

## HOW I WANT MY BODY TAKEN

I don't want a horse or car  
to carry me. I want to be brought  
in the arms of some beloved, held  
tenderly and passed from friend  
to friend, warmed against each heart  
around a circle or up and down each row.

And then I want to be taken  
by the weather, the way our friend  
was flung, his son perched  
on a steep hillside with tears  
of afternoon sun and cold wind off the Pacific  
in his eyes despite his squint  
as he opened a white container,  
tilted it to the air and swung his arm wide,  
casting his father out to sea, his father  
blowing back at him in sunlit motes  
and drops of fog and settling  
on his hair and shoulders,

or entombed like a Viking in a ship  
I'd traveled in alive, my grandfather's  
heavy but fragile wood and canvas canoe,  
the grey paint and shellac cracked  
but still watertight for a final paddle  
through a beaver creek at sunset,  
the full moon rising at the other end  
of the lake, and then buried under layers  
of pine needles and rotting aspen leaves  
in the Northern Ontario woods.

But what I really want is to ride  
in a wire basket on the handlebars  
of the bike I dreamt I was riding  
the night I learned how,  
my being still tingling with the thrill  
of letting momentum take me,  
the perfect balance of stillness  
and motion, of abandon and control.

I want the night to be as dark  
as it was in that dream, the streetlights  
cycling off, streamers flying  
from the bar grips and the rider  
pedaling hard, then harder,  
building speed and with it levitating,  
the bike ascending at a slant  
above the trunk of the last parked car  
and then leveling off at its cruising altitude  
taking flight over the whole row of them,  
and leaving a wake of light behind it.

## GREETINGS FROM THE MEZZANINE

I'm writing from the mezzanine  
where I've been put  
in a vocabulary lesson  
from my older brother's fifth grade teacher  
who suggested to her students  
that they warn their younger siblings  
*If you don't stop procrastinating  
I'll put you on the mezzanine.*

I like the mezzanine seats.  
The view is good  
in a middle ground  
happy medium  
Goldilocks kind of way  
not too close to see the whole stage  
not too far to see the musician's faces,  
not so steep that it's vertiginous.

Or it's the mezzanine of a department store  
where I've been put  
and the furniture is just as just right  
a couch stuffed full but not too full  
a small upright piano not quite in tune  
but good enough  
and a well-stocked rack  
of magazines for browsing.

I may stay for a while  
inhabiting this story between stories  
this liminal pause  
considering my defense of procrastination  
that it's germination  
or hibernation  
both natural phases  
in this cyclical living.

There's a small café  
with Sacher torte and Linzer torte  
with linden tea and a sundae served  
in a glass goblet with a dimple  
where the bowl joins the stem  
and the melted ice cream pools.  
The final drop is never quite retrievable  
but I'll be here for a while, trying.

## GRATEFUL

I'm not a grateful person,  
I told Darcy at the post office  
when she asked if I might want  
the Thank You stamps, but I was joking.  
I am grateful, I assured her. I just didn't like the script  
on the Thank You stamps, and I really wanted  
the Raven stamps, the Western Wear stamps  
with the faux woodcut cowboy boot complete  
with star-shaped spur or the Ursula K. LeGuin  
commemoratives, all the new issues  
that hadn't come in yet. But truly  
I am grateful and I was that day.

I bought the Sun Science stamps, the full sheet  
with six different solar phenomena, four each  
of the coronal loops and holes, the solar flares  
(royal blue and teal versions) and the plasma blast,  
and one each of the sunspots and the Active sun.  
I've learned just enough about all of this to know  
that I am grateful for the Quiet sun  
and its predictable stream of steady light,  
a flash of which shone through the fog  
when I went back out into the street.

At the bookstore, I found a copy—used—  
of the book I wanted—the extraordinary *Olio*  
by Tyehimba Jess. (You should read it if you haven't.)  
Two women were squeezed in with me in the narrow aisle  
between Poetry and Spirituality, and I couldn't help  
but overhear their conversation. "My friend's husband,"  
one said, "was telling me about this book.  
The writer starts each section with a thank-you note  
to someone in his life and then goes on  
into a meditation." Then they started talking about Rumi

and I asked if they knew his poem  
about the guesthouse, the one with the lines  
*This being human is a guesthouse/  
Every morning a new arrival. . .  
Even if they're a crowd of sorrows. . .  
Be grateful for whoever comes. . .*  
They didn't, and I couldn't find it in the book  
she had picked out but I told her she would find it  
if she did a search for "Rumi guesthouse"  
and she was grateful.

