

NEW POEMS BY
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PORTRAIT OF JAMES TATE *by* RACHEL B. GLASER

THE INTERRUPTED FLOW

Grover swung in a rope. Harvey caught him and Grover said, "What do you think you're doing? I was only halfway through my arc. You've interrupted my natural flow." "I thought you were going to crash. I was only trying to protect you," Harvey said. Grover slumped into a pile and said, "Well, that is my last try. I gave it everything I could. Now I am defeated." "You should be thanking me for your life. If you had kept going like that I honestly believe you might have died," Harvey said. "But I'd be a hero. People would be talking about me, eventually there'd be a statue," Grover said. "A little tiny statue that nobody would see," Harvey said. "Now you're being cruel. Why would you want to hurt me," Grover said. "Wake up old boy, you're alive. What could be better than that?" Harvey said. Grover crawled around on the ground. "I'm looking for a stick," he said. "Why would you want a stick?" Harvey said. "I want a stick to poke you," he said. "Why would you want to poke me?" Harvey said. "I want you to know how it feels to have all the air let out of you," Grover said. "Come on, let's be friends," Harvey said. "You stopped me from the greatness I was born to achieve. That's hardly the basis for friendship," he said. "I kept you alive. Doesn't that count for anything?" Harvey said. "You kept me from immortality. Now I am just a snail crawling along a path waiting to be crushed," he said. "Escargot is my favorite appetizer," Harvey said. "You wicked friend," Grover said.

CONSPIRACY

I said, "Well, I certainly don't know anything about any of this." Mr. Black said, "Well, you've certainly landed in the middle of it." I said, "I don't even know what it is." "It's a conspiracy of like-minded souls to undermine the government," he said. "Why would I care to be a part of something like that?" I said. "You would like to bring down our government," he said. "I don't think about our government one way or another," I said. "Of course you do. Everybody thinks about our government one way or another," he said. "But I don't. I am completely oblivious to our government," he said. "That's not possible. You pay your taxes, don't you? You follow certain laws. The government is always telling you what to do," he said. "Yes, but I try to ignore it. I just do things my own way," I said. "And your way happens to coincide with what the government is telling you?" he said. "I've never really thought about it, I guess so," I said. "I don't believe you. You are out to tear the whole thing down. I know your type," he said. "I am not, I assure you. I don't care one bit about the government," I said. "See, that's what I mean. Only somebody like yourself could have made these plans," he said. "I'm not like anybody you have met before. I don't care what you say. You're not going to twist me into this thing," I said. "You are already there. Everything you say points towards your guilt," he said. "Then I'll not say anything more," I said. We sat there in our chairs for a long time until he finally fell asleep. Crickets were chirruping outside. I thought about the keys on his belt, then fell into my own deep sleep, where antelope jumped the fence each night and were caught captive by the farmer in the morning.

MOUNT FUJI

I sat in my study looking at a huge map of the Alps. When my son came in he said, "What are you looking at that for?" I said, "I'm thinking of going there." He said, "Can I go?" I said, "Not now, but when you're older." He left the room. I folded the map and put it in my desk. My wife, Regina, stuck her head in the door. "What's this I hear about your going to the Alps? You're not going without me," she said. "I just never got around to mentioning it before this. It's something that came up on short notice. Of course, I would take you, darling. I just haven't had time to mention it," I said. "You want to do some climbing, I know you, and you think I wouldn't understand," she said. "Well, climbing has entered my mind, that's true, but I wouldn't say it was the only reason. We can compromise. I'll climb only half the time, the other half we can shop and explore on our own," I said. "And what about little Timmy? What are we going to do with him?" she said. "He can stay at your parent's house, or mine, if you prefer. It doesn't matter," I said. "Well, of course it matters. It matters a great deal to me. One of them treats him like a dog. The other one treats him as if he is a prince. Neither one is any good, you know that yourself," she said. "Then we're not going," I said. "But I want to go," she said. "Then we'll have to take Timmy with us," I said. "I don't want to take Timmy with us," she said. "Then we'll abandon him in a field," I said. "Doesn't that seem rather extreme?" she said. "Yes, but I don't know what else to do," I said. "We could leave him in the house alone and tell some friends to check up on him from time to time," she said. "Or we could just take him with us," I said. "I think we had better not go," she said. "I think you're right," I said. She went back in the kitchen to start dinner and I reached in and pulled out a much smaller map of Japan. Mount Fuji was circled in red.

