Attention Kept

Set in Gentium, 10 on 15 point, from SIL Global. The title and page numbers are Basteleur, by Keussel. The running heads and my name are Sligoil Micro, by Ariel Martín Pérez for Velvetyne. All three typefaces are open source (SIL OFL Licensed). This means they are free to use, change and share.

While I wrote the poems, I made this book with the help of Claude Code. We wrote a small tool for it, called Bjook. The poems are plain text files, a stylesheet sets the page, and one command builds the PDF and arranges the pages. It's part of a large library of design system rules, palettes, etc. to try and create a "Design Intelligence" to allow me to automate things where it makes sense. The tool is at github.com/bjornmeansbear/color-system-and-guidelines.

Letter paper, folded once, stapled twice.

Nothing Is Happening

KRISTIAN BJØRNARD

Glitter Universe

Morning.
We seem to be the only ones outside.
Birds. Light breeze. Clear sky.

My daughter and I play with slime,
all the colors,
glitter and tiny plastic toys folded in.

Pink, purple, gold.
A universe of sparkles and lime slices.

‡

Frosted Flakes (A Snow Poem)

Snowflakes fall in silent grace,
A hush upon the world they trace.
Each one shaped with icy art,
They melt like dreams upon my heart.

You taste one — cold and crisp, it gleams,
A fleeting sip of winter's streams.
Too icy now to blend a treat,
But oh, that crunch beneath my feet!

‡

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Everything is dimmer than she expected.
Who normally turns the lights on?
So few obstacles.
Wood, then tile.
Bare feet in the quiet.

She pours a second glass
and leans on the kitchen counter.
Not sitting.
Not pacing.
One hand on the edge,
the other holding the glass.
Are there still plates in the cupboard for dinner?

She drinks slowly.
She waits.
No one is coming down.

‡

Plates

Home.
She opens the bottle
waiting in the kitchen.
The cork pops.
It echoes off the tile.
Then nothing.
No sound from upstairs.

She pours a glass.
Her cuff loose on her hand, she pushes it to her elbow,
and carries the glass down the hall.
Sofa or lounge chair?
The chair.
Sits. Sinks in. Sips.
Swings a leg over the arm.
Then the other.
Her arm drapes, the sleeve falls down again.

Sun dapples through the plants in the windows,
then goes.
The house darkens.
She tips the glass. Nothing.
Up.

→

Another wasted day

I wasted the day — time spilled, silent and slow.
The sun crossed the floor, but I never moved with it.
What aches is how well I know this script.
Evening comes, and I have nothing to show.

‡

An Antidote

I seized the day — time bloomed, vibrant and bright.
Dancing with the sun as it painted walls.
Many preferable futures started in this moment.
Evening comes, holding a harvest of light.

‡

What Still Stands

You left me like a tornado leaves a town.
Trailers everywhere.

On Main Street,
a piece of my heart, still standing.

Somewhere a girl wakes up in color.
Not here.

Here, Mrs. Diehl brings a casserole.
The Peterson boys run chainsaws until dark.
A kid two counties over finds us by their lake,
glossy, creased, both of us smiling.
Nobody asks how I am.
They hand me a hammer.

‡

Je ne sais quoi

Some things have it.
Most don't.

It isn't the medium.
It isn't the format,
the material,
the decade.

It is the whole,
more than the parts.
Gestalt.

A timeless thing can wear a style
and never look dated.
It can be made of something old
and still look new.

The fifties, sixties, seventies
were full of modernist radios —
clean boxes, honest knobs.

Most of them just look old or quaint now.

Rams's are still *now*.

‡

Can we help this Neighborhood mom

That mom,
she sounds like
she's having a hard time.

What can I do to help?
What can any of us do?

She doesn't want it.
Snails, crawfish, fungus,
the bird her cat caught.
distractions.

She'll help them,
not herself.

Is it just listening?
Is that all she needs?
Asking to go on a walk.
What do you give up?
What parasite is
draining, demanding,
drawing away
your energy now?

→

How do we help?
Can we?
Please be well.

‡

Down the road, a flat tire.
I ran out to help them change it,
get back on their way.

That's just what you do.

‡

Strange Familiarity

I sat with them today,
my cousin and her family,
strangers bound by blood.

Actors in a play not well rehearsed,
forgetting the lines.

I looked at their faces
and wondered
what makes them like mine.

Argh. I felt no connection,
only obligation's weight.
We used to see each other,
what, twice a year as kids?

Two decades of nearly nothing,
just digital versions
I don't really recognize
and don't often agree with.

