

Teacher

When I was a boy
barely old enough to drive a '78 Toyota
I came to your door with flowers on a Sunday.

It was unannounced I'd be there
but I was free in the world for a day and loved you
and wanted to tell you without saying the words.
I was a singer in your choir
and ran into a soprano from our group on the sidewalk,
a blonde, someone who made me cry when I sang beside her
because of one brilliant note.

I knocked on your door.
You were sleep-deprived and accepted the flowers—
I don't recall what kind—
and you said this:
"It's proper to call someone before you just show up."

It destroyed me. I never told you.

Years later when I was in college we met at a restaurant
for a beer and you told me I was suicidal in high school.

Now, with even more years between us,
I look back at that afternoon and the flowers
and your spent voice in the doorway of home.

I only loved you when I wasn't thinking.

After Surgery

I take it as placebo, calling it something other than
what the nurses call it, not a pill for pain or nausea
but instead the drug which comes after,
the bricked instinct of this little healing white circle,
hell, when I slid from bed
I did it all wrong and went straight to the bottle of orange-brown
I confused with same color applied to my childhood skin
by Grandmother when I'd fall from running, which often I did,
she'd blow lightly and be blamed for the pain,
but this week in the dark I step over balled-up shorts
and a fallen pillow and stagger past tied curtains
normally breeze-whipped by early spring nights
in Louisiana before the heat, before the windows close evenings
until October, I reach for the one bottle of four
after lining them so I would know what's what in the blackness,
the aching makes my tiptoeing loud and when I pry lightly
a roof off the pill building my husband scares himself awake,
he startles from dreams and defensive talks in the air
above his twilight mouth, he asks if I am all right,
I don't think he's awake enough to mean it,
I whisper *yes* and he rolls over, gone again, I think,
but then easing back in bed, knuckles down first
then elbow with ass and hip, then the rest of me,
his hand protrudes gently from inside night,
I say nothing and lie still once he settles me and I catch my breath,
he says *you will get through this*, he says it sleepily,
he will not remember in the morning, but I will, it is what I do.

The Year In Review

We forgot ourselves
and ran forward with tongues
panting against each morning.

The months hurled inward like asteroids,
every fleck against Earth a story.
You were human every day of your life.
We said we loved to be gold
and so we were golden.

It was, after all, the year of the photograph
and so we paused and posed
to make stick the thick history of Moment.
Joy roamed and anger steeped,
the former dancing in the latter
like homeless cut-outs above the road.
I opened my eyes,
at least to spy orange sun wash your face with love.

After this I slept because it was over.

Guest Room

Some day I'll paint this room
the proper gray it deserves,
maybe gun metal, or old sword,
and

I'll wake up in it in one state or another,
slide from bed after morning is clear
on the clock,
not telling like sunlight forcing down a hat
I stole from the night prior,
one I pull down
when I watch TV to show friends that,
among other things,
I'm moving so I haven't died.

Fear

The guessing is what counts,
as in
how many times might I kiss him again
above the nipple where there's hair growing
as in
what to do about this hernia, and age,
as in
am I reduced to this like a sauce.

I think of love as heavy ice crippling a branch,
waiting to be photographed as it breaks
like it were a cave-dripping frozen against a sagging earth.

When we were children, when my sister and I were children,
we feared smothering and fresh air
and no stuff of elders.

Now, if there is one,
I can't think of what else there is to say
as in
this is how we are dumbfounded
as in
this whole thing's a ruse
as in
this is the quietest night of my life.

The Sleep Precipice

That specific time I uttered
“you’re sweet”
into a dying telephone,
what again were we considering?

You wanted to leave your lover,
I saw a photo of you half-nude,
wars had broken out between myself and Creation
and I needed time to not want for you.

For several days I didn’t shower—
I bought a new toothbrush but
when it came to passing mirrors
I shied away and turned down the AC
so I’d be forced to bed,
tucked in brown sheets without leaving,
talking to you in the dark
about what we had and lost,
what we needed,
what we thought we needed.

Thunder

Here's to the catalyst, babe,
the ruin and the burn
and whispering at rain
like it's your cousin or
a fucked-up storm breaking
your home to shards
or bent points of creosote
in your memory
piercing brain
you
yelling across New Mexico
while your diaphragm blew out
and you gasped

“Hope? What is hope?”

Darling, an exercise that hurts.