

## Protocol for Meet-ups in the Park

*What kind of times are these, when  
A talk about trees is almost a crime  
Because it implies silence about so many horrors?*  
Brecht

You don't scour these paths for yet more proofs  
of a breakage now past repair.  
The truth was already obvious. To you.  
It's not like more tulips would matter.

You're not looking to feel consoled, which is good,  
given the ragged state of this grass.  
And you won't settle for distraction, although  
among ducks and such, it still happens.

It's trees that bring you here. Me too.  
Wind rakes through them like an unseen river.  
Even our nullest speech comes off complicit.  
Leaves blazoning the current, never.

# The Silence Treatment

From beyond those shaggy pines our horizon crackles behind  
you'd hear it—  
a kind of smothered enormous indignant bellowing,  
the shitstorm  
doing what shitstorms do—  
if you listened.

So don't listen.

## Off-Season Beach Takeaway

You've got to respect it, how at first the cormorants  
pretend not to notice us,  
each one perched atop  
its pole, every dark-crested head now  
swivelling  
as we approach, until,  
out of subtly tensing postures  
and a rippling flock-wide flutter,  
they vault as one into flight, skimming  
over wind-crisped cobalt water,  
west over the bay, east over the sea, away from nothing  
but us—

And so what, if there's only some mirage of a project  
to stoop us down into our cool indigo shadows,  
scrabbling for shells that quote the sun, gold-  
flecked, gold-spritzed, gold-lacquer-  
dipped, which,  
chinkling for now in your pocket,  
will be bundled home, short-, then long-listed, perused  
the once,  
then bottom-drawn, unthought-of, cracked, lost,  
trashed—

No regrets either when, in return  
for dawdling along the braid of tidewrack  
two miles farther,  
its fossil-white driftwood, pecked-over  
crab carapaces and scribbles of kelp  
not only in no way differ,  
but cost us that much more late-afternoon sun  
hard at our faces for the walk  
back, now that we're walking back, since there's no other way  
but back—

Because what's left for you at last,  
after retracing our paths  
out onto the tidal flats,  
and sloshing ahead some more  
through the onward gush of the current,

then just wading on past  
while the prints of people, birds, a dog,  
blur under one swipe from a wavelet  
after another,

is to acquire,  
as a tempo fit for our own occurring,  
this fluent local rhythm  
of, for some time now,  
nothing mattering.

## A Brief Loss of Momentum

I somehow seem to be leaving my apartment late a lot these days, in fact pretty much every time. I know it's a bad habit, but I'm OK with how it vectors me out into this, the hive-roar of New York City, plated afresh in that alloy of purpose my oyster-shy life otherwise lacks. There'll be no swerves. No no-*you*-firsts. None of the idle noticing that makes the tug of analog vistas such a nuisance. If it's raining, as it is tonight, I'll let the onyx prongs of Manhattan's overworld outmenace the first *Blade Runner's* LA all they want, so long as my trajectory can arc through its boulevards' arterial spurt and throb undeflectably. Like I said, a bad habit.

So now, with ant-black traffic slithering up Third, a sift of pinpoint drizzle diffracts lunar haloes from streetlamps, my cue to note the contours of every hard thing diluted and blurred. As my privileged pace sputters out, I must register first the old woman with a walker hurrying slowly across the avenue, who gets almost halfway before the red hand starts flashing, then the homeless man, no coat, no hat, no *shoes*, who's shaking a crumpled cup at a river of umbrellas plunging past. I'm crowded aside while I peer around, wondering if I really care to know how much of this might be other than it is were I not of what keeps it so. Which is what I get for slowing down.

## A Poem about Love (Not a Love Poem)

*The best way to hold on to something is to pay no attention to it. The things you love too much perish.*

Dmitri Shostakovich

Around here, I never know how much I'll have to care when the next thing fails, or goes missing, or just ends. For example, along the avenue I walk down every day I don't always have to notice that for every tree there are far more ex-trees: thick amputated columns, or stubby little stumps, or scraped plots of dirt the color of cement, or squares of actual cement where someone just said *OK, enough with this*. They pass like boxes left unchecked on some medical form. So many? That can't be good.

There's a way I go sometimes, not often, a sidestreet I'd say I almost loved, if asked to name my favorite street, though only children ask such questions and I don't have kids. And to admit it's because of some tree, well, you can imagine how that'd go. Still, it *is* why: one tall silver maple, the grain of whose pewtery bark records how the trunk arched away from the buildings and flexed up, out, and over the street, reaching for light and space. Its posture reminds me every time of Michelangelo's Libyan Sybil, though a quick image search shows no resemblance beyond an excuse to remember a place where I was happy.

Which brings me to Shostakovich. His advice, like most good advice, is inarguably true and impossible to follow. Because I know how one desolating day I'll finally come upon that tree freshly cut down, do I avoid this block, start the farewell now? No, I just forget about it, like I forget everything except the next thing I need to do and maybe the thing after that, and walk anyhow, and go on finding myself there, low orange sun behind me, the sybil still not cut down. Time again to wonder if I so love Rome only because I can't live there, and what love for his children did to Shostakovich during the Great Terror, and how much it has cost me to survive the violent love that is the opposite of both pretended neglect and real neglect, and when, at long last, our Earth will have had enough of whatever it is—call it love—that goes on cutting down more and more of the trees it didn't even have to plant, along with those it did.