At the ice cream shop, the flavor of the week  
was Golden Milk, salubrious tonic of ginger  
and turmeric, almost too good to be true.  
And when I stopped at the community garden  
to finish the melting frozen Golden Milk,

the evening primrose was in bloom, a crown  
of watery yellow blossoms atop each spire  
of layered upturned leaves. The leaves are all  
that has emerged so far of the evening primrose  
in our garden, and now I know what I have

to look forward to.

## To-do list, items 1 & 2

1.

*Rinse poems*, it says.

I've soaked this poem in multiple changes  
of water like the greens from last night's  
dinner prep, so much peppery mineral-vegetal  
growth for each pale mud-caked moon  
of turnip. I've given away the grit that sank  
to the bottom with each discarded draft.

You can eat the cabbage aphids on the kale  
and I've read that they have superpowers.  
They metabolize the bitter compounds of their hosts  
to fend off predators, and while the females wait for males  
to fertilize their eggs, they manufacture clones  
of their tiny round grey selves that clone themselves  
in turn, up to thirty generations in a single summer.  
They stay alive all winter clinging  
to the frozen stalk until it thaws  
into a long-awaited meal. It's just as well  
they're too persistent to rinse off, I guess,

and is the rinsing my poems really need  
the kind that some art can't be made without—  
rinsing off the acid from an etching plate  
when it has reinforced the lines and marks  
you've carved in ground to open them to ink  
or rinsing the chemical coating from paper  
you've exposed to sunlight to reveal  
the ghostly image of whatever you laid on it  
floating in its sea of Prussian Blue?

2.

*Send out poems*.

Send them out for  
their 5000-mile service,  
front-end alignment and new wipers.  
Send them out on an errand.  
Send them out with a list:  
milk, eggs, butter, chips, lawn  
and leaf bags, mousetrap.  
Send them out with the mouse.  
Have them release it from the wire  
jaws of death. They won't mind  
the darkening drop of mouse blood  
drying on the wood. Make sure  
they wash their hands  
when they come back.

Send the poems out to cool off.  
Tell them they can come back in  
when they are ready. When they've given  
what they did some thought and are ready  
to apologize. When they're ready to focus  
and can start again.

Send them out for coffee  
and tell them to keep the change.  
Get a little something for themselves  
or pocket it for later.

**In response to being told *I admire your poems***

I want to say that I too feel a tender kind  
of admiration for them, meaning that I *wonder*  
*at* them, that I *regard* them *with pleasant surprise*  
and maybe even *marvel* at them as if holding them

out at arm's length from my body and lifting and turning  
them gently or walking around them tilting my head  
slightly or squinting to take them in from all angles  
these things I've made but think may not be all of my own

making, like the domed and golden loaves I mix and knead  
but whose chemistry of sugar, yeast and acid is only partly  
in my control, or the garden in its prime that I planted but am not  
the rain or sun for or the wind or birds whose visits scatter seeds

and make surprise revisions; and meaning, having entered  
the atmosphere of admiration, that I see them as a kind of miracle  
I can't quite explain or that like mirages they may not look  
exactly as I thought they would when I get closer

and you may not see in them what I see.  
I aspire as we do with those we hold in high esteem  
to the qualities of their small inanimate selves, nerveless  
but also nervy, brave and unapologetic in their presence

on the page, and when I say *thank you* for admiring them  
I am thanking you on their behalf for your attention  
to them but I want to thank them too, say *thank you*  
to them for their patience while I dawdled and left them

waiting and for letting me catch up or find them  
in their hiding places, and *thank you* to the other poets  
the steady shower of whose voices sings and soaks  
deep to the roots of the poems, and I want to say

*thank you* to the burs of language that catch  
on the trouser legs of my mind as I wander  
across the fields and stumble through the thickets  
of my days, *thank you* to the poems for their willingness

to not just take but be small leaps of faith.