

(obligations and affections :selected and recent poetry)

The daily drone of street traffic

She could hear from the morning
as she spat through her teeth at the blank pages
around her keyboard clicking
computers murmuring information
her mind was not on work
this machine displeased her
and she despised all this emptiness she could dig out
from the guts of the world
that wouldn't feed

She heard her galoshes in the corner sag
nothing was in place
the voices of her busy co-workers lifted her
out of the office chair.
Bird call, cows and children in a yard,
crunchy gravel and glorious mud
in the splash of ochre sky
her feet light as laughter

The doorway was now cluttered
with the others from the office asking her
to join them, lunch time,
she could leave her file on the desk for later
They drifted into their raincoats,
some had scarves and hats, no one had ugly rainboots like hers.
They opened the elevator and emerged,
a wave curling over the street
gray sky quivering overhead.
She was immersed in the notion of dreading having to go back
to work, afraid it would never end.

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The daily drone of street traffic continued

They chose a restaurant nearby,
where some men ordered drinks from the bar
and young people sat on stools, elbow to elbow
waiting for tables hungry and friendly
in the smoky dark of clinking glasses.
Her thoughts her own silence
while she looked at her galoshes
and didn't remove her coat.

After lunch, a slice of light through mist
and as they turned the corner,
they watched her cross the street,
bend over the blossoms at a flower stand
where colors burst into the moist air, refreshed
drops of rain kissing the petals.

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snow on trees

you like the light shining behind the branches
settled with several inches of snow
hardly moving or if they do
in the rain and wind
melting blobs fall randomly orchestrated
in thicketed dangers as we pass underneath
groomed trails while some take in the view from their garret chalets
looking over their ridge and others speed down slopes

but we're striding on skis
I plod along within tracks and you're skating
the trail plowed smooth for that kind of dance
up and over and through

breathing so our muscles and heart
make a strong sweet emptying mind music
Buddhists spending time together
along the trail in the snow a meadow of snow forms bent over tree limbs
a sculpture garden of animals and shaped figures

and I notice bird's song
a titmouse you say
because there are so few birds
maybe one or two squirrels
the immense silence
challenge of our bodies aging
here in muffled cold and quiet where we love

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that green

the famous angel wings of Laguna Beach
a responsible jade Buddha
an accurate butterfly's forest
a bison pasture
a stretch of spiky cattail reeds
those stems of force beside the ocean valley
coastline rising beyond thick jungle darkness
algae on boat hulls in translucent surf
pastel light petals
mossy museum walls and
carpeted waterfall stones
all the rain all the trees
dry cracked books
soggy dustbin rags
cougar grass hillsides
crisp bills flashing
chipped cups leaky grease
gears valves pumping granite
moon oxygen millions of years
the night sky junk
dropping into the waste of heavy
fading breaths

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SELF PORTRAIT AS A SKY DIVER

My vocabulary is groundless
in the lovely distance of tool sheds where ghosts shine at night;
gaps in the air, griddled streets, consequences of music
the modern condition of dust.

Some bureaucrat is off to his first class picnic, bed and breakfast
while a storekeeper gets mugged when he's on the phone;
do any of us know how we are related
our lives passing through one another like air?

In the expanse of blue, love is an anchor and a mast.
The opening of gentle wind, violet sky, trembling stars.
Kids say the clouds look like cotton
I say the words are clouds inside the wounds of our hearts
and the baby's breath of sweet light
washes the bitterness out of my mouth.

A ship, a sail
the body falling through sun
cracks of light-worn eyes

In the smoky summer sweat, shimmering heat waves off pavement
tourist feet swell in comfortable shoes.
trains ribbon the landscape;
dancers and businessmen enter the railroad cars,
and pass by little church towns and the horns toot into nightfall.

I blunder into their perfect fantasies.

Fast and cheap steaming food
thickly layered, collision, fragments, variety
necessary and helpful neighbors
footprints underground surface.

This jump is not meant for the result
except what it does to you.

As the air presses like a sword,
I'm just dropping in, spreading the news:

The most precious gift is doubt.

Or maybe curiosity, after all.

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SELF PORTRAIT AS A SKY DIVER continued

I see them undress
or make peanut butter and jelly sandwiches
They take care of their guard dogs, wire fences,
admire those stars, fireworks and combat zones.
Kids at sixteen with casual despair of small talk,
painfully honest with sweaty palms.

The underbelly of cities, the backwash of canyons
ridges of broken roads where hikers explore muted trails
and down by the river, people cleaning fish;
in the stubborn glare of summer, shops and tenements
water hose spray and sparkling garbage,
some genetic mutations of habit.

Love is the reason we're all here.
Even for one moment, when you fall
all the resources you are converge
the longing for desire expressed
by that truth pulled by gravity.

I'm lucky, but unsure what to order.
The curve of Earth.

A stone wears the embrace of a wave
and at night I lie twisted up in the sheets,
imagine a parachute getting lost around me
my electric body cannot sleep
motorcycles, chainsaws, Mercedes
language, laughter, and the right shoes for landing.

I feel perfect above the USA.
Swarms of bugs hitting windshields.
racecars spinning around tracks
shopping malls and parking lots
burning dinners on the stove. And all the people
you forgot, patchwork land, quilted brown and green
faces through windows,
children yelling and bobbing in swimming pools
airplanes and feathers scattering light through the air.

And like a first kiss, eyes nervous and awkward,
I wonder each time
if I'm making a mistake, falling backwards,
counting to ten, tugging the chord.

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JOURNEY IN A JEEP

(for CLL)

Joking and thought-provoking through the muddy terrain
conversation about a vibrant party a witty hostess;
men grumpy in thick air, cigars, cologne, jasmine.
Later, all of us conversational toasting the night.
I had enough of folly and black buttered mushrooms,
resonant music pouring through my ears. Time would heal us.
I wanted to tell a story :

 a street an empty lot a bar that used to sparkle
maybe a neon beer sign half its letters blinking slogan gone

Laughter that kept bringing us to the next afternoon and women
We found boxes of books and empty milk cartons stashed in the alley
picking up ready to leave our gaze across the room
eyes the light of motion.