TO KELLER FROM SKAMANIA LODGE
—Stevenson, Washington

Dear Nick—

The ospreys are nesting atop the telephone poles,
And six Canada geese just threaded over and missed the window
I'm looking out of toward a mountain I gave up a marriage
On—though I haven't come here to recover so much as go on
To veer toward the false veritas of un-mortal life.
Part citizen, part lapsed-cognoscenti, I stare at the late air
And imagine it's braided with judgment. The wind knifes
The sky, and the moon has yet to bumber over.
Did you really mean to say that thing about faith? Sometimes,
I know, faith is the Pearl Girl, sometimes Ming the Merciless.
   Like: Fides, I want to say Fides, fidere.

But, Nick, all the Latin I've memorized has left me short of breath.
Consider this: When I look out now at this long field
I see that the shrubs, the flowers, the shade, and the liverish
Alienation that lacks the pleasure of indifference
Are no more cosmetic than they are a zeitgeist for the cosmos.
You were right to say prophets are brazen
And to believe that hope is the birth of songs.
But did you really mean to say, "'Yes' is a complete sentence," Nick?
Yes. I suppose you did. For me, it's fallible
And riddled as a ribbon of scarlet silk.
And, yes, Nick, I can hear lullabies of the lonely from another era.
—You would love this view! And, in the old days, this gin—
No matter. I can hear music rising now from one of the weddings
Started today in the high grass that has yet to be plowed in
And that trembles toward the river. At the end of the first wedding,
There's applause, a cello, and a revelation
That no one will understand for years.
At the end of the other wedding, the cuddly party
Weaved through the tall grass like the revelers
Panting coldly in Keats' ode—with the lacey bride
Smiling into her yellow bouquet, and the young groom
Seeming to begin to breathe again. I think you’d have loved
The uncertain crossroads, the way the res publica made room
For the community (it was like a window opening into a tattered wind).
Then the light got whippy and wrinkled and hovered
Over the swallows that swept the sky down to the river’s calm rings.
Faith is a verb you said. OK. We’ll see.