

On The Back Porch



**Ronald
Baatz**



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Ronald Baatz

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FIRST EDITION

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This book is dedicated to Rupa, a cat,
without a tail, who was always meowing.

1

Warm soft rain.
The earth a wet
and soggy place
of squirrel teeth
holding a green
apple.

2

A cool clearing. A blessing, for sure,
since it's been so god-awful muggy.
So i get done what i have to get done.
As i push a couch across the back porch
the sparrows cheer me on.

3

For some reason, this year there are
more frogs than ever. I read all night
to the sound of them. A peaceful sound,
perfect for reading. Until i think of one
of the frogs dying from a heart attack,
suddenly becoming quiet, eyes closed,
old naive moonlight still shining down on it.

4

Those monstrous clouds rolling in are
harmless as egg whites. My jaw relaxes.
But when i go out for the papers i see
a dead deer in front of a closed gas station.
I never seem able to get used to this sight.
An angry blue jay sounds as though
it's tearing pieces of the sky apart.

5

I'm surprised to see fresh lilacs at breakfast.
Such a large bunch of them too, in a vase
purchased at a yard sale one summer.
It never seemed to rain that summer.
Every night stars burned over grass
that had gone flat and brown and stiff
as an unwelcoming rug.

6

Mowing under the apple tree
i bash my head against a birdhouse.
A crow's feather blows up against
the same tree and leaves a black stain.
The thought of this stain stays with me
on into the evening. Filled with despair
i choke on the small bone of a small bird.

7

My mother is concerned that if my father
works in the garden this year it will kill him.
He tries to calm her fears, assuring her that
the garden will be made much smaller.
To me he slyly says, "yeah, it'll be smaller,
but still plenty big enough to die in."
I think of Montaigne wanting death
to find him planting his cabbages.

8

When i wash up for lunch i see vultures
in the bathroom mirror patrolling the road.
Damp grass clings to my sneakers,
death to my mind. In the fridge
i find an egg with the word "hard"
inked on it.

9

On a dark moonless night i again
end up sleeping on the back porch.
At dawn i wake to a gentle thunder,
a cold rain falling in gutters. And
no doubt those chubby sparrows,
the ones with the snow-white throats,
are gathered under the gardenia bush.

10

As i pick at fish bones i realize
my old mother still loves to cook.
I look for my father in his garden,
but he's nowhere to be found.
A breeze in the poplars sounds like
whispering impossible to understand.
And those anthills in the driveway,
they'll prove to be a bad idea.

11

So burdened with their own fullness,
peonies out by the road can't face
the morning sun. And there, look,
crawling down the side of the vase,
an ant brought inside with peonies.
Damned ants! They're everywhere.
I open the mailbox and discover
only more black ants have arrived.

12

I've been told that to praise birds in flight
is the special responsibility of the poet.
Fine, but tonight i feel more like praising
the stillness of an empty wine bottle.
Ah! The stars are perfect for pissing under.
It feels good to sigh so far upwards.

13

I retreat to the old couch on the back porch.
While dozing off i write a worthless haiku
about a crow crying out that the dark is
the dark of another Monday morning.

14

In the bowl where the goldfish live
there is water that brings a happiness.
It's nearly bedtime and the insects
get very quiet when i brush my teeth.
I have a dream, a very simple dream
of dogs barking at me because i am
eating birds and overfeeding the fish.

15

My, how my father's hands tremble
when picking strawberries in the garden.
And i see the imprints of her thin fingers
in the sandwich my mother made for me.
We do not live in this world for long.
The ants, they work hard as they can.

16

A little seashell that was thrown
in amongst some coins, i find it
in the pants i'm putting in the wash.
I place it in the soap dish where there's
a bar of soap thin as a potato chip.

17

Some nights i walk across the field that's
thick with rubbery blades of damp grass
to watch a movie in the barn with the landlord.
Large yellow dependable flashlight in hand,
i think of the landlord having only recently
been attacked and savaged by a rabid fox.
I guess most flashlights are dependable,
which is the comforting thought
i later on tuck myself into bed with.