They asked me something
and I saw a glimmer —
something still catches.

→

Y2K never happened, but still

At a backyard gathering, a voice
cuts through the chatter:
"My photos live on an ancient device,
no cloud, no backup."

I'm stunned. It's as if
time has folded in on itself,
transporting us back
to 2005.

How can this be?
A capable professional
seemingly detached
from the world of cloud everything,
a dissonance
between the world and their personal realms.

I find myself
perplexed,
caught between
technological progress
and the quaintness
of personal choice.

→

Is it merely preference,
or an unspoken divide?
As an everyman of tech,
I can't help but question —
where does the balance lie?

‡

Not creative.
The creating.
Becoming.

‡

The fallen becomes the buried.
The buried becomes weight.
Weight becomes pressure.
Pressure becomes stone.
Stone becomes crust,
folded,
crushed,
heated,
melted,
mixed.

Then: cooling.
Then: crystal.
Minerals locking into place
in the dark
with no witness.

The forest makes soil.
The soil makes rock.
The rock returns
as mountain,
as sand,
as this thin skin we stand on.

→

Strange Familiarity

I sat with them today,
My cousin and her family,
Strangers, but strangers bound by blood.

We spoke, but what do we know about each other really?
Leaves falling in a forgotten forest.
Familiar yet distant.
Actors in a play not well rehearsed
Now forgetting the lines.

What is family?
The question hangs in my mind like smoke.
Is it liquid DNA that runs through us,
Or stories we've shared?
Past memories?
What?

I looked at their faces and wondered:
What makes them like mine?
Do we need the same beliefs
To bridge our indifferences?
What starts as a fragile thread
Tied by memory and hope
Built further on shared truths.

→

Argh. I felt no connection,
Only obligation's weight.
But what if connection is not found,
But made?
Not fate but volition.

So I listened to the unspoken stories,
Now they're asking me questions
I saw a glimmer — is it just a memory?
But it leads somewhere new,
Full of possibility.

Perhaps family is not given, But chosen,
A path we walk together
Even when the road is unclear.

‡

Patient as a Rock

The earth is constantly turning one thing into another.
Not creative but creating.
Becoming.

A leaf drops in a forest and keeps falling
after it hits the ground —
softening, darkening,
trading its green
for the brown of soil.
Fungus threads it through,
patient as rot.
A fallen branch loosens its fibers
one slow tug at a time.
Rain returns.

Sometimes it appears nothing is happening —
the woods holding still,
forest floor lying undisturbed —
but layers are being laid:
leaves, sediment, shells.

→

Is it cliché to write of a love not had?
Perhaps.
But the script is etched in the ice.
She chooses who falls,
carries the chosen
where the rest of us cannot follow.
We are just the namesakes,
performing the chase
until the winter takes the stage.

Then the thaw.
New tracks.
Follow.

‡

The Boardwalk

Havre de Grace —
My wife and kid butcher it beautifully,
All giggles and mangled French,
Making it theirs.

We arrive.
Woah.
This boardwalk knows its name,
Stretches along the shoreline,
Counting birds — and one escaping children's Bluey toy,

Amazing how much life
Fits in such small spaces —
Snapping turtle sunning,
Heron standing like a question mark,
Osprey writing circles overhead

Marina to lighthouse,
A beginning and an end
Connected by planks
Beautiful "natural" recreation(s)
And the promise of ice cream.

→

We rush off,
Bay air in our lungs,
And carry home the sound
Of water lapping wood,
Of wings cutting sky,
Of laughter that can't pronounce
Beautiful things

See you at home,
Where we'll try to explain
How a boardwalk becomes
A bridge between
What we came looking for
And what we found instead.

‡

The North

We will sacrifice ourselves
to the pale girls of the north.
It is the first lesson:
the beautiful are the ones who survive.
We do all that the blood allows.
Taken to a narrow bed,
we offer up the hours, the years,
hoping for rebirth from this cold curse.

Oh, how romantic —
this theater of horns and hounds.
Other suitors prevail;
that is the clockwork of the season.
It is a superficial tie,
a thin wire pulled tight.
Does love even bind?
Trumpets through the pines:
a new pursuit begins
before the old tracks have frozen.

→

We were from Kalamazoo.
We didn't know yet
that somewhere in every system
someone is at the edge,
and the trains
don't stop in time,
and the afternoon
continues anyway,
and you let it,
because what else
do you do.

‡

River Day

The cormorant dives deep,
No hesitation,
While we idle on the pontoon,
Deciding where to go.
Osprey overhead —
Focused, hunting,
Everything we're not today.