MARCELLA IN THE FOREST

Marcella stood naked on the forest floor. I said, "What are you doing naked out here?" She said, "I thought you might like it." "Well, of course I'll like it, but somebody might catch us out here," I said. "You know there's never anybody out here," she said. "I know, but there might be," I said. "You're just afraid of nature, aren't you?" she said. "If I am, I didn't know it," I said. "Then why don't you get naked too," she said. "I could never get naked out here. It just doesn't feel right," I said. "Then I'm putting my clothes back on. It doesn't make any sense for me to be standing naked all by myself," she said. A hunter walked onto the scene just then. "What's going on here?" he said. "She's my wife," I said. "I just wanted to feel close to nature," Marcella said. "I almost shot you. I thought you were a deer," he said. "I don't look like a deer," she said. "In the brush and all you do," he said. "Honey, put your clothes on," I said. "I forgot where I put them," she said. "They're somewhere around here," I said. The hunter said, "Here they are, right at my feet." She walked toward the hunter, glancing back at me. The hunter said, "Panties first, then the bra." She followed his orders. Finally she was completely dressed. She thanked him for his help. He waved his around and said, "Go on, get out of here, before I decide to shoot you." We started running. Marcella leapt over a lake that I fell in. Then I heard a shot, and another shot.

OUR ROLES IN LIFE

"Is there nothing you can do for me? I'm stuck in this hole," he said. "There's nothing I can do for you. You're stuck in that hole," I said. "But can't you find a shovel or something and dig me out?" he said. "I don't think there's a shovel around here, but I could look," I said. I went and looked for a shovel, but all I found was a spoon. "Here's a spoon," I said. "But that will take forever," he said. "I don't want a spoon. That will take forever," he said. "Then I'm afraid you must stay buried," I said. "This is not something I want to hear," he said. "Who buried you like this, anyway?" I said. "I did not catch his name. He was a tall man, quick with his hands," he said. "Well, that is no help," I said. "I was half-asleep at the time. I wasn't paying attention," he said. "And you ended up buried in that hole?" I said. "Yes, when I awoke I was buried in this hole," he said. "Let me remove just one spoon of dirt and see if that feels better," I said. "One spoon couldn't possibly make me feel better," he said. "Okay, then I'm going," I said. "Oh, please don't go. I need you," he said. "I can't do anything for you so I might as well leave," I said. "You could put a spoon of dirt on my head. If I'm going to be buried I might as well be buried all the way," he said. "No, you need a breathing hole," I said. "I don't want a breathing hole if I'm going to be buried like this," he said. "Someone will come along and dig you out eventually," I said. "I can't go on like this," he said. "You're doing fine," I said. "You don't know what you're talking about. I'm next to death here," he said. "I've never seen a finer head than yours," I said. "Please put me out of my misery," he said. "I suppose I could start digging with my hands," I said. "We could be here forever," he said. "Such is cast our roles in life," I said. "Such is cast our roles in life," he said.

THE CHICKADEE

I opened my hand and a small bird flew out. It flew to the top of the chimney and rested there, twittering a little song. I walked into the house. Stacy was making a pot of coffee. "My report is due tomorrow," I said. "Paula lost her front teeth this morning, did I tell you that?" she said. "I haven't written a word of it," I said. "Actually, she looks quite cute without them," she said. "When people eat buffalo meat they think they're stealing from the Indians. That's what all the reports say. Do you think that's crazy or what?" I said. "Paula couldn't wait to go to school to show her friends her missing teeth. She was proud of them. I would've thought it might have been otherwise," she said. "I'm going to have to go to St. Louis next week for a meeting with some toy manufacturers. What do I know about toys? It's a big deal. Maybe you'd like to come?" I said. "I'm not leaving Paula with your mother again. That just doesn't work out. You know that from the last time we tried it," she said. "When I was outside a few minutes ago a bird, a chickadee I think it was, landed on my hand and I can't tell you how thrilled I was. But then I let it go. I mean, it would have been stupid to capture it, don't you think?" I said. "So you go to St. Louis and have some fun with these toy people and Paula and I will stay here. We'll go to a movie or something," she said. "I'm going to have to stay up late tonight working on that report. It's about artificial bacteria we've introduced into cattle feed. There are more two-headed calves being born than ever before," I said. "Paula is staying after school for her play rehearsal. You wouldn't believe how cute she is in her costume. She's a carrot, you know," she said. "I know. I'm sorry I'm going to miss the play, Harold got fired, did I tell you?" I said. "I know, I always liked Harold, married to that awful woman, what's her name, Missy. But I liked him, very quiet and courteous," she said. I walked into the living room and picked up a magazine. I felt like my life was drifting away. I recognized some tiny bits floating in space. I reached out for them and fell and kept on falling. It wasn't so bad. I had the whole universe around me, but I kept wishing for that bird. But there wasn't one. There was only the faint twinkle of light from great, unimaginable distances.

