

Probably Inevitable

Matthew Tierney



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Matthew Tierney

Coach House Books, Toronto

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first edition



Canada Council
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Conseil des Arts
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ONTARIO ARTS COUNCIL
CONSEIL DES ARTS DE L'ONTARIO

Canada

Published with the generous assistance of the Canada Council for the Arts and the Ontario Arts Council. Coach House Books also acknowledges the support of the Government of Canada through the Canada Book Fund and the Government of Ontario through the Ontario Book Publishing Tax Credit.

LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES CANADA CATALOGUING IN PUBLICATION

Tierney, Matthew Frederick, 1970-
Probably inevitable / Matthew Tierney.

Poems.

Issued also in an electronic format.

ISBN 978-1-55245-261-5

I. Title.

PS8589.I42P76 2012

c811.6

C2012-904673-6

Probably Inevitable is available as an ebook: ISBN 978 1 77056 318 6.

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*For my brothers,
Geoffrey, Aaron, Peter & Luke*

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*All of the heroes
you see falling down
were filmed trying to stand up.*
– Mary Ruefle

Author's Note to Self

They keep reminding me you're without foghorn. Unlikely this missive will end before you've determined it's possible to navigate by hi-hat alone. Bad idea. Cymbals aren't usually

cymbals, they're mermaids. Inland we've taken to mounting birth certificates to establish the thickness of drywall. Thus far mine (ours) hangs askew from last month's tremors, nothing

a dog lick couldn't set straight. While boiling broth today I heard eighth notes mingle in a downstream draft. Thought to myself: all art aspires to the well-crafted pop song. Then a supernova

went off and optical fibres bobbed like anemones in the deep. It's been one petit mal after another. But enough about me. How're those chilblains? Tolerable? My support group says

ailments I've blamed on you are narrative issues in spite of the unforgiving arctic wind. You're captain, you've shouldered a yeoman's share, I should cut you some slack re: the untimely

loss of my cockatiel. Steadfast above the long-range forecast, its pitch-perfect imitation of our doorbell's reveille never failed to move me. Now I'm hours on the ottoman staring at its cage

until an intestinal jab sends me to the low-flush. So depressing, waiting to rehit the button like some percussionist. You'll be happy to learn I've cut out the supplements, though (my mistake)

I bought in bulk a year's worth of birdseed. My nutritionist, she's high on ancient whole grains, I can never stock enough tobacco tins of quinoa or spelt, so naturally it got me thinking –

Okay, that part's made up. Never allowed a pet, was I? Please, no sugar-coating, explain what you meant by *Incompatible with your peccadilloes*. I admit only a weakness for pink noise

and a modest collection of boosted artwork. This tristesse, black bile, what you under Munch-red sky write off as o-c, it's my strategy for keeping time. Mostly I can't get over how

the toilet's gargle sounds like a hectic call centre. You're tacking along Big Sur or Ha Long or Hadsselfjorden, your head turns, wake feathers past the bow, you're not sure ... yes, an echo off

porcelain tiles. Suddenly I've lost count: how many honks make a metaphor? Don't answer that. I wouldn't want you abstracted. It's me who finds the Sleuth of Baker Street a bore, the dean

more fortune's fool than clown. Joint rasp, lid spasm: also me. Sun in sync with a sawtooth vee (where does this come from?) like a rusty chest retractor, you squint against snowcap glare

as regrets grow melodious, take a hard look at the lead goose ... Right. Enough about me. You can see the cheque's made out to CASH. After much internal debate, I left the memo line blank.

Speed Dating in the Milky Way

My lower limbs
on the Schwinn Elliptical
trace ovals in Euclidean space, 7 min, 12 sec
since I laced up, applied digital pressure
to QUICK START my regimen. Ten of us
pseudo-running towards ten identical moues
afloat storeys high in Bally's street-facing windows.
Grim, bluecoat infantrymen
certain a jammed flintlock plays in their future.
We choose flight over fight, study our dashboards,
the kilometres' uptick, calories' red shift.
First law of thermodynamics holds
like a well-pitched pup tent in a rainstorm;
change in my internal E
fogging concave lenses, myopia itself evidence
of a tipsy work/life balance. Much as I try to feign
zero interest in your metabolism,
i.e., whether it might be free later
for a gourmet burger and low-watt rom-com,
it's too easy to check out your reflection
not to. Could this be
what Einstein was thinking
when he lit on his special theory? Our ability
to fixate on the adjunct or disagreement
at the expense of eye to eye. If you and I happily ever
pass each other on the street
in the faraway once-upon, we might find grounds
for a meaningful relationship. We would, however,
quibble over the movie's start time

in a theatre near Andromeda.
Should the moment arrive, threaten to derail
our genetic mandate, I'm here to tell you
we'd both be right. Honey,
it breaks us, but there's no absolute.
Time's not the market, it's the bustle;
not the price, but worth.
The haggle, sleight, flirt. *Hello*,
was that a look? Or euphoria sweetening the pot?
Mean solar age and gravitational weight
say I've sustained my heart's optimum rate
across the eight-minute tickertape – roughly when
this twilight departed the sun.
All we share are endorphins
and a longing to twin circadian rhythms
with that special someone on a plush California king
about to go superluminal. My/your
sweatdrops bounce off the gym floor
like hot shells during a massacre,
evaporate into chalk outlines
of giant amoebas
circumscribed by the circles we define as coincident.