A jet boat screams past,
All noise and wake,
Tubing kids shrieking joy
Behind it like a tail.

We're cruising,
Which is really just
Moving without purpose,
Calling it adventure.

The egret stands still
In the shallows,
A heron waits too,
Like it knows something
We're still learning.
Patient as a prayer
We forgot how to say

→

Seagulls beg and steal,
Familiar chaos,
The family dynamics
We brought with us.

Then the bald eagle
Circles high above it all,
Watching our small dramas
From a distance that makes sense.

By evening we're exhausted
From doing nothing much,
Sunburned and soda-sticky,
But the water holds us anyway,
Birds and boats and people,
All of us just floating
In the same uncertain space.

‡

We were shuffled back up,
out to the street,
into the June heat —
not yet the full weight of summer
but getting there.

We didn't talk much.
We continued the plan.
That's the thing I can't explain —
how the afternoon just
folded us back in,
the city indifferent,
a café somewhere,
light on the Seine doing
what light does.

And underneath it:

could I have seen it coming
in someone I loved?
Could I see it in myself?

→

Metro, Juin

We were from Kalamazoo.
Paris was still a movie set,
light doing what it does
in paintings, on postcards —
we were headed somewhere cheerful,
the plan was sightseeing,
the afternoon was everything.

Then: squealing brakes.
Shouts. The platform
across the tracks
going suddenly wrong.
It took us a moment.
The French came fast and official
and meant nothing —
except one word.
Un jeune.

At the far end of the opposite platform,
something dark at the edge of the car.
People standing
the way people stand
when they cannot move.

→

Reframings

I miss deadlines
I procrastinate
I feel lost

In a forest of unreachable goals
I wander
beside a river of ideas
choked by stones of self-doubt
its current silenced

Yet, in this wilderness,
might I learn life's true cycles?
A silvopasture of the soul —
reframe missteps
as cracks in the dam
each fracture sparks a new stream
dissolving my old vector
creating new possibles

Could losing my way
become the seed of fresh growth?

‡

Found Wood: A Circular Narrative

Found wood, a silent revolution
Silvopasture sheep sequestering carbon
Roots plunging deep into bioregion soil
Hemp cord binding us — literally, figuratively,
    metaphorically

Circular whispers of sustainable dreams
Where form follows function, function follows earth
Each object revealing its origin
Design that gives more than it takes

Crafted by hands in tune with nature's wisdom
A chair that murmurs of forests and fields
Its curves speak the language of regeneration
From soil to seat, a journey made whole

‡

Sprung

Today is equinox
I hear a woodpecker
Vibrating
Knock knock knocking its rhythm
Seeking those who tunneled through the cold dark,
dreaming of nothing, now moving again
The sun out, rain just past
Spring? Are you here?
Are the sounds of this pileated drummer you making
    yourself known
The yard garlic and crocus rise up to meet you
Viridian and purple against the moist browns and grays
Willing servants
Sprung.

‡

Midsummer (Til Árs ok Friðar)

Into the solstice
the sun stands still
momentarily
everything is possible
but everything gets shorter from here
flowers, fruit
a tree, a son, a night on the lawn
up past dark
which comes so late now
grill, talk
oh Frey
can we guarantee food
and fine weather
for the rest of the summer
peace, pleasure
good harvest.

‡

Rest as a Vector

Well, I got almost nothing done today
Work piled up like unread emails
Questions buzzing —
“Am I really in charge here?”
We spent the whole afternoon at the pool
Body lighter. Mind clearer.

Water’s gentle cradle
rocked my shoulders free of doubt
Sunlight sifted through my thoughts
like fine sand through fingers
(wait, why is there sand at a pool?)

If rest can be progress,
what if stillness is my new vector?
How do “successful” people
measure the breadth of a quiet day?
Could doing less be the path forward —
for you, for me, for all of us?

‡

I saw them at a street fair...

Street fair band.
Your sound isn't quite right.
Vocals too low.
Should I say something?
Nice tone on the guitar.
Cool vibes from the bassist —
she's actually playing runs,
not just root notes and sustain.
But still, voices muffled.
Wait, they have a sound guy.
There we go.
Moving around.
Tweaking some settings.
(It's all just on an iPad)
Aha, sudden, clean, opened.
She cuts through the rest
and now two distinct voices in harmony,
Finally, I can actually tell — yes —
you are a good band.

‡

Poem about snow

Looks like frosted flakes,
glistens in the sun.
Damp and fluffy
all across the ground.

