

-The Four Seasons of a Boy-

Spring

At melting-time we fell,
down the tumbleslippery
sweet and muddy hills,
all scraped
from chasing victory,
or was it vengeance?

We laughed along
the heartless, rushing dance,
the danger smell of wild floods
we knew could suck you under

*and if you're lucky,
someone, by chance
a mile from here
will find you dead,
spinning face down
in your own private pool,*

and that was enough to stop us
from ever wanting children.

Summer

Always came too late,
but just in time for sour green apples
and purloined peaches,
sucked chin-dripping sweet
through fuzz that made it hard to concentrate
on the real work of braving things --
like dry summer thistle stings,
and other daily tests designed
to turn us into men,

earning the right to brush
by plan or accident,
against the pungent loins
of girls, who laughed

to send us down the ladder
of our momentary sorrow.

But for warrior kings, girls
had no lasting meaning.
For we had capes, and wings
made of old sheets,
with bow and arrow, and saplings
spear-sharp to fling
in barefoot majesty,
at anything that moved
before tomorrow.

Autumn

Meant the end
of milkweed parachutes
drifting in still air,
down to the valley of nowhere.

Meant all too soon
a prison of teachers,
and boots.

Meant frosty-fingered death
would come again,
without permission, to bend
the swooning grass of summer,
to laugh at the burning of our breath.

Meant an early drop
of darkening dew
chewy candies, too,
(snatched with deepest panic
from a black-witch treasure),
pulling, at fiercely-eager teeth
in sweet-and- sour pleasure.

Meant somersault
from an old fence-rail,
into golden leaves
and buried girls,
who prayed to be found

by the last boy hiding,
(betrayed,
by the happy wag
of a dog's tail).

Winter

Rural route 3
where I grew up
is gone now,
except in words.

They fall through memory
like slow snow,
for those who know

the telltale carving sound
of a sharp blade,
on crack-black ice,
announcing,
as sure as your next breath,
a puck-slap on the boards.

How to sit

panting hard in the frosty air,
chopping the darkest hole
with a single skate-heel arc,
then kneel, with new-invented holy words
and burning lips, to suck
the whole instreaking river up.

Mom said
that would freeze an over-heated heart.
Time to come home.
But she didn't know --
for a thirsty boy
that's no price to pay,
compared to bed.