Rising Action, Then Falling

Every make and model, it seems,
scrolls past like begats in the King James.
The word *yield*, face out inside its equilateral
yellow field, makes a case for progress as noun
and whim. My left turn signal counters
with notions of a clockwork universe,
my stomach walls continue to spaghettify.
All intelligent species need increasingly
richer resources: hotels on Marvin Gardens, high-
energy plankton, artesian wells. *The Wind-Up
Bird Chronicle* has entire chapters set at the bottom
of a black hole, Murakami's protagonist in deep
(as usual) with cats and existential shadows.
He's moved more copies than a cancer cell.
Late summer memories bead like humidity
on window-mounted air conditioners,
I believe approaching heat stroke or heat death
could rob me of my chance to upgrade
the more fragile human parts: titanium hips
and a cloned pig's heart, so I can outlive my shame
at underachieving on the LSAT. I've since learned
pusillanimity rarely gets you noticed –
goddamn, people, this off-ramp ain't no rooftop
helipad. We think little of what we're doing
while we're doing, which tells us we think
too much. Expansion brings diminishing returns;
Freeman Dyson figured an evolved 'we' could nest
in a white dwarf, ratchet down our metabolism,
dispense a single thought every millennium.

I really hope not to have 20,000 years of
'C'mon buddy, let me in.' Anxiety
is what happens if nothing else does,
I'm late for my appointed genre (dramedy),
a decade since my last metaphysical.
Parse a finite interval infinitely and you're
Bill Murray in *Groundhog Day* or Georg Cantor
or both, hallucinogen making lucid
the dog-and-pony show of fine motor control.
Some engines power down when idling,
it's ingenious how people put their heads together
and come up with reactions that make sense.
Raindrops fall like opportunities from past lives,
two-to-one I'm wasting something besides
the morning. The bird I remember
on a branch outside the kitchen window
just sounded like it was being wound up,
a jack-in-a-box ignoring the weasel pop.
Vehicles outfox my reflexes like fusion jazz,
a Corolla rolls into view, the driver
with million-mile stare just another closet novelist
who'd gladly sacrifice character for plot.
Give her half a chance and a heartbeat.

Seldom Rarely Never

When she wakes
she wakes having dreamt
she's had a bad sleep.
East-lit window ajar,
bushes bright as ash,
beds of jostling swans.
Once lucid, she's sure
some expected thing
will drop to the lawn,
she's not sure what.
Above all, stay positive.
The mirror looks on her
not unkindly, hums a
newly familiar tune.
Clothed, she descends
and enters the kitchen
and the hardwood creaks
as if her dance card's full.
Is it unreal or surreal?
What's the proper term
for feeling so normal?
She stands sipping tea
while sprites complete
routine figure eights.
Such unwonted grace
in the Virginia creeper,
enough not to notice
privacy screen or fence.

V Is for Vacuum

On the flip side
he's in sweatpants moving house,
groping for a contact lens
in the carpet. There's
the view of nuclear stacks
from when he memorized
the alphabet front to back.
He's not doing so well.
He's doing just fine, thanks.
He's stuck between U
and double U
and the cheerleaders refuse
to spell out his name.
The lake sun sets like a
victory parade float,
he's always thought so.
Not everything will change
tomorrow. Cheerleaders
practise inverted vees
on the painted grass –
so he imagines, on hands
and knees, combing his fingers
through cerulean shag.
Hear that? That's a fleet
of beetles on bottlecaps
striking out for Kincardine.
The current does its thing,
and when he leaves
he'll leave to a hero's welcome.

From the Outside In

Underdone funeral parlour, floral
papered walls in colours clinically proven
to soothe, I'm moved to watch my second hand
sack-hop ahead. Galileo lit on the pendulum clock
in an oak-backed pew, a blessed Renaissance breeze
swung the cathedral's chandelier in periods
counted out with his pulse: *one censer, two censer* ...
Our dead friend didn't specialize, loved music:
from overhead speakers 'November Rain'
dusts eight-by-tens framed for the lobby's
Pledged surfaces. Kleenex is weapon of choice
for the meek, the earth four billion years young,
home to the deceased for forty-two of them. Questions
like Fedex packages no one's willing to sign for –
it goes without saying chronometers
have skewed our reckoning of a good life,
panels and panels of Charlie Brown
consumed by good grief. A Planck time interval
is so vapour-thin there's no before or after,
no report to follow the starter's pistol,
no revenge to bury Macbeth, no sketch artists.
The finer we measure the present, the wilder
our stab at the future; plans are thus afoot
to lower into the paunch of a desert mountain
a sixty-foot clock some optimists have designed
to last 10,000 years. You couldn't engineer
a denouement sweeter than this peach punch
or the munchkin under the table in Sunday best
munching on a gherkin. Kids are always
proud of their age, this one's about four

revolutions around a sun in a solar system
stubbornly self-centred. Galileo died under house arrest,
refusing to endorse notions that the universe
means us. Ten millennia hence, whatever creatures
scamper on prehensiles down eroded inclines
in the geopolitical state once called Nevada
will witness our final sputter like the raspberry
from a New Year's noisemaker. I overhear
a truism shared by the four-year-old's mother:
her quavering voice the hinge on the afternoon,
a jewellery box lined with black velvet.
The breadth between feeling and knowing
like chestnut and koan, or going, going
and gone. How normal he was, good heart
but bad ticker. A lesson to think on later
when resuming my daily chores, shedding Man
Ray tears, mowing tighter and tighter rectangles
towards the middle of Kentucky blue.