18

I take a glass of wine, my nightcap,
out to the back porch and i listen
to the fragile songs of crickets.
What's left from dinner on paper plates
are cherry pits and the shiny bones
of sea bass. The asparagus ferns
she placed outside the back door
are like sprawling invitations to rain.

19

Driving by the church, i see many irises
growing high under each of the windows.
No doubt they thrive on songs of adoration.
I see the Good Humor truck in the parking lot,
waiting for people to come out of confession.
I'm tempted to stop and buy some ice cream,
but keep driving instead, thinking about the ant
on the windshield. It will never see its home again.

20

What a strange day, all this sunlight
and rolling thunder at the same time.
I don't know what to think anymore.
I just try to make myself useful by
finally cleaning out the wood stove.
The piano, it's as quiet as the shadow
it casts on the blue cat that's napping.

21

The same dead leaf has been stuck
to the back porch's screen door for days.
Bored, i walk up to the barn where
the landlord lives in the summertime.
It's hot. My arms feel ironed flat, and
an ant climbs an oak tree so fast
you'd think the ground was on fire.

22

As i sit salting my poached egg i spot
the mail jeep coming through the fog.
The chirping of a cricket ~ you'd think
if there was one cricket chirping
there would easily be a thousand.
Those Italian boots i'm saving
for old age, i hope they still fit.

23

I find wine glasses on the card table
where we had our dinner last night.
She had talked about her sister dead
from a heroin overdose, her father dead
from booze, a mother who doesn't utter
any words of genuine feeling anymore.
The years all go off in the direction
of a black hill of leafless black trees.

24

At the produce stand Georgia peaches
tell stories so sweet and so delicious.
I take a bag of them back to the house
and settle down on the couch.
When i wake after dark i notice
the last peach on the coffee table
holding down the cover on a
book of Japanese death poems.

25

The dress quickly taken off this morning
is still lying across my side of the bed.
It was that kind of morning, and now
the afternoon is long and spent outside.
To drive a snake out of the chives she
throws her deteriorating garden gloves at it,
and then asks me retrieve them.



26

So much butter on cobs of corn
it's difficult to hold a conversation.
But it is only one of the many
conversations we always have.
On the fridge a moth
disguised as a magnet.

27

At the front door i see the mower
that ran out of gas in the tall weeds.
I open the back door and a moth
flies out towards the yellow barn.
It looks just like a feeble prayer
released from a death bed scene.



Eating a peach in a bouncing car
i spit the pit out the window.
I'm taking the dirt-road shortcut
i found when i first moved here.
In the rearview mirror, gray hairs
growing wildly out of my ears.

After dessert she puts the glossy red shoes
of a doll on two fingers and then her hand
starts walking towards me, drunk and sexy.
I don't ask her how she pulled these shoes
out of thin air. Instead i'm curious as to why
she had stuck her fork in the chicken's heart
and then didn't bother eating it.

30

I can't sleep, so resort to reading.
The tiniest bugs come to the lamp.
This is the way it is on such nights.
Some screen must have a hole in it.
I think it's the same screen that's
letting in bad dreams when i do sleep.

31

I am surprised by the drawing
of a nude woman on a bike,
having had no intention of doing
such a drawing. But there she is,
slender and erect, going off somewhere
with a carefree smile, waving to me.

32

A thoroughly wasted Saturday.
I drive to town through the rain,
eating a sandwich in a gray world
that smells like a smoking candle.

Garden stunted from so much rain, only
scrawny weedy-looking flowers thriving,
not what you'd pick to put in a vase.
But the forecast said that later this week
we'll catch a break from this bad weather.
God only knows how heavy that bucket
of ashes is by the shed, never emptied
after i cleaned out the wood stove.

A charcoal-soft evening.
i relax on the crumbling patio
watching the birds, sparrows which
come to the garden as though looking
for something they had lost, as though
looking for something small,
maybe small as a seed.

