

Leaves  
of  
Light

*Poems by Charles Michael Burack*

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## MT. MADONNA REDWOODS

### I

Nine young redwoods  
circling remains  
of mother tree,  
her body charred  
wishbone  
ten-feet high.

Children born  
from maternal ashes  
like a flock  
of arboreal phoenixes.

### II

Redwood stump  
like green mountain  
stream,  
mosses cascading  
down  
her terraced contours  
flowing, flowing, flowing  
onto rocks  
below.

From her dead  
center  
delicate seedling  
rises  
festooned with  
spider webs.

III

Young stub  
still attached  
to mother  
trunk  
grows tender  
bark over  
severed end  
like torn limb  
sprouting  
new flesh  
where blood  
once flowed.

IV

Through core  
of massive log  
lodged  
at waterfall lip  
the stream flows,  
her cold mountain  
waters seeming  
to rejuvenate  
old veins.

V

O rotting log  
at side  
of trail,  
how good  
to see you  
again

after losing  
my way  
and finding  
it and you  
once more.

## SWEETGUM IN SUMMER LIGHT

Like a great green diamond  
atop a tall granite pedestal  
you flashed your life so exuberantly.

And I, a passerby, suddenly felt  
heart clench and eyes tear.

Walking on I wondered: was it awe  
alone that so shattered me?

Or was there also a touch  
of envy?

## SQUIRREL SCIENCE

Miming the squeaks of squirrel  
seems to stir his curiosity  
and turn him into scientist.

He experiments with sound,  
suddenly stopping or starting,  
testing or investigating,  
if I'll continue aping him—  
I do.

At length he grows silent,  
perhaps tired of inquiry  
or certain of knowledge  
or satisfied he's in control.

## VOICE OF THE WOODS

Just days before  
millennial turn  
I sit cross-legged  
on rickety planks  
suspended  
by young redwoods  
high above Land  
of Medicine Buddha  
witnessing  
in joy and peace  
the surrounding trees, birds, bugs,  
sky, flickering sunlight  
in timeless  
repose  
...  
then hear  
*Voice of the Woods*  
and am filled  
with quiet  
excitement.

It feels like a sacred  
calling:  
these marvelous creatures  
beckoning me  
to speak on their behalf.

How precious  
and undefended  
they are!

## THE HARMONY OF HEAVENLY BODIES

All night our sleeping bodies  
press together  
fuse rib to rib  
refuse the cold  
lonely spaces  
between stars  
squeeze gentle heat  
from slumbering passion

All night feeling your touch  
and your turns  
an arm lingering  
on my chest  
warm breath caressing  
ear and neck  
a foot that slides  
slowly down my leg  
til it finds  
a foot  
and rests there  
content  
toes entwining toes

All night your wondrous  
image  
shimmers in dreams  
like a full moon  
in summer sky  
til suddenly  
my eyes open wide  
craving sight of you  
and see your eyes

spring open too  
dark almonds  
silvered with flames  
and in that moment  
as if by request  
the radio plays  
your favorite song  
Ode to Joy!

## EARLY SPRING ON MT. TAM

Young redwood twisted  
open  
by El Nino winds and rains

Huge moist slit rosy  
like lover's lips

Old stump gleams wet redbrown  
in spring sun

Chunks of rotting wood flake  
like grilled salmon flesh

Oaks everywhere bedecked  
in multigreen mosses

Terraced rock wall  
so mossed over seems  
a vernal waterfall

Two snails a handbreadth apart  
bulge out of madrone bark  
like dark staring eyes

## WATER SPIDERS

Water spiders like jet-  
propelled crosses  
flash across  
surface  
of pond  
dedicated  
to Awakened One.\*

*\*The Awakened One is Gautama Buddha.*

## MY CAT'S ADVICE ON JOB HUNTING

Get up at dawn—it's a new day.  
Feel the sun on your face,  
stretch, breathe deeply, shake  
yourself awake. Eat a good  
breakfast high in protein. Drink  
some water. Go outside for some  
fresh air. Take a little relaxed  
walk and notice the way the trees  
look, the plants smell, the wind  
sounds. Above all, enjoy

yourself. Remember each moment  
is an adventure. Always  
keep your eyes open—the world  
ever sends you signals. Listen  
to the sounds, the voices,  
the vibrations. Feel them  
along the length of your body.  
Flee the dangerous presences,  
investigate the inviting ones.

If something seems really  
appealing, check it out  
some more: smell it, walk around  
it, touch it, give it a little  
lick. Stay with it as long  
as there is something alive  
and enlivening. When you sense  
the attraction waning,  
move on. Do what you like.  
Repeat what you love.

Insist on having what really  
feeds you, body and soul.

Whine and persist in whining  
until you get it. Be willing  
to eat what is offered but  
keep asking for what you really  
desire. You need to let others  
know you're serious and determined  
to get what you want. But

you have to be sure you really  
want it. Don't think too much.  
Stop making those crazy lists  
of pros and cons. Use your senses,  
your instincts, your intuitions.  
Let your head follow your belly  
and heart. Keep yourself clean  
and well groomed. Make sure  
you get your head and back rubbed  
at least once a day by someone

you love and trust. When you find  
the job you really want, stalk it,  
observe it quietly, study  
its movements and patterns  
and then pounce before it gets  
away. Pounce, and if you miss,  
pounce again, and if it gets away,  
then seek a fresh opportunity,

forgetting the disappointment  
of failure but remembering  
the approaches that helped  
and those that didn't. Keep honing  
your hunting strategies—the better  
they become, the better the job  
you'll land. The more skilled  
the cat, the juicier the catch!

