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## Going to Pieces

*Pull yourself together, pal.*  
— advice from a stranger

Those marionette-show skeletons can do it  
Suddenly, after their skulls have been  
Alone in the rafters, after their wishbones  
Have fluttered in the wings, leaving the feet onstage  
To hoof it solo: they pull themselves together,  
Bring everything back and thread it on their spines.

But looking around and seeing other people  
Coming apart at parties, breaking up  
And catching their own laughter in both hands,  
Or crossing the lawn and throwing up their spirits  
Like voice-balloons in funnies, touching noses  
In bedroom mirrors, one after another,  
I figure something can be said for it:  
Maybe some people break in better halves  
Or some of the parts are greater than the whole.

Pal, take a look around: a heap of coats  
Discarded in one spot like empty skins;  
Under the tables enough shoes and gloves,  
Enough loose hair, saliva, and fingernails  
To conjure bodies off a hundred souls.  
Now I'll tell you one: the palolo worms,  
One night a year at the bottom of the sea,  
Back halfway out of the burrows where they spend  
Long lives; their tails turn luminous, twist free,  
And all by themselves swim up to the surface,  
Joining with millions of other detached tails;  
The sea in a writhing mass lies white for miles  
Under a gibbous moon; the bright halves die  
And float away like scraps after a party,  
But leave behind their larvae, set for life.

Meanwhile, the old ones, steady in their holes,  
Can go about their business, fanning food  
Into their sleek, uninterrupted gullets.  
Think of them there, pal, chewing the ocean,  
Staying alive by going to pieces.

DAVID WAGONER