



**A Break in the Weather**

**Robert Kelly**

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*for Charlotte*

A break in the weather  
as kind of meaning  
a few over freezing hours  
for the first time in weeks  
what will Iago make  
of this tepid opportunity?

*Septentrio* the north  
its horses winds and crystals  
ice compass needle  
brave discourse tough skin  
then something else happens  
birds on a phone line

string sparrow perches through our cities  
like the Sabbath-limit lines  
used to snake through Brownsville  
in my day, a disaster  
of geography, the world  
turned inside out

*erwin*

just long enough to remember  
how the Tweets read up  
from the bottom of the screen  
as if language is always  
climbing to heaven through streets  
that feel like your hands

a device to take off  
is it a shirt or a plane  
a woman dressed as a tongue  
silent in the auditorium  
but in Russia only men may speak  
in all this hurry no room for change

*yazyk*

for I was a subway token in a purse  
back when there were coins

I took people where they need to go  
I was a word and you listened  
a ballgame at twilight  
what is the purpose of your sport

it is to break the circle of the world  
madame, it is to come home  
but where have you silly boys been  
to need such iffy symbolism  
not a symbol, a hard thing in your hand  
but the mother thing was silent

we know that to understand a game  
is to play it no longer  
dying chessmen welter on wet sand  
and a tide reluctant to come in  
I own the weather  
I am what you do in your dark

because I am hollow  
I must suffer in and on my skin  
all the griefs of body life  
this miracle of seeming  
Adam creates God on the Sistine ceiling  
every stick has two ends

*sTong.ra*

*G.I.G.*

all color all skin and in the dark o Lady  
where the mechanical raptures  
cruise down Bronx avenues  
looking for a night that never comes  
once you turn the light on  
it stays lit forever

the little ring I gave your ancient hand  
chrysoprase and sardonyx  
gold wire wrought to feign branches  
holding the stones like fruit  
to a winter god like today  
my hands are cold to tell you this

monk I am and all the world a monastery  
rough the paper with my thumb the ink  
seeps a little thickening the meaning  
spill your morning coffee on the snow  
this mark is all marks  
any real symbol means all the rest

for we live by implication and cheap food  
we kill to eat and eat our way to dying  
or so the pandits tell us word by word  
o Christ the stuff we dare to listen to!  
when all we need is the wind abaft  
and ice crackling underfoot

*"the mu-sick" C.O.*

*mare Balticum*

Christ's other brother went the furthest west  
and set up there in dolmens by the sea  
an alternate energy to jolt the Spirit down  
from heaven and up from hidden earth  
to speak a new word breath by breath  
until all of Europe heard it

*Sant'Iago*

but didn't know what they heard  
so came on foot for a thousand miles  
to hear what the sea was saying  
for those Christs invented the ocean  
before that was just scary mystery  
the way an old house is you lived in once

and where do we live now  
among the unspeakable evidence all round  
of what had been ours now we are no one  
and Xu in prison for fifty months  
for commenting on the drift of government  
how can wise men live day to day

no one trusts us and we trust no one  
is the everlasting motto of the rose  
I am beautiful because I am  
and soon will not be  
and what do you have to say for yourself  
captain of many an absent war

while pains of abstract peace renew  
o soothe me with your alphabets  
sisterhood of signs o sweep my floor clean  
brotherhood of ancient instruments  
as slim Rameau might once have caused to tune  
in candlelit preparations for orderly *ecstase*

opera or wishing glass or pool that spells  
tone by tone the message of the stars  
as creepy old astrologers proclaimed  
this means you and you mean this  
and all the while the red light held  
the panting lovers motionless from home

*alabaster wreath of clouds!* he cried  
that I remember when all the names are gone  
forget them anyhow  
they only work when you cry them out  
straining your throat on the hillside  
and the only answer surges in your gut