Snow snow snow.
It's so wonderful.
Too bad it's too icy
to make tasty icees.

Still, that crunch.

‡

Opelika

Even the suit's too hot.
Pale blue, rumpled, on my aunt's screen door.
Seersucker.

Pink face flickering on a sign.
Wire baskets, fried chicken, checkerboard floor.
Piggly Wiggly.

My uncle hands me a Coke,
glass bottle, sweating.
The cousins talk over the cicadas.

Somebody says it's always been this hot.
I mutter into the bottle.
Motherfucker.

‡

One/Another

Things are almost
Over

Performance wraps,
hushed halls,
one act closes.

Or rather:
things are just
beginning.

What is left to do?
What is left to ask?

Things appear fine:
A calm, icy surface —
crystalline, fragile.

Are they?

Beneath that surface,
everything's freaked out,
insecure, neurotic,
emotional.

Unraveled.

→

What is right to do?
What is right to say?

One act closes,
another surface cracks.

Everything.
Anything.
One thing.
Over. Under.
Beginning. End.

‡

The costume is not a lie.
It is a declaration:
I am on the side of making,
of the callus and the sawdust,
of the thing that exists
when you are done.

And somewhere in the wearing,
in the mending and the measuring
and the project that takes
three times as long as you thought —

you stop performing
and just become
the person
in the coveralls.

‡

Workwear

I am not a laborer.
I know this.
I am the one who draws the thing
someone else builds.

But given the choice
between the boardroom and the shop floor
I will take the shop floor
every time —
the smell of it,
the noise,
the honest relationship
between a hand and a material.

So I dress for where I want to be.
Coveralls. Handkerchief. Closed-toe shoes.
Moholy-Nagy did the same —
artist in mechanic's clothes,
not fooling anyone,
making a statement anyway.

→

North by Northwest

Asphalt stretches into the distance —
to my right,
sun-drenched waves of grass
and a river
carving its ancient, shifting course;
to my left,
steel rails humming
with a train
in restless migration.

On the riverbank,
cottonwoods shed seeds
drifting on a boreal breeze.
Spun tufts soon become wings:
tens of Sandhill cranes rising
red crowns flickering
over the flowing field.

→

A steel beast
thunders past
on parallel rails,
boxcars migrate beside us,
slicing green waves:
rail
road
river
meridian
adjacent veins journeying.

On the distant horizon,
track and highway dissolve into light,
the invisible promise of
somewhere
else —
past and future fold into each other.

Will seeds and cranes
always migrate beside me?
I hope so.

‡

Ars Designica

The Grid. The System. The Method.
The steps that promise “The Way.”
We try to decipher a design
with more certainty than we predict the weather,
but the air is never that lucid.
If form and meaning are inseparable,
then a design about design
must find its own fracture every time.
It is not a drawing or a building;
it is the act of listening
to the dam as it breaks.

‡

First Flurries

Is winter really here?
It certainly has been colder.
But I'm not sure it's meant to last
I'll try not to think too hard about it
and just enjoy the silent flakes floating past

‡

Regenerative Design

In nature's hands, we find our truest art,
Where every piece of wood and wool can sing,
From fallen trees, new life shall take its part,
And every thread a tale of hope can bring.

With local roots, our craft begins anew,
No waste shall mar the beauty of our hands,
For in each choice, the earth's own voice shines through,
A dance of form and function, life expands.

Let not the past be lost in fleeting trends,
But weave a future bright with every seam,
In harmony, our vision never ends,
A world reborn, where all can share the dream.

So let us build with care, and hearts aligned,
For in our hands, a better world we find.

‡

Quarry lake

Quarry lake
A flooded old stone hole
The sun is out
It dances off the top of water
Sparkles here and there
Perpetual twinkling
The wind dies
Water stills
Suddenly it's calm
The glimmers disappear
A duck cuts across
Glints return
Nothing is happening
Attention kept

‡

Verdent Veil

Through veil of verdant green,
The troll spins magic unseen,

Obedient plants bow down,
Enchantments scattered around.

In nature's sacred weave,
Spirits dance, secrets they leave,

Portals open, potions brew,
Mystic books whisper, too.

Codes hide in shadows deep,
Guarded by an ancient keep,

The troll's magic uncovers all,
Nature's secrets heed her call

‡

Shimmering Cascade

The morning sun paints the sky with a vibrant hue,
Waking the world from its slumber, fresh and anew.
The birds sing their song, a joyous serenade,
The dew glistens upon leaves, a shimmering cascade.

