

## This Year

This year has been such that  
when a car passes by a little too fast  
while I'm out walking the dog,  
my mind—a complete traitor—  
might whisper, "Step out  
into the street."  
But there's the dog to worry about.  
He'd miss me, I think,  
almost sure.

I'm so far removed from any love  
that certainty is out of the question.

What I do know is that  
when I go to sleep,  
with some secret hope that it might be  
gentle, eternal  
and instead it's fitful and brief,  
I will wake up  
and you'll ask me if I had any dreams  
and I'll ask you why you ask  
and you'll say, "Because you dream a lot."

So, I scratch the dog's back,  
tell you about the pleasant ones,  
and continue on.

## Scalding

My mom bought a kettle  
that always makes the water too hot.  
I know this and, yet, every morning  
I sip my tea too early,  
smacking my lips to rid them of the sting,  
kissing the air,  
nobody.

This morning I take my tea outside,  
walking from the kitchen  
to the backyard, my mug balanced  
in one hand, a stack of books in the other.  
The hot water is kissing the mug's rim,  
back and forth, as I walk deliberately,  
more mesmerizing than my hips.

I open the door, carefully, carefully.  
But I throw the water off balance  
and the tea slows down  
as it rises and spills over  
the lip.

I wish I could throw down the mug  
but it would shatter: a bigger mess  
than the boiling water scalding my hands.  
Oh, it's burning me!  
But I don't yell  
though I want to.

You told me your sister-in-law  
thinks I am beautiful.  
A compliment with so much distance  
I'm not sure  
it is one.

No, you never told me your best friend  
was sleeping with your flatmate.  
But you told me about her  
when I was sleeping with you.  
Suits them—you think he's more  
handsome than you and she's prettier  
than I am.

We haven't spoken in years, now.  
You offer to pay me to read your words  
probably to avoid remembering  
that I'd do it for free.

I tell my best friend that  
I feel so many people in my life are  
completely extraneous.  
"He literally brings nothing to me."  
Except the wish that he did.

## Flat Tire

The bike that you bought for me  
has a flat tire.  
I rode it across town,  
rickety on its rim,  
me trying to hold my own weight,  
wishing, like I did when you gave me the bike,  
that I weighed nothing at all.

“I must have punctured it,”  
I tell my dad,  
as we both look at it later.  
Deflated.  
He tells me that after nine years  
it may have dry-rotted,  
killed by time and lack of care.

I mailed you an envelope a few weeks ago  
of old letters I never sent  
but couldn't throw away.  
You didn't answer.  
Hope and expectation  
are two very different things.

I carry the bike back into the basement.  
I don't think the tire will patch.  
I'll have to replace it entirely.