OUT BACK

The man washes the car under the lemon tree out back.
Calmly, steps back, extremely pleased with the job.
He calls to the woman he'll be coming, drives the car
around to the front, takes the key out with just the
right amount of twist. Looks back for specks and rust.

Then he makes a headlong rush out back again, turns
the water off, swears there's only one thing to do, go!
Breakfast is 8 o'clock as usual, the woman's present,
poaching eggs. She'd rather be alone, does nothing to
calm him down. Who would prevent her from kissing his
neck? By that time the mantle of oblivion would have
been cast over him. He wouldn't have had to check the
car again. Did it with egg in his mouth, bread in hand.

MALLORY ON EVEREST

I have lost the second volume of Chapman's Odyssey.
Somewhere at a lower camp, in the bleary coldness
Of another dawn, I must have dropped it
And failed to observe the moment that it fell
Down the dark north face of Everest, abode of snow.

Failed to see it fall apart, the torn pages drifting away
On the Tibetan wind. It is no matter.
Tomorrow we climb to Chomolungma's summit, where a book is too heavy
And too useless.

Tonight I read from Volume One, of the whirlpool and the undergloom,
And hear echoes of the Sirens' song in the winds that blow
Unfettered above this great pillar of the Earth.
At dawn I will tie myself to Irvine
With forty yards of braided line.

Outside the flapping tent the last light glows on the snow
And in my dreams I step from the serac onto a long boat
With black oars and row the ebb through a saltmarsh.
Two migratory birds turn their necks from Polaris
To watch me pass.