*H.v.H.*

is it always winter where you are  
how come your breath is always warm  
how come churchbells ring all night long  
you always come to me with a simple question  
it takes my whole life to unravel  
and by then the child has come and gone

as if it were only a matter of beginning  
a little thing, the imaginary atom, say  
which is really just a locus of behavior  
energies convolving in a brisk of being  
temporary identity of river marl  
and all the rubies of the Irrawaddy

welcome, storm cloud, we are drenched  
with reminiscence, what else  
could a classic be but norm remembered  
almost automatic the way we love and kill  
don't blame Homer he sang for love and supper  
blame the schools that inculcate his bronze

because metal is the thing that hurts  
four thousand years of it refining  
swifter ways of delivering that pain  
Iago broods about his lost loves, lost  
to those who act out their desires  
whereas he can only cantilate his grief

fear bottomless despair of someone  
who saw the sea once and failed it  
turned his back and strutted safe away  
into the darkness of common life  
scorning these upstart heroes with high C's  
*I believe in a cruel god who does not believe in me*

man with a mutilated soul  
the sea does that when you try to escape  
your knights and turrets drowned in surf scum  
it hurts like the thought of tomorrow  
Magdalen forgive my imprecisions  
I have to believe any real person is really you

I thought all this while was pure number  
but there is something worse than ignorance  
a dead bluejay in the snow a sign of it  
something worse than war  
a poem glorifying it  
something worse than death an unspent life

Iago is the common man an everybody  
dressed like nobody his skin is resentment  
his core is fear forgive him as you forgive yourself  
making trouble is the only thing he can,  
pity the ineptness that sings its way to tragedy  
everybody loses that's the point of it

Iago is rational he chooses what hurts others  
to drown out what hurts him and that  
he never knows, mind and no soul,  
soul and no spirit, gall and no skin,  
we don't know what we are at last  
we are Iago mostly and glad to die

get it over with whatever it was  
clouds come up the sky sometimes it rains  
sometimes deer come in from the woods  
a kind woman feeds them and for an hour  
there is quiet in Eden and no thought  
mind as lucid as the clear sky after

but after that no matter, the letter  
comes in from India the Southern Kingdom  
the People's Thing of China the waves  
on every earthly beach defiled by beauty  
and transcendence, the lobster trap  
broken on the slimy rocks I love you

as everybody says to everybody  
meaning it all too true the rocks  
are wet continually with coming and going  
how can a mineral sleep its ears  
are everywhere it has no eyes  
so can see everything by touch alone

of course you love me I can listen  
and when you learn to listen I will  
love you too like a railroad train  
running round the Christmas tree  
on little tracks over cotton snow  
past a little mirror pond your hand

on the switch and always in control  
why are we waiting for the pilgrims  
to come home they never will  
Compostela is further than Mecca  
further than Kailas the moon is nearer  
the sun is right in your pocket

and here you thought it was just chess  
or theology or some innocent misprision  
like a fender-bender on Fordham Road  
who cares what you think just drink your tea  
Oolong means Black Dragon just like me  
juice of ginger root and fresh turmeric

whereby you have enough to pray  
incense for puja and a beast to ride  
or could it be your spiritual bride  
phantom bridegroom of so many words  
just means a man just means a slow  
dance at the approach of twilight

and before you know it it's night  
dead night and the freight cars  
idling on the siding Barrytown in '64  
cover the panting in the old Merc  
my god why would it be with a woman  
like that who wept all night

but there were jewels in the gravel  
water between the ties collected  
tadpoles and stick insects in moonlight  
who knew such people walked the dark  
I thought we were the only dragons here  
soaking our cigarettes in laudanum and

never mind spirit the soul is meat enough  
for all our living, spend twenty seconds  
under anesthesia my life is changed forever  
because time is a compromise time is  
really our friend time gives us time  
to notice and savor and to change

We go in and go out freely evenings mornings or  
what makes it a garden, we grow there  
and are grown, Eden, *Gan Eden*,  
it is the other dreamland, the one  
we sleep to enter, not this we wake to find

or it would be Eden if I could  
night and day the gates lie open  
and the glow of your own skin  
is adequate to light the way  
*through this deep-sunken highway*  
you must come — *no other way* to Eden

F.S.

