

Tag Sale

He knew something they did not.
It was time to let go
of earthly possessions.
Not owing to a divorce,
although there was one.
It wasn't because the kids
had grown up and moved away,
even though his daughter had.
If they still spoke to each other,
she might be there
to help him put the price labels
on all the different house tools.

He knew it was time to go--
maybe today, maybe not..
Could be next week,
next month.
Who could tell?
God knows.

When it happened
he could be doing anything--
driving, frying an egg, shaving.
But not watching television.
Not anymore.
Whenever it happened,
he understood the mess
that would be
left behind.
Why add to it?

The house was going next week,
sold to the nice young couple
with the three month old/
They had no idea
what awaits them.
It didn't have to be that way,

had they listened.
But they didn't.
That's the gift
and burden
of free will.

He was surprised that people
showed up so early.
The signs he made,
the ad he put in
the local circular,
the post on Facebook
all said 9am.
The first ones showed up
around 7:30.

If there was one thing he understood
it was the need for expedience,
so he didn't mind.
He carried his morning coffee
and asked the customers
if they'd help
bring the tables
out of the garage.

They were all willing to help,
not out of Chrisitan charity,
he thought,\but because they
would get a first look
at his wares for sale.

Once the tables were set up,
he began selling off
pieces of his earthly life:
books he and his wife once read,
classic DVD collections,
several unused toilet brushes
(he got quite the deal
at Costco that day),

a long neglected pasta maker,
several unused children's toys--
they were sent to his grandson,
but his daughter returned them
all unopened.

He took everyone's first offers,
even though he knew
not haggling over prices
took some of the fun
out of this for his patrons.
One irritated woman insisted
he take more than five dollars
for the fruit dish--
it was a Lenox, after all.
A teenage boy with a nose ring
handed him a dollar for ten CD's.
He smirked a little to himself
when he noticed one of the discs
was Blondie's "Rapture."

The crowds died out about eleven.
He knew it would just
be a few stragglers now.
He consolidated the leftovers
onto the table--
baseball cards of players
no one remembered,
a couple of empty document frames,
an old calculator
with a six digit screen
and an AC adaptor.
He wondered if he should
take that to Antiques Roadshow,
but doubted he'd have the chance.

He pushed the table
to the edge of the street,
and taped a sign to it that read

“FREE.”

A moment later,
he returned with
a magic marker
and added the words
“I AM.”

The Goat

I'm from the city, so
I'm not totally certain
where you go to find goats.
Or even the difference
between goats and sheep.

What I do know is that
if you made a list
of where goats
are supposed to be,
running in the center of
a two-lane highway
cutting through the
Connecticut countryside
should not be on it.

This thought occurs
as I pass a goat--
galloping, fixed
on a destination
driven by instinct,
a place known only
to its amygdala.
I rumble southbound
along worn asphalt
cratered by countless
industrial tractors
and weighted
eighteen wheelers.

And normally,
today being the exception,
I would say that the
desperate gentleman
with a rope in his hand
running a quarter mile

behind the goat is
also not where he is
supposed to be.

The Thing Under the Door

That's the thing about
these old Victorians--
the space below the doors
is cavernous, so wide
you can easily slide your hands
beneath them.

And you would only do this
like I'm doing now
because there's a cat
on the other side
that paws at my hand
each time I reach through.

I switch hands, but the cat
whacks at either one.
I send in the left and the right.

He can't quite decide
which to attack,
so he goes for both.

We play the game of feline
patty cake for a while when
I'm struck with the idea
he might not know
these are my hands.

I laugh at the thought until it
occurs to me that the cat
might think I don't know
these are his paws.

Bones

There are memories,
now just flashes—
a veiled dress,
toes covered in muddy sand,
arms and legs locked
in a naked embrace.
There is a present,
now a constant—
harsh silence,
two sets of sheets in the wash,
meals eaten in separate rooms.

They're not who
they promised
each other they'd be.
He is diminished physically,
his balance and stillness
betrayed by chemistry.
She seemingly of two minds,
one that yearns for grace,
another that senses only agony.

What remains is no longer theirs.
They cannot find a way
to fill the space between,
even though they know
in their bones
it is all they have left.

Cold Room

The room is too cold.
The blinds are shut.
Fluorescent light shines
harsh and pale.
A long, oak table
stretches from the door
to the back wall.
A girl sits across
from her teacher
at one end.

Crying so softly,
She can barely be heard
over her shivering
and the sound of
hooking, unhooking, hooking
the strap of a canvas shoulder bag.

The teacher's mouth trembles,
opens slightly, closes again.
A secretary,
who once was her baby-sitter,
comes in and places a blanket
over the girl's shoulders.
The student asks to see her mom
with a small, broken voice.

The girl has already been told
about the car skidding, rolling
over an embankment and
the childhood friend who is gone.
She doesn't yet know that the driver,
an old boyfriend, will soon follow.
Later, she will remember that today
is his 19th birthday.

She barely reacts to the rumbling earth,
the piercing of the straining brakes
chaos and shouting
pouring off the school bus
onto the sidewalk outside.

The teacher says,

“We’ll go see your mom.”

The girl rises slowly
and turns to leave.

He gently places his hand
on her shoulder.

The secretary shakes off a chill,
pushes open the door.