## MY CHILDREN

Walking these hills alone,  
the sun a blinding white eye,  
I see my precious children  
and feel myself the father  
I might have been.

My eldest son,  
New Year's surprise  
over eight years ago,  
lanky and timid as a reed,  
eyes keen and curious  
as his mother's dark orbs,  
clings to my left hand  
to brace his frame  
against the golden shock  
of daffodils  
trumpeting spring.

My soft round daughter,  
St. Valentine's gift  
just six winters ago,  
big-hearted like her mother  
and sporting eyes blue as ice;  
she swings my right hand,  
points with hers and asks  
can she pet the pretty dog  
coming toward us.

My wet-cheeked baby boy,  
conceived in spasms  
of thoughtless bliss  
two summers ago,

sleeps on my back  
like a papoose  
and dreams of next summer  
when he can run ahead,  
more wild and free  
than his mother.

But as I near home  
my unborn children vanish  
and their mothers disappear  
and I shudder at our sins  
of aborted dreams  
and cruel convenience.

## SWEETGUM IN WINTER LIGHT

Young  
pear-shaped  
sweetgum dropping  
deep pink and yellow flames  
on grass and sidewalk while nearby  
older tree still clings to last green embers,  
its base lightly speckled with shades of salmon  
and saffron, its crown orange and rust-red like  
harvest time. . . . I realize so much of the delight  
I take in these trees is the bliss of the Infinite  
appreciating its own  
creation.

## THE TREES OF LIFE ARE FALLING

My prayer walk  
    through the park  
Is assailed  
    this morning  
By grizzly  
    grinding sounds  
Of chain saws  
    buzzing, buzzing,  
Buzzing through  
    hearts  
Of eucalyptus,  
    the latest  
    victims  
Of human  
    progress.

In the name  
    of electric  
    force,  
For the sake  
    of modern  
    civilization,  
Tall trees  
    are being razed  
    to the ground  
For they grow  
    too near  
    the lines  
    of power.

Holy, holy, holy  
    is the Lord  
    of Hosts.

Heavy, heavy, heavy  
is my heart  
of flesh.  
Killing, killing, killing  
are the machines  
of men.

The trees of life  
are falling  
The trees of life  
are falling

So we can indulge  
our comforts  
And fill  
our pockets  
And consume  
the Earth.

Even though I walk  
through the valley  
Of the shadow  
of death  
I will fear  
no evil  
For You are  
with me.

Yet the cogs  
of commerce  
continue to turn,  
And the chips  
of technology  
hum faster and faster  
out of control,

And the engines  
of greed grow  
more and more  
insatiable.

The trees of life  
are falling  
The trees of life  
are falling

When will we cease  
to eat  
From the Tree of Power  
and Progress?

## OYSTER

Cold and chaotic currents purl  
and jostle her this way and that,  
dash her fluted workshop  
against the sea's scalloped floor,  
rocking the sphere of her secret labor.

Yet within her wondrous lab,  
she silently perseveres  
in expressing her liquid loveliness,  
translucent as blood soaked in sun,  
and layer by layer, year by year,  
transforms the once irritating atom  
of rough rock, dust of sea,  
waste of ages, into startling  
globe of enameled light,  
the sea's own brilliant moon.

# I AM

In the beginnings  
I am  
And in the endings  
I am  
Every finish but a pause  
Every start but a push  
Or pull  
Of infinite pulsations  
Of endless cyclings and recyclings  
Birthings and buryings  
Bloomings and bustings

All I see is I  
I is all I see  
All always all  
Always each  
Always all

Each a part a portal  
A prism

Enter a leaf  
You are there  
Enter a root  
You are here  
Branch trunk fruit  
Tree of life

Earth is Sun's  
Dark condensed  
Rays  
Sun is Earth's

Light loosened  
Dust

Waves dissolve  
Into particles  
Particles dance  
Into waves

Can you see an apple  
Without seeing the branch  
The sun the dirt the ants  
The spring rain the clouds  
The nearby lake the distant sea  
The farmer the trucker the steel plant  
The rubber plantation  
The marketplace

I am the mother and the baby  
And the flow of joy between  
I am the mammaries and the milk  
And the mouth that sucks blind

The trees are my thick hairs  
The mountains muscled bone  
The seas fragrant sweat  
The winds living breath

I split myself to see myself  
To know my nature  
To gaze upon my face  
To proclaim my facets

With division I multiply  
With difference I make sense

One to act  
Another to react  
One to be  
Another to become  
One to know  
Another to be known

I make worlds out of yearning  
For partners  
In dance

Worlds whirl out  
And worlds whirl in  
But never do I release  
Both hands

Lovewrestling is the combat  
I love most

I rip my stillness  
To make delirious dance  
And score my quietude  
To make uproarious song

Chaos is my free play  
Order my moment of rest

I splinter my eye  
To make points of view  
I gather my eyes  
To know myself  
Completely

I burn and burn  
Consuming myself  
Spreading out my wealth  
That all may be  
Light

Everyone  
A ray  
Rooted  
In my burning  
Heart

Everyone  
A root  
Arrayed  
With my fire

My heart a bright home  
An incandescent loam