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I Want to Taste Formaldehyde

I want to slaughter Cause by feasting
On a diet of red and white roses

I want to strangle Effect by weaving
A rosary of thorns Wearing a thin patch
Of black rose petals over my left eye

I want to stymie Worm and the Dust
Brothers with all their Myrmidons
Those quiet delvers Rot Mold
Stench Decay Fungi Bacteria

Oh McKernan What will your bravado
Hatred of Death's indelible ink earn you?
I want maps of the islands When and Where
I want to taunt Death so harshly that He's ready
To drag me from my dirty Omaha grave

& flick me -- in a snap -- to the moon

"Your Poem Is Empty and Devoid of Meaning"

That's what Abe Lincoln told me in his calm voice
He spoke matter of factly Without rancor

"Much of your stuff is pure fake You might
Think you are saying something but really
There's nothing here but vowels and consonants."

"I like this: Tiny air bubbles in blue
Stained glass and I like Fear can stitch
An eyelid tighter than any shadow.
But what's this crap Night's galactic indifference?"

"I don't rise from the grave very often
Especially for poets But I like
Your midwestern daring So when you feel
Like writing The raindrops kissed enough silence
Feel this penny and then throw it away."

I Don't Feel Like Any Poems Today

I don't want to remember your blonde hair
Your tall tan body A perfect sculpture

I don't want to remember the jerk I was
Cramming atoms into every corner
Of my brain Your voice in Organic lab

I don't want to remember that dark night
Curved as a flute over all of Nebraska
Nor the sound of the train's wheels Nor the shrill
Pointless whistle Nor the moon saying nothing

I don't want to remember how drained
Of light that laboratory was How for weeks
Each carbon atom that burned in that room
Reminded me of your sweet mocking voice
"Don't you just hate Carbon! Look at this soot!"

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John McKernan is a retired comma herder. He lives in West Virginia most of the year -- except for the icicles -- where he edits ABZ Press. His poems have appeared in many magazines including *The Paris Review*, *The New Yorker*, *The Atlantic Monthly*, etc. His most recent book is a selected poems edition called

Resurrection of the Dust.