

Afternoon in Late December 2021

and the sun has sloped low enough to spill
its weight at my feet, almost an offering
for the year of loneliness we renamed love.

These days I am less myself than I used to be,
quartered by the ache of arms filled

with longing, but the neighbor girl is singing again,
and I almost remember. I do. I do.

I imagine her just past the fence, joy-blistered

and kneeling, bowed against the ground
as though she alone holds the world together.

Still young enough to recall the mother
tongue of forgiveness, her voice curls
when the ripe light hooks behind her ear,

loving her for the way she praises
the ants, the new year, the dirt.

Alexander tells me how he'd like to be buried

which is not buried so much as laid—
in some field or meadow or shadow of a mountain
under a shout of blue where the cry of the thrasher threads cloud to cloud
and the sun is overflowing with itself, trembling in its goodness,
its shattered light tripping down leaves to where tall grasses bear up
his soul-shell, heavy in its solitude and easy, and he will never
catch chill again after he hands himself over to the tender nature of things,
after a harvest mouse beds in the hollow of his socket and the pearl strand
of his spine becomes wasteland to root systems, his lungs splayed
like open palms, flowering with dog-tooth violets that stretch above his lips
in a last sigh as he lets the earth overtake him bit by replaceable bit,
still becoming, becoming, becoming.

Dog Prayers

Today I took Indy to the river
and it's true—she can't put into words
the way the sunlight falls in sheets
and shatters on the surface of the creek

or speak on the gentleness
of the wide, flat stone that has been slicked
over for generations since it first
discovered rest in the river bed.

Yet she knows how to pray.
Even as she lies in the cool of the current,
she feels the sun's velvet heat,
she wrests rainbows out of water drops.

I watch her tremble with the simple pleasure of anticipation.
She knows that following the jay's cry would lead to reckless abandon—
the triumph of pulling her body through exuberance,
the thirst that follows. She knows to wait.

Yes, her prayers are better than my own, I'm certain:
for she closes her eyes in satisfaction, not need,
for she turns her face towards Heaven,
for she never shies from the intimacy of being known.

I pray joy finds us all so gently.

Lemons

Come spring, I'll plant a lemon tree.
I'll shovel through newly thawed ground
to make a bed between the coleus and calendula,
where my knees will meet the teeth of rocks
and come away unbruised, still tender.
I'll saddle the roots with dirt, and the clouds,
I'll ask, to split and fall into mercy.
When the days stretch larger than my desire,
I'll lift the sill to fifty palm-sized suns,
glorying in their stubborn ephemerality,
before I pluck the last from that green panorama,
help it to shed the weight of living,
learn to let its sour rest on my tongue.