Blind*

*Inspired by the life of John Hull, Emeritus Professor at the University of Birmingham, who went blind partway through his career. All italicized portions are direct quotations from Hull himself, from his wife Marilyn, or from his daughter Imogen.*

If only there could be he said, something equivalent to rain falling inside.
The heaving of fog through doorways—condensing in the kitchen, showering the nursery in a kind of sung topography. Blinds drawn by a dawn’s drizzle strokes; home’s bleary contours rinsed in dripped staccato. How else to wring the texture of a life from rooms so dry?

Perhaps—But can this dreamed solution soothe the furrows in his wife’s voice when she blues: there’s no beholding. And what of color? Her eyes? Are these fragments enough to answer a daughter’s tiptoe plea:

Ob but daddy I wish you could see me
Impressions of Your Fourteenth-to-last Day

for my dad

The morning began in San Diego—the end of a three-day-long respite from decline, from hospitals. There was a small summer wildfire burning up the coastline. The hills flung their temporary vermillion into the waves’ reflections, and, driving home to see you, I came close very close to the pliant flames but the windows kept me cool. The smoke spun itself around the tires for a moment as I skated by.

Two hours north, shriveled birds of paradise loitered outside the gate that opened onto the driveway and past it the house in its bougainvillea armor, where you were waiting—years before, I would boast to you that my feet never hurt when I walked barefoot on the driveway’s gravel. You would grin and lift me high as the persimmons with hands still tennis-strong.

Inside, you were living but living a little less. Living in tissue-paper yellow—skin, eyes, fingernails. Your mercurial chuckle broke into a wheeze as I stole past.

I waited hours before joining you; we waded through the afternoon in separate rooms. As the promise of evening pulled our shadows longer, I wondered if the fire was still burning. Still leaking in rivulets up that mountainside, the coast toward us. Quietly, distant constellations of orange and carmine replaced your yellow and outside, the last of the season’s persimmons,
heavy with color,
bowed their boughs.

Vesuvius

I
I wonder which impression will spread its hot film
over the place where
today lingers in my memory.

II  For example
The base of a backyard redwood.

III
It is something like a tentative
Vesuvius
whose humped back
skims the underside
of consciousness’s surface—oblivious
even of its own capacity to spout;
the people nearby oblivious too
of its lazy potential to resurface
the landscape with
itself—accustomed as they are
to its quiet almost-presence
underfoot.

IV  Example, contd.
When I think of my fourth year
all I can recall with any certainty is
spools of water spilling
from my heavy little can
in the morning, in the spring,
dirt furious and swirling
over my toes on the bubbling slick
moating a trunk whose branches
even the lowest branches
I wish I could raise
memory’s eyes to.

V
And then a civilization
of 16,000, historians guess, vanishes—
leaving nothing but 16,000
instant negative spaces
beneath the unquenchable rock.

Recently, it was declared a national park.
The summit was opened to the public
(Foot Access Only).

VI
I follow my bare feet
down instead, my mind a makeshift trowel.
In the living mountain’s shadow,
I wonder
at the hollow forms, the branches
above eye-level.

Etymologies

*Daisy*
Morning forces you
open—squinting, dilated
still after the night.
Consider
It’s impossible
on stormy nights; our minds go
grey without the stars.

Sincere
Steadfast as its peers
soften—a Roman statue:
pure marble, no wax.

Cell
Can you imagine
his surprise: a million monks
cloistered in the cork!

Worm
The humblest dragon
peered up through the heat and begged
for a fearsome name.

Cantaloupe
Sliced, your two halves blush
like the spring moon to which
wolves bay their ballads.

Charlotte
It makes perfect sense:
you are apple marmalade
covered with breadcrumbs.

Cynthia
Your own orbit is
a mystery to you. Moon-
gaze in the mirror.