at the Poetry Foundation](#)

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