UNLIKELY FRIENDS

There was a rib joint where I could go and get take-out. It made me extremely happy to be eating those ribs at home, they were so tender and tasty. When I'd clean up I'd feel completely happy. Then I'd go and watch a movie on television and fall asleep on my recliner. One night while I was sleeping I thought I heard some scratching on my door. I woke up and went and opened it. There was a bear standing there. I said, "What do you want?" The bear pushed me to the floor and stepped over me. I stood up and grabbed a kitchen knife. "You shouldn't be in my house," I said. The bear walked into my living room. He seemed careful not to break any lamps. I followed him in there. He sat down in my chair and fell asleep. I couldn't kill a sleeping bear, so I sat down in the chair next to him and fell asleep myself. When I woke up an hour later he was sniffing me all over. I pulled my knife and aimed it at him. "Stand back," I said. He made whining sounds and stood back. "I don't think you should be in this house," I said. I stood and pointed the knife at him. He roared and looked angry. He reached out and shoved me back in my chair. I waved the knife at him. He raised a paw and knocked it from my hand. I didn't like my odds in this kind of game. The bear walked into the dining room. I picked up my knife and followed him. He sat down at the table and demanded that I bring him some food. So I went and filled a bowl with raspberries and brought it to him. He gobbled them up in a surprisingly short time. He wanted more, so I took his bowl and filled it with blueberries, which he quickly ate. I filled his bowl with strawberries, which he lingered over, eating them one at a time. By the time he was finished he wanted no more. He stood up and yawned. He lumbered toward the door and asked to be let out. I opened the door and we said good-bye. After that night he came often. Some nights we'd watch TV and fall asleep. Other nights he just wanted his berries. I no longer carried a knife. I no longer had to.

THE KISS

Barbara didn't remember who I was, so I told her and said, "Maybe we can get together sometime." And she said, "Why? I still don't know you." And I said, "But I told you. We went out together in high school once. I kissed you. You don't remember that?" "No, I don't. I have no memory of that at all," she said. "It was quite a beautiful kiss as I remember it, but it's gone, or at least one half of it is gone," I said. "Good-bye, I don't want to talk to you anymore," she said. She picked up her purse and left. I sat there thinking things over. I didn't really know her any longer. She was a different person. I got up to leave. Someone tapped me on the shoulder. I turned around and it was Barbara. "I remember you, you were short and had braces," she said. "I grew quite a bit," I said. "Yes, you did. And you're really quite handsome," she said. "Well, thank you. It's not something I tried to be," I said. "How I remembered you I'll never know. You were just a squirt of a guy," she said. "Well, it was still me. I was just in a different package," I said. "That's one way of putting it. It was quite a different package all right," she said. "But it was me, I promise you," I said. "That kiss was the silliest I ever had in my life," she said. "It was sacred to me," I said. "We should try again," she said. "No, that was the only kiss I had for you in this lifetime," I said. And I walked away swinging my old knapsack on my back.

THE AVIARY

I flew low over the neighborhood. Then a blackbird flew into my mouth and I swallowed it. It was still alive. I could hear it squawking and feel it kicking. I did several somersaults in the air and finally straightened out. I could see the Stewards watching television. They were eating popcorn. The Goodwins were just having dinner. A roast chicken, lovely! Then I hit a power line and started to fall, then gained my balance and flew on. This time of night is most beautiful, the stars just coming out, the moon a pale shadow up there, several stray dogs wandering the streets. That's my house down there. My wife is starting to set the table, music is playing on the radio. I land in the driveway, dust myself off. I pick a couple of feathers out of my teeth. I walk up to the door and let myself in. "Hi, honey, sorry if I'm late," I said. "You're just in time for dinner," she said. I pulled out my chair and sat myself down. The blackbird squawked. "What was that?" she said. "I didn't hear anything," I said. She served us a delicious beef stew. "How was work?" she said. "Oh, work was fine. You know, a little of this and a little of that. It ends up evening about," I said. "That doesn't make much sense," she said. The blackbird was in my throat now. I tried to swallow some stew, but it flew out. "My god, what the hell is that?" she screamed. "I guess that's a blackbird," I said. "But it came out of your mouth!" she said. "I'll catch it and put it back in," I said, "No, a thing like that doesn't belong there," she said. "Well, where else are we going to put it?" I said. "In the aviary," she said. "We don't have an aviary," I said. "Well, we do now," she said.



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