Nights steamy as rice. Everywhere
i direct the flashlight on the patio
i see prints from her wet bare feet.
I throw a mangled toothpick into
an empty wine glass. The most
seductive thing a woman can do
is to be found sleeping.

36

The white Jetta has been for sale
out on the front lawn for weeks now.
A nightmare since the day i bought it,
it no doubt will continue to be so.
The insurance company refuses to cover
for towing anymore, and my mechanic
told me to take it to Volkswagen.
It looks like a huge block of ice
that won't melt away even in
the worst of the August heat.

37

A pear too overripe to be eaten,
unless it's thrown out to the deer.
They won't go near the garden,
so heavily has it been sprayed
with a deterrent concocted from
rotten eggs and garlic. Even
the wind seems to stay away.

38

Black-eyed Susans weary from old age.
I have the urge to cut them down to nothing.
Sipping coffee with lips still puffy from sleep,
she completely ignores the bleak outside world.
And the cat is not interested in
the burnt piece of toast i offer it.

After closing up the back porch we climb
the stairs to the bedroom facing the road.
At the end of the hallway a mirror, never
having known the reflection of falling leaves.
And the moon, it's there in the window,
bruised and just beginning to show rot.

It's three o'clock in the morning.
She asks me what time it is, and
without looking i can tell her since
i was just down in the cold kitchen
getting a glass of cold water, and
i just happened to notice the time
on the clock on the stove, which
had cold hands, i'm sure.

I cannot say anything about the wind.
There is not another word i can say.
Everything i've ever wanted to say
about the wind i've said. Some things
i've said hundreds of times over.
And for awhile everything i said
about the wind i wrote down.

42

I cut my father's hair in his garage.
He talks about being ninety and
why old people find relief in dying.
I'm so shocked by my love for him
that i want to fly off like the crow,
having its smaller vocabulary
to express myself with.

43

Cemetery rain falling on
the roof of the car wakes me.
I look around at cement angels guarding
the graves of children. Surely
these angels must be envious of birds
free of such a weighty responsibility.

44

Two sleepless nights, except for dozing while
staring at the dimly lit ceiling over the couch.
She came by today to pick up the frying pan
she left behind. I made sure i wasn't here.
To a large extent it's simply the length of
twenty-four hours that's staggering.
My, so many apples on that tree
by the shed, crowded as cherries,
all destined to be left uneaten.

45

Thoughts of my own death follow
the killing of a moth. I can't sleep.
How does that old Yiddish saying go,
the one about a sleepless night
being the worst punishment?
I hear the sound of a car
turning around in the driveway,
the sound of strangers using lights.

46

I want to see pink roses when i die.
I want to see them on the night table
right next to my bed, glowing softly
as a beautiful sunset. Maybe
they'll exist only in my imagination,
as perhaps my life exists only
in my imagination, or the lack of it.

47

Some leaves float across the pond
faster than others. A tip-toeing heron
completely ignores me, as though
i were just some harmless ghost.
Tonight i'll burn part of the old dock.

