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Author of *Legs* and *Billy
IRONY
WINNER OF THE PULITZER PRIZE

“One of the richest, most startling, and most satisfying American novels in recent years”
— Philadelphia Inquirer
IRON W

Rich Curtis
This is a series of thirty-five poems composed from found text. The found source material was a copy of the book *Ironweed*, by William Kennedy, that I ripped in half. I used the half that was attached to the spine of the book. As a result, I picked out certain phrases from the partial words and half sentences. I collected repeating images that occurred throughout the text. After this process was complete I began rearranging and distilling the parts into short cohesive poems. I used *Ironweed* as my source material because of the themes in the story and because I simply liked the book. There is also significance to the number thirty-five. This book is one of thirty-five projects I am completing within my thirty-fifth year. As Dante's protagonist in *The Divine Comedy* suggests, this is my symbolic half-life. I hope the poems cobbled from the half-pages of the book do justice their source.
IRON W
1.
up the winding road
rattling aware
of the dead
rounded by fields

like heavenly deposits
row upon row
of crosses twitch
in the grass

brittle to the touch
careful to preserve
face the familiar
silent past

just to wait easy
growing nameless
at the foot of more
durable memory
2.
that word
coward
past the place
where the old
come out fighting
frivolous is a
good word
the other side of
palpable smoke
here situates a man
3.
a country soul
distracted in town
missing connections
whango-bango
down the door
on the other side
break fence and roam
4. snows of reduction arrived ranging the unbridgeable chasms steadfast virtues of innocence denial deflected all moisture sublimity exuding a high gloss water panoramic memory vivid as eyesight dropping from right hand passing
5.
forge
through an act
of pressing
obligation

abandoning
silently in such
prolonged
final acts

both crouched
both stopped
in that
crouch

the breeze
has grown to
a noonday
pitch.
6.
remembered
remembered
the shape

loving life
the way it
could strike

feed
there and
wonder

following old
through old
window too old

toward the bed
the river alive
hopped in and out

journey to the
nameless
simple hopeless

fits of weeping
both questing
something

unutterable
eyes confirm
ever existence

old lock
over the other
seen the river

still run
right past
it blazing

supine
and yielding
the pose

full
all full of
scabs
7:
horses guard
between pillars of fire
helping to light
the weight of stone

on the final night
when grace is old and
the new dead walk

dust and sand
of redemption
bodies in allies
bodies in part of that
eternal landscape
8.
proffered hand
in spectacle
in a thing

touched the curved
fingers curved
tension on

came on and
lift leap pull
toward his own

face with
his own
gestures that

was a simple
show of
compassion
9.
be frost
freeze here
so fast
bring ice

any weeds
depth weeds
keep them
standing up
futility
10.
sounds made by
several amateur voices
raised all without
folding faces flushed
all woebegone

perfunctory mumbling
putrid perfume of
windblown purity or
private petulance

takes down forward
hair streamed
hands held it floating
in dust twisted
above the back
so full of holes
stained and tapped
remember nothing
for when last seen
a bridge not far

this summer-hummer
this poem as well
remember the plaintive

nothing lasted on
that famous night
stood between speed

these reminiscences
and envy festering in
the heart that surpasses

so desperately needing
expression went unanswered
a most visible burning
12.
the compulsion to flight
desire searching swiftly

the urge to run
pleasurable running
the running from
or running in quest
of the spirit

another departure
all things ceased in
wondrous self
buttoned up
nodded

having taken
life

would
understand

it smiled
and doffed
of brilliance

gleaming
the properties
of an angel

understanding
and

remaining
full

to loss
to failure
to the hostile
inconsistencies
14. 
the light pole on the corner
ate what was left then
threw a fire into an oil drum
15. throat-screamed
standing up

across time
held squinted eyes

leaving the
rest of your

life with you
when you

are struck
on the table
16.
now gone
gone entirely
turned
days pass
past the old
nights
so long the
vast hole
pours in cold
17. that fusion of beauty and desolation

life very likely is a posture of elegance

the cocoon of pretension is transforming

admiration into glares of envy and hostility
18.
gray clouds blow
swiftly past shimmer
a sprawling sea of names

fingers like roots from
half-full arms are
closing in around it

the door is cantered on
one hinge protecting
from moonlight leaking

in a sudden blink
it returns for the night
to reinvest in a lost age
19. into the moving
be-grieving bright
streets of sunshine
rising for work
opening into a
day of substance
and optimism
20.
stillness bringing dreams
into the dust

rendered motionless
mountains rise up

and trumpets sound
floating without trepidation

into the exalted reaches
composed so long ago
21.
do not
speak ill

for the
fire I am

in my
tree of trees

what will be
and in what

strength
into life so

willfully
my poet says

I am
not dead
hovering
at the edge of
escaping into
music
out into
the still-visible
stars drunk with
fire
resonating
out at the dawn
and roaming
free
listen to a
tree whose leaves
burst forth
symphonic
such things
cast crooked hands
to embrace a modest
understanding
23.
on the streets
the boys have urges

watch the night
watching naked

wanting a woman
wanting to watch

to climb down
and walk softly

listening to words
or sounds of metal

they are on top
and at the window

taking turns toward
vital and full and

confessing a fiery
yearning to

carry it through
having it finally

flaming bodies
finally together

for much more
unstoppable fire
24.
to move toward
  only hold tight
    moved
      toward
  
  fingers dare moved toward
tweeze and caress

permit fingers to
  fleshy whiteness
culminating
cleverly

  humming
    again and again

trying mightily
  in exhaustion
25. spoiled seed
   grows to a
   blossom of
   no value

   it produces
   no seed
   of its own

   withers and
   perishes
   and falls
   unknown
26.
once who
with once
that night

that once
when no
one since

the end of
the city
of the end
27.
morning air looked
and touched absolutely

the words tumbled and
the rapture swooned

into the world willfully
will to grace elusive

that grace moving
like wandering but not

unfolding instead
with no symbols lost

no pure instinct
its perfection in the
power to destroy itself
out of that deep center

all there was
was empty
28.
ever so much
is floating down
under the weight
of so much floating

ever so slowly
white bird glides
onto the grass
astream with singing

in its own perfection
which the wind
will curse in a
foreign language
there are things
never thought and
there are things
never wanted

some involuntary
messengers try
connecting insight
into the patterns

uncommon contact
until the departure
a flight of a kind
fly again each spring

and it won’t last long
and the grass comes green
and the music begins
and time is conscious
and longs to flee
30.
a target
movement

a lifetime
crumpled

the sound
the stone

the skull
old iron

too cold
this one

timed to
the frost
31. 
the way 
of time 
goes on 
without 
the way 
and out 
still go 
still real 
that each 
forever 
another 
would be 
there never 
still again
32.
odor of lost time
of imprisoned flowers
of reconstituted past

inside the trunk
melancholy histories
filed silently away
new light holding
the very air in the
softest wheeze
at last cleared
smoke winter's harbor of
breath to carry with it
34.
walking down the night
adjusting to the darkness
in some damp place
with fallen plaster

looking for a little room
occupied with sleep
such a place still alive
live it out with a blessing
35.
too late now to continue
propping against it softly

the soul of the world is
a bird of uncertainty

a vision carved deeply
filling other souls

in grace and in air of fallible
memory never making it right