or anywhere else where dreams half-free  
half frozen in the midnight air  
lie around you babbling meek images  
you have to learn to energize  
with spittle and with sperm, the oil  
of Lucifer sweating on your brow

and all that romance busy in the dark  
forgive me for slipping back into  
a century or two along the past's  
*half-sunken highway* to a crossroad  
beneath a barren gibbet and a voice  
unseen lifted in the fields nearby

o my mushrooms o my cauliflowers  
is there any food that does not milk the mind  
so that strange visions totter down the light  
o lettuce and the cheese-rind biomes  
how can we live if everything's alive  
the empty noose swinging in the breeze

I saw the moon caught in its loop  
so that for once the sky and earth  
were tied together and it was safe to sleep  
for normally the atmosphere is narrative  
and all its nitrogen explodes in imagery  
inside our half-baked longings lost in dream

any open window waits in kindness  
mother's eye forgiving weeping child  
for I did every wrong there was  
I killed the seagull I puffed an ill-wind  
into the mainsail of the doomed ship  
all nightmares I saddle in my stable

*what is thy name?* though she keeps singing  
the loveliest the lost know how to hear  
voice on high asking the lowest question  
almost you know it the answer don't you  
the time is right *no other way to come*  
*or go* this is the forest of your forgetting

when things fall they are the sky  
upon us when things rise up they are the sun  
and the rivers of Eden flow from your lips  
laps liberties liquidambar all the orient  
arched over us as human arētē  
transhuman anatomy that bright shade

someday it will be different beast  
the wolf will talk the woman bear her child  
in a crystal goblet in the moonlight live  
and it will be all hers half yours and so  
the pine trees tremble in the wind  
I can't feel down here for all my lust

despite the liminal the ground gives way  
a doorsill open on the Adriatic  
I saw once through September fog  
all the animals are people don't you know that  
even yet after the opera house exploded  
and daunted Europe with a final aria

*Gesamtkunstwerk* we'll never escape  
the tune like smoke pursues us  
through the keyhole where the ghosts come in  
keep an iron key there at all times  
witches hate the cold of iron love the kiss of air  
I came to my love under her locked door

R.W.

as if a word were there to give  
against the sun glare a fin rising  
from the sheen all your hopes are on it  
following where it slices forward into  
too bright to be seen the *natural way*  
only you're exhausted only thinking stops

standing alone the way an eagle  
falls down to its prey *o felix culpa*  
for every meal is made of sin  
and if we lived in truth we'd live  
on air if that and dream hard stone  
blue lapis and pellucid sea

for I am water mostly when I take your hand  
leave me on you when I slip away  
the way we belong to each other  
mackerel-crowded mitred-bishop synod  
jabbering the imperfections of the truth  
while all the while the quiet mind

and nothing more, your eyes this noontime  
stayed with me all day and that alone  
is ancient Ægypt telling me the truth  
the line of haunch the lion sphinxing  
the line of light runs through the stone  
a mouth to swallow all the vagrant years

just tell me what your body thinks

and that's Derrida enough for me  
and all the online lexicons rehearse  
the quick toss of one woman's amber hair  
then the opera's done the folk song folds  
back into the people they don't sing anymore

and give the walled garden room  
for those peaches — Persia's — to ooze  
summer sap along the trysting bench  
loops void around the tree, no lovers more  
the bench an empty theater but the tree  
still fluent amber juice of Samarkand

as if Shelley were your gaudy sister  
and Byron your wicked aunt, don't know,  
never read enough to tell celestial  
from garden dirt, I bowed my head  
deep within an antique book  
its letters all dark-graved and latine

wasn't it enough to be a child forever  
2 below sun in treetops already glancing  
bracket the language of theory let song insist  
knew you when you were still thinking  
now I dip my pen in tea to write  
a skinny wobble on an absent page

last night I dreamed a lucid lecture  
I was giving a young candidate to teach  
with titanium logic brought to understand  
the only goal of teaching is give pleasure  
how to take pleasure from the things you do  
how to turn observation into ecstasy