48

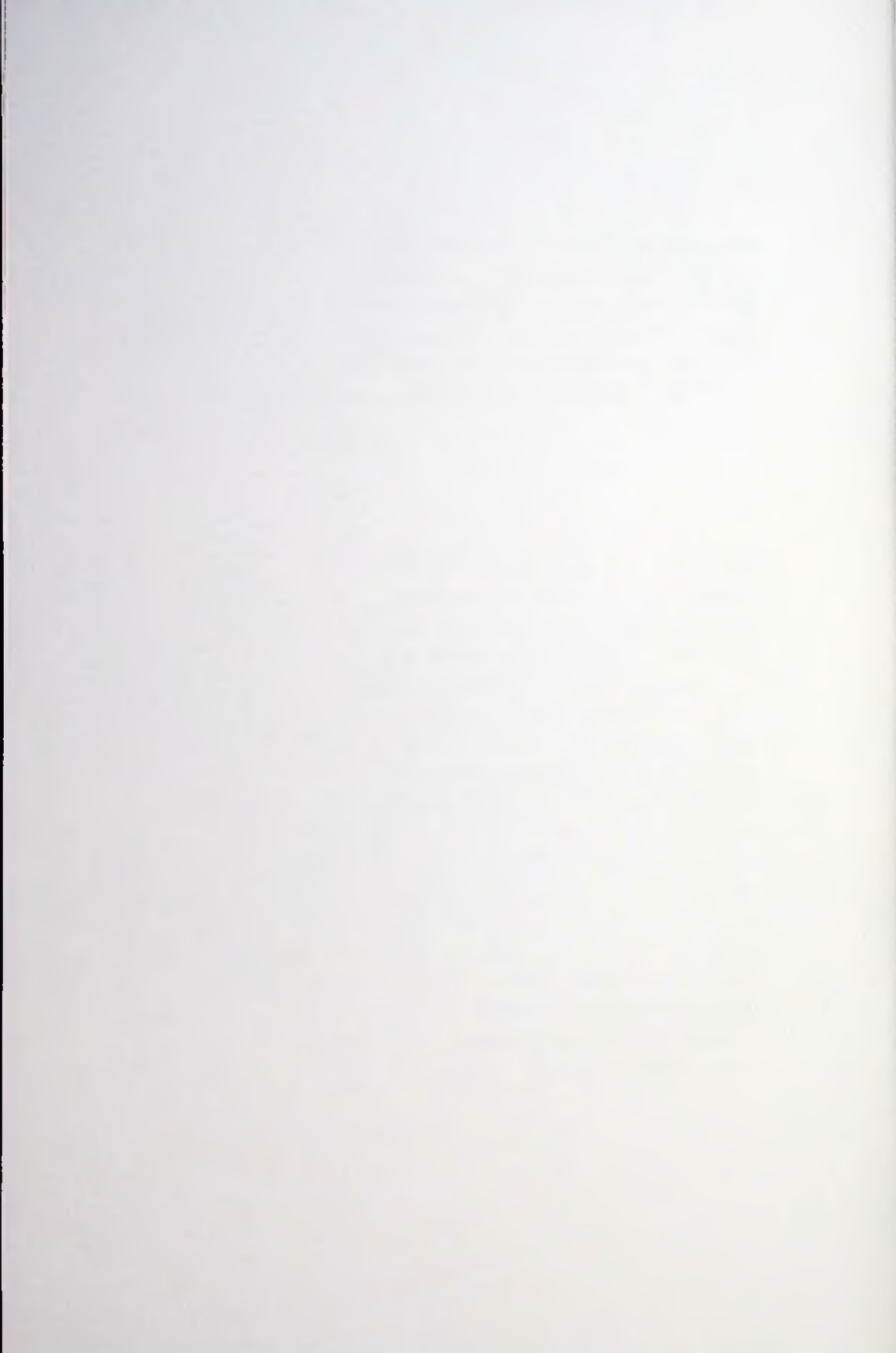
On a leafless branch a crow watches
the gray flames of a cold evening sun.
With leaves gone now, bird nests are
more visible. But what is the name of
that small gnarled tree that stands alone
in the field, still holding on to all its small
red leaves?

49

I hear a motorcycle pass out front of
the house in the middle of the night.
It sounds like a small hog traveling west
towards the mountains in Phoenicia.
It catches me right on the edge of sleep,
but i'm awake enough to want to be
on that bike, alone, going off into
the night, chewing on peanuts and
raisins dug out of my leather jacket.

50

A moon,
the size of a thumb print,
entering a ridge of tall trees
where other moons have gone
never to be seen again.

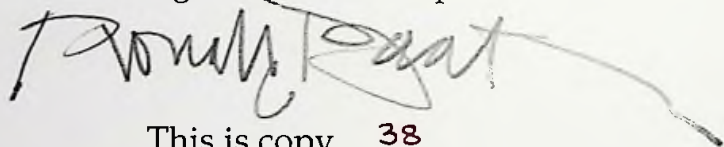


Ronald Baatz lives in an old
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This First Edition is limited
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A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Tony Regan", with a long, sweeping horizontal line extending to the right.

This is copy 38

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