

Matins · *William Aiken*

All my dog needs  
is enough light  
to make out certain messages

equivalent to the wind needed  
to blow the classifieds  
under a tree.

There is a scale of illumination that tells  
a car that has been abandoned  
from one merely parked in front of a new friend's house,

a man planting shrubs in the night  
from the flowering shrub itself,  
Venus at 20 degrees in the east, caught in the telephone lines.

I am out with my dog to ascertain  
the sequence of birds  
in the morning—

three whistles at 7:06, a warbler,  
by 7:10 sparrow and chickadee chirps,  
and then the crow at 7:26, just as the sun rises.

Today a seven-year-old will have her first trumpet lesson,  
a high school band will pack for a football game,  
a mother will make her first visit to the therapist.

Does the swelling chorus equal the swelling light?  
My dog stops at the split rail fence  
near wasted virgin's bower

the sickly fragrance gone,  
only the dazzling tendrils left.  
We indulge each other's pauses,

swept by a scent or a memory.  
Coming back from the Animal Rescue shelter,  
I took her, she took me.

Already dogwood has turned its green-veined russet.  
The lindens yellow.  
Magnolias begin their desperate continuance.

My dog and I conclude  
a bird's chirp is not equal to one lumen.  
This is the scale of our lives, these early things.

We have lived as each other's motive for many years.