thæt wæs true dream I reckon  
Saxon in the morning and Celt at night  
meet my old friends the words there  
wind a sentence round the bobbin  
then let it loose, see who hears it  
*in yene velt* the other world behind the light

voice from the closet warm hand on your back  
fingertips trace the paths of splendor  
down the ever-branching habits of the Holy Tree  
your body, that world comes into this  
among the pilgrim miracles we are  
our green language made the green sea

or is there always waiting to be done  
if this word keeps saying long enough  
the sparrows will come back and peck their seed  
who hide in bitter cold an instant hibernate  
wake to their warmer though to us still cold  
and who are us this morning you sweet young nun

all sunny disposition and white bib a cross thereon  
seems made of fire and your gentle eyes  
catch some of that incendiary calm  
the fire lit before the world was made, a word  
is what it looks like now, you hear  
its colors in your darkest certainty

andropogon seems to be the genus  
man-beard but why call *that* patchouli  
when woman-whisker makes the best of scent  
but they rose up despondent at his coarseness  
stormed out of bio lab and drank Fiji water  
for anything is possible in education

even the worst teacher knows something you don't know  
a glass of feeble substitute toast smeared with ovaltine  
and yet the morning still comes tripping out of dawn  
with all the living children of the night  
yapping and baying in the form of words  
and every little word has you in mind

since the source is always near to hand  
Desdemona's handkerchief the bitten apple core  
jealousy needs no evidence but thought  
but what is that to me I am no Moor no Hispaniol  
I live between the lines of all his plays  
I am the heart never happened

or maybe I'm the moon on autumn nights  
twinkling around Ophelia as she floats  
for I can count my flowers too, every digit  
is one blossom on an infinite tree  
count me till I come to you in dream  
whispering barbaric names to guide you home

there is fear and time to be afraid  
is not a fragrant handkerchief or sleeve  
dangled before a doting spaniel evidence  
or could all anxiety be the furnace rumbling  
combustion makes noise, the song of flame  
and roaring in the heart your fear

could you lead music into fire  
the flame would speak, be angel fire  
maybe maybe and chant the fear away  
or let a candle in a votive lamp  
say your Ave's or your Mani's for you  
would that calm your oppression, no,

to be awake at all is to be afraid  
they call it vigilance cats have it  
or stretch a flag over the sky fatherland  
but all loyalty is fear and here I am  
in winter complaining to no self  
go light a candle and see what it says

*my nefesh went out to that form but worry*  
if it rushes out and never comes back  
but cleaves to the target of its *first impression*  
and lingers out there lost or with another  
so that which is the social me of me, *my outward*  
is lost from me and I am winter mere

(he means by *nefesh* appetitive soul  
he thinks he can lose it, then where will he be  
but drowning men never lose their lust for air)  
and we are drowning in a sea of necessity  
*nede hath no lawe* says the *Lover's Confession*  
and "I will never walk through this door again"

J.G.

the one I left out is Othello of course  
you hardly need him for the tragedy  
malevolence and innocence adequate  
together, just use his tender sturdy fingers  
then let all fall, now let her rise, a person  
of the mind and mind alone

my eyes are on all this from the seashore  
the deer at browse beside me and a clam  
forced by gull its house beside me  
every story is a tragedy every song  
a wolf howling in the forest, fire  
sounds like water when you listen

it became clear to me later that a stone  
heals itself in moonlight of those sicknesses  
a stone — tourmaline obsidian jadeite — can  
transmit to humans or a glass of milk  
have you ever listened to one of those  
carefully while your lips were busy at it

and what business have they not done  
through all these eras of deduction  
in the homeland of the first Critique  
some part of my mind a dozen years after  
is still landing between the peaks  
in Innsbruck gateway to the Roman land

can I be truer than you my skin  
my moult my serpent mind my claw  
uplifted to scribble with the clouds  
your lipstick on my manuscript  
my eighty-volume novel you have to read  
because everything ever is in it twice-over

