The Pen

The pen that told the truth
went into the washing machine
for its trouble. Came out
an hour later, and was tossed
in the dryer with jeans
and a western shirt. Days passed
while it lay quietly on the desk
under the window. Lay there
thinking it was finished.
Without a single conviction
to its name. It didn't have
the will to go on, even if it'd wanted.
But one morning, an hour or so
before sunrise, it came to life
and wrote:
"The damp fields asleep in moonlight."
Then it was still again.
Its usefulness in this life
clearly at an end.

He shook it and whacked it
on the desk. Then gave up
on it, or nearly.
Once more though, with the greatest
effort, it summoned its last
reserves. This is what it wrote:
"A light wind, and beyond the window
trees swimming in the golden morning air."

He tried to write some more
but that was all. The pen
quit working forever.
By and by it was put
into the stove along with
other junk. And much later
it was another pen,
an undistinguished pen
that hadn't proved itself
yet, that facilely wrote:
"Darkness gathers in the branches.
Stay inside. Keep still."

NyQuil

Call it iron discipline. But for months
I never took my first drink
before eleven p.m. Not so bad,
considering. This was in the beginning
phase of things. I knew a man
whose drink of choice was Listerine.
He was coming down off Scotch.
He bought Listerine by the case,
and drank it by the case. The back seat
of his car was piled high with dead soldiers.
Those empty bottles of Listerine
gleaming in his scalding back seat!
The sight of it sent me home soul-searching.
I did that once or twice. Everybody does.
Go way down inside and look around.
I spent hours there, but
didn't meet anyone, or see anything
of interest. I came back to the here and now,
and put on my slippers. Fixed
myself a nice glass of NyQuil.
Dragged a chair over to the window.
Where I watched a pale moon struggle to rise
over Cupertino, California.
I waited through hours of darkness with NyQuil.
And then, sweet Jesus! the first sliver
of light.