

A painting of a window with a dog looking out. The window is on the left, showing a bright, overcast sky. A red curtain hangs to the right of the window. In the bottom right corner, a brown and white dog is looking up towards the window. The background is dark, suggesting an interior room.

A  
CALENDAR *of*  
RECKONING

*poems*

DAVE MARGOSHES

## Total Eclipse

(for dee)

It's easy to see how early man fell for the chicanery of religion. Consider the eclipse of the moon, the rape of one celestial body by another, the sun giving in to its most basic instincts and devouring the object of its desire whole. Now think of some poor besotted caveman, some half-breed Egyptian or Assyrian or rune-addled Celt, with nowhere to turn but up, nothing to believe in but the unthinkable. Every day more or less the same, the seasons with their comforting rhythm regular as breath, the cycle of day and night so dependable. Then this unexpected carnage in the heavens, even stars shocked into silence, seeming to confirm all those rumours of Zeus and the mysterious others high in the mountains, distant, unreachable. What else could it be? Even now, with science behind us, the eclipse last night sent shivers along our spines, reminding us there's more than one reason to bend one's knee, to whisper prayers.

## My Father's Ghost

More than thirty years dead, my father visits me still in dreams. The other morning, his voice was in my ear when I woke, the words fading too quickly to catch his meaning. All day I struggled to bring them back, but I might as well have been netting gossamer. Another night, I was startled awake by a presence in the room, and thought I glimpsed him standing at the foot of the bed, but looking away. I remembered that deep night in the hospital, the life being choked out of him, when he begged me to kill him and I looked away – a lifetime as a son distilled to that one terrible moment of failure. What did he think of me then, that I wasn't worthy of his love? Or did he feel a grudging respect? Unlike my father, I have no son, no one to visit my final days, for me to put in that awful spot. And like him, when the time comes, I'll be alone.

## The Heart in its Dotage

The heart in its dotage has eccentricities. It's partial to blindfolded crosswords, walnuts in bed, the jangled memory of crows at the darkest hour. At this stage of its life, the heart sings out of tune, dances a lame-footed jig, refusing to look back. A hard-driver, a ripsnorter, a bellweather, a dump-truck gigolo, a motherfucker, the heart is the flickering light at the head of the stairs.

The heart, *this* heart, is the sum of all its varied parts, the distance between zero and minus 60, the speed of light slick on a polished floor. The *abiding* heart takes a deep, stuttering breath, a long last glance, calculates the odds on its fingers. The ripened heart's hearing is going, it has to stop, ask directions. The heart is failing in its dotage, yes, but it remembers everything.

## Modern Life

The egg is a lonely traveler.  
Will she be a chicken? No thank you,  
she says. Ah, a meal then! Scrambled, fried,  
poached....? No thank you again, if it's all  
the same to you. The egg is very polite. She  
also declines omelet, soufflé, quiche,  
more elegant but just as fatal. An egg  
can't be too careful. An egg must think  
of all possibilities, examine her options,  
take no sides. The past faces her from  
all directions, likewise her future. Yet  
she must consider her future: go  
with the flow, roll with the punches, avoid  
the bumps. The one thing she need not do is  
watch her diet: her shape is one thing she has  
little care for. She is too self-possessed  
for that, too self-contained. She appreciates  
the admiring glances she gets, dismisses those  
who are disrespectful. She refrains from making  
obvious puns. An egg longs to be held, cool  
and grave, in the palm of her lover's hand,  
to be rolled along the soft skin of his cheek.  
She has hardened her own skin but her heart  
can be broken.

## Dreams of a Snowy Evening

The flea dreams of the dog, the dog  
of hearth and fire. Fire dreams  
of winds rushing down a chimney, seducing  
it into something greater than itself.  
Its nightmare is rain. The chimney dreams  
of both the firm hand of the mason  
and the sweep, the two great loves  
of her blackened life. The sweep dreams  
of his broom, the mason, fitfully, of the stone  
he could not lift. The sculptor too dreams  
of that stone, of the shape he would make  
of it if only he could. The stone dreams  
of rain, the rain of moss, the moss of fire,  
and round we go again, fire, hearth, dog,  
flea. All the while, wide awake, snow falls.

Creation Theory  
(for Lorri Neilsen)

Break open a stone, water.  
Tie water in a knot, stone.  
Tie snakes in a knot, woman.  
Break a woman's heart, man.

So the seasons cycle into one  
another, causes abundant.  
Break. Tie. Tie. Break. Down  
through generations, smoke  
clearing at last upon an Eden.

## Before Summer's Arrival

Early June I wake to the song of nightingales flooding the neighbourhood, sweeten my coffee with decaying lilac, sleepwalk through a somnolent day heavy with the dregs of obligation and regret, a joyless but serene day like the ones we endured at school. As the month deepens, days become clues in a crossword puzzle I'm unable to finish, air thins to the snapping texture of cellophane and I lie naked on my restless bed with the window open and allow the night to devour me. This is how I greet summer, who has whispered promises in my ear all winter, made staccato phone calls through bitter spring. I turn my head to the window at the buzzing, a mosquito smaller than the chimes of netting, bringing me a virus kiss as a baroque gift. In the fever's flannel embrace I find that I can fly, stumble silently through walls, see forever, there is nothing beyond my reach or grasp. Drained, I sleep finally while the sultry night spins in its own fever, baying at the operatic moon. In the days before summer's arrival I open myself to its promised possibilities, close my ears to its stuttering denials. When it does arrive, I can honestly say there are no secrets between us. We are like man and wife, grown old in each other's breath, the tumult of stars in summer's pulse, just silence in mine, just silence.

## Wisdom

A man walks to the edge of the pier and looks into the bottomless sea; enamoured of the fishes and their secrets, he knows not to jump in. His brother opens the window on the 17th floor the better to see butterflies and birds – *I could fly*, he thinks, but he too resists the urge. All day long we are tested by temptation and still we batter on against the wind, glancing both left and right yet aiming straight ahead. At day's end, we take off our shoes, savour the anticipation of cool sheets, steaming coffee in the morning, consolation enough. There's wisdom in the stars if only we could see it.

## Call and Response

I have heard the sweet mouth's siren call,  
the sad sad song of the sour, the hopeful cry  
rising from the beaks of blunted birds  
bloody from the flesh of their prey.  
How is it that beneath the feathered heart  
lies the never-to-be-satisfied gut,  
that the sallow loins of the lion ripple  
for the thrill of the zebra's flight? Watching  
the suicide of the sea turtle from the bow  
of the Beagle, a tear came  
to Darwin's eye, not for the turtle,  
but for himself. Looking far  
into the horizon he could see  
his own extinction.