rabbit rabbit she cried because the month began  
and we are citizens of time but never loyal  
expostulation is as bracing as strong-brewed Assam  
with the tigers growling nearby in your mind  
we delight to hear such travesties of truth  
as old Omeros conferred on his pale Greeks

before dusky Asians came sexy out of Lydia  
where rivers run with gold but no fish to eat  
hence the parable of Midas and his golden fingertips  
for everything we think becomes commodity  
and money makes a prisoner of mind o god and  
Kant and Fichte and Hegel are just music,

and music means nothing but Nietzsche *means*  
I rest my case in those piquant palabras  
that wake me mornings with a taste of sugar  
granulated like sunlight on this week-old snow  
is this enough for me to believe, philosophy  
is the symphony of men who can't carry a tune

blink (the last man blinks) blank balance sheet  
the pillow sweaty from sleep how hard we work  
to muscle through that other consciousness  
but when is that Our Lady of Intuitions  
language is the working class's vengeance on the rich

we wrote this war too, we win by word  
and all the pyramids take off to heaven  
till every acre is a shadow of them  
why don't you advertise the moonlight  
that smells better here than anywhere  
you thought it was just a glass of milk

no, but I am, the engine idling, the train  
ready to north its way into vacancy  
I am the empty polar regions ear to ear  
thick with rock oil to keep the girls away  
leave me arctic sunlight and a bear  
until the stars come out to stab me

Back to life again mavourneen, a sea  
between my feet, my shadow topples  
over all your steeples, okay, no protest,  
only the lipid aftertaste of light  
you are you are most blessed in so moving  
ice dance of the frozen Hudson

hummocky and buttocky and almost free  
the one lane icebreakers kept open  
so the barges can bring the flame from Albany,  
god, we all are made of skin and not much else  
a hollow house with snow on the roof  
a crow lands on it and makes a few remarks

you think I'm talking but the wind knows better  
the name of our discourse is going places  
even now a diesel horn honks southly  
yes yes I'm getting somewhere  
just like the train from Rochester  
and it will be a city wherever I stop

and I will be your mother, metropole,  
my fetid breath your blue cathedral,  
those sins your mothers explain  
to pass winter nights through your mind,  
the greatest mystery of all is sleep,  
the why of it and the someday of why not

so it ends at Glastonbury after all  
in early spring snow trudged up the Tor  
that modest mountain starts below the sea  
and reaches to the nearest star,  
St. Michael's Tower links both together  
an arrow of light comes down and replaces the spine

one only weapon our war with heaven  
you lift it whenever you open your mouth  
to give or chant melisma or to forgive  
so full of life you make the meager sunlight  
and every shadow comes alive with counter glow  
Bruckner's Eighth the horncalls dwindling

agnostic reveries in new-plowed fields  
the best treatment in most cases  
case means fall, fall means happen  
happen means chance and there's no such thing  
I rest my case *im Kristall dein Fall*  
cries the weird old woman to the poor young man

E.T.A.H.

or any other word that fits Homer's meter  
he's Baltic to begin, ship foundering on land  
much snow has melted over one mild night  
fear of river pirates Chinese paper lanterns  
I'm telling you the kind of truth retired  
Brits natter on verandas in St. Kitts

o history, you can read me in any book  
these words I pilfered from the lexicon  
so you won't see the scum of handsoap on the sink  
wouldn't hear the telltale finches of high noon  
squealing from the bird clock on the wall  
and you'd forgive me for one whole life

get me ready for another, a house  
holds almost everything, I give you  
everything something, wooden blocks  
sufficed me as a child, A especially  
and B and C, blue grooves fit together  
build them my fingers and forget the war

but the puzzle thing comes back  
Orpheus caught between his need  
and her identity, *ohime!* identity  
is the mother of needs but not  
necessity, there's always something wilful  
in being somebody in particular

me for instance, my shadow cast  
by porch light on the snow, forgive me,  
I can't resist being in a body, even mine,  
word-soaked adventurer with wind up his sleeve  
in the straits twixt north and south the dolphin Jack  
spared the life of many mariners, but me

N.Z.