‡

Namesake

Green the pines grow
Up through winter snow,
Fluffy, white, and there!
Prints softly outlined.
Look — a warning sign,
Bark torn to one side.
And then we hear the shout,
Gunshots ring out,
The dogs bark loud.
A scream rises through the air

When Bjørn meets Bear.
All he can do is stare,
The namesake of...
The last thought through his mind:
Perhaps he's not the killing kind.

When Bjørn meets Bear.
All he can do is stare.
The namesake of...

When Bjørn meets Bear,
we just stand and stare.
He is the namesake of...

‡

The Weight of Potential

I thought I lost my pencils today.
Notebook: check. The other tool: gone.
That was actually a worse feeling than much else —
the missing emails, the broken phone, the rain.
Stress, shame, and failure: the usual.
But what am I without a lead?

Notebooks are not reservoirs of memory;
they are the triggers of the spark,
flint to a steel.
A gesture, an overheard word,
a door swinging open to a room
that did not exist
until the graphite pressed the grain.
The thought is a mirage until it's traced.

Then: the find.
A zipped pocket, a plastic clip.
Mechanical, resin, reliable.
I hold it in my hand and feel the gravity return —
the heavy, holy weight of potential.

‡

Trifecta

Sedum, cement, wood
A trifecta of beauty
Nature meets design

‡

Ghost of Unkissed Kisses

I can always picture this girl from college,
But, she's not a single girl — she's an amalgam
of all the girls I loved or wished to love
that I grasped and that slipped through my fingers.
Sometimes blonde, sometimes brunette
Something lingering, an after-image
whispering out from every song, every film, every book
I try to catch her smile between frames and pages
It's winter dusk and she stands beside me,
her laughter echoing off brick walls and Greek columns.
Yet I cannot remember
the name she whispers back.

‡

Understory

Quietly, I sit,
Grounded like the moss and lichen.
Present, observing.
Nature's beauty,
Decay, cycles, systems —
A symphony of life.
Breathe, stillness,
Rooted, connected to the earth,
An unobtrusive yet integral presence.

‡

Perhaps She's Just Well-Travelled

I saw her there:
A Chihuahua in her purse,
An exotic cigarette held in red, red lips.
Wispy rings of smoke surround her like a shroud,
And when she turns...

A quick hair flip.
Strands part to reveal immense sunglasses —
So dark they block out more than just the sun.
An impenetrable fortress

Amongst the gleams off windshields and sideview
mirrors.
She's a Jet-set icon.
Her cell phone to her ear.
Lost in conversation,

Perched in perfect balance on a vintage Vespa —
First guess: a Veloce 1971.
Oh Goddess of asphalt and concrete,
Perfection in blond curls and the latest fashion.

→

Secrets in the Undergrowth

Tardigrades, small and tough,
Yellow mushrooms, bright and rough,

Moss and rotting stumps abound,
A world of wonder, all around.

On mosquitoes' wings they fly,
The internet? Mycelium's sigh,

Life's mysteries all intertwined,
Nature's secrets, ever-entwined.

‡

Hamburg Harbor Hymn

Techno sea god ziggurat —
sentinel of rain and iron,
Witness to the harbor's restless hymn.
What weather sprites descend today?
Their breath churns turbines into song,
Wind-whipped blades never cease their turning.
Cranes rise tireless from the water's edge,
Industrial and cold, bowing to no deity but labor itself.
Who comes to pay respects?
Not the cruise ship pilgrims,
Their chubby faces turned from the storm — hurrying
inside
But the rain, the wind, and the workers endure
Their devotion etched in weathered hands.
How does one send an offering?
Upon arrival, we find, the way is blocked.
Not the cathedral to aqua we thought.

‡

European by recent descent?
Highly likely.
Though perhaps she is just well-travelled.

‡

On an upper peninsula drive

Sun drenches waves of grass
a river cuts through
on the banks, cottonwoods
seeds migrate like drifting snow,
carried on a restless breeze.
spun tufts give way to wings.

A lone Sandhill crane glides past —
no, now ten of them,
already in the next field
red crowns flickering
over the grassy sea,
where are they headed? Farther north?

On the other side
a steel beast thundering by
on parallel rails,
boxcars migrate beside us,
slicing their man-made line through the green waves:
river, road, rail, meridian.

→

At the horizon,
tracks, highway, and oasis vanish together
into the promise of somewhere new —
hundreds of miles still ahead.
how long will seeds, cranes, water, and boxcars
journey beside us?

My hope: all the way.

‡