I'd never go to sea, once was enough, came here  
over the addictive Atlantic I still drink  
when I can but never walk again that deck  
speak unFrench and think I'm on my way home  
because no language has a word for house  
any more than English has a word for you

what it looks towards soon will be  
so *seize before* is to make it so  
remember not the picture but what it said  
in me as I turned to look, gather to me  
it cried out to the lens in all of us  
*see me into your own dark, I am yours*

I had not yet begun to snow, a cougar  
walked later over the hill above the yard  
they have so many names, years,  
they have fire in their eyes, and diamonds  
often in their safe-deposit boxes, glisten  
on the edges of their prayer books

gold is greasy nowadays, the ground  
is asking for it, weather is always an answer,  
some Utah Protestants are praying for rain  
one week this song has worked  
I embarrass myself with particulars  
need the argent fountain of sheer must

did you say childhood or wildwood  
did you say caravan or yet again  
lick my ears clean o lordly lady  
so I can hear the consonants divide  
sacred breath cleaves or makes them cleave  
and did you say weather or a feather

spend a whole life listening and get it wrong  
*bu hao*, this is New Year's I'll never know your name  
dim sum in paradise busy street outside  
invisible diners plucking palpable food  
to be served dinner is to disappear  
only the waiters are there the deep *personnel*

for them we are phantoms, we eat out for them  
we sit invisible with joyful wallets,  
braced by their *stronger existence*,  
those eyes-away girls and wifty boys who carry  
heavy plates and beefy arguments around the room,  
we sheep look up and think we're fed

R.M.R.

the servers are the only people here, we vanish  
into agency, chat and chomp and soon are gone,  
oh what a bistro this sad earth is  
and winter waits outside, a week of this  
no fins no feathers just a clock remarking  
evening news from Budapest catch a word or two

it will be over soon they say the snow  
and say the pine tree shelters in the mist  
I will not go where such things live  
angry partisans belonging to their guns,  
I use the simplest words I can  
because my journey up the river is so long

I'd give all this to drink the light  
among the trees thicker, it grows the snow  
Faust gets young again with strength enough  
to be hurt again by what he thought was done  
but nothing's there and nothing's then,  
old age is a permanent condition in some men

"you are or will be the Prince Novo  
who changes the way we do the world"  
(dreamt, in Armenian, before woke  
into sun on snow with more to come)  
(end of my history of the American Republic)  
but who is this prince I or another must be?

who knows to whom a dream is talking  
if I swam it would be against the current  
sub-heroic but it functions this way  
with any old book for my larder  
and a man shoveling snow quietly outside  
remember that lawn we saw the northern lights?

I am not finished with this form  
*who pulls me downe?* irony of rapture  
we give so little and get everything  
each one a springboard to the next  
but there is a cenote in this world  
where lost things sink to rise in their time

C.M.

like Easter through the snow-laced trees  
yes something is coming miracle or otherwise  
the counting numbers never get you there  
a quiet moment's Eden enough, the four  
rivers of it are what the compass shows —  
to move at all is to lose your direction

certainly tried to tell the road  
from the river the moongate from the sea  
trampled snow smell of a horse  
the Prince has fallen — now you know he's a prince —  
raptors busy in the lower air, where Greeks  
were mostly free of gods, safe from all but self

*L.T.*

so be contrary all you choose  
the secret name of this is everything  
help the prince up from the mire  
avoiding the hoofsteps of his horse-machine  
put a word in his mouth and set him loose  
now comes the revolution the voice set free

and all those rights you dreamed you had  
your body all your own with what it does,  
hollow network of a vast enclosure  
fence round nada but how the nada gleams!  
don't you sometimes wish you were  
the only one the language means

but the frost of snow on the yew trees  
everybody wants to get into the idea  
Japanese *No* mask you carry in your eyes  
ready for the hour of disguise  
when a hand reaches out and makes a sign  
your skin makes sense of before the mind

let me be light  
and be of use to dark around me  
let me learn something  
and give it to you let me  
be you as much as we can  
until the sacred difference sleeps.

*January-April 2014*