

Calling It Dark

We can call it dark if you say so,
though topping this black cylinder, pale
sky's still a choppy sea of cloud,
and I know, out there, every swell and hollow
up to the shore of the hissing woods.
I've cut it too close—again—
and we're out of time. Still,
not the dark of the television box
we crouched inside playing house,
not the moist seducing summer night,
nor the open freezing black
twinked with a million sharp lights
(cold, too, for all we know)
over the Colorado creek, nor
the long bruising insomniac trek to dawn;
nothing like pin the tail on the donkey,
nothing, nothing at all like blindness—
of which I know nothing—
nothing like nothing.
Not like that early October morn when,
wakened by the commotion of you hunters leaving,
I went out and lay on the black driveway
still ever so faintly warm from the sun,
and stared into the restless, sighing night
till, just at the instant I could make out green:
all around, in the woods, the barrage.

The New Friend

“Is this you?” And of course
I don’t even have to look to answer,
knew when we set foot on this train
it would be, with more certainty, say,
than with that mural promising automation
at the far end of this station, overlooking
the *bassin*, docked boats, *en plein air*.
That first night, late, there seemed to me
for a moment a real passage, a train;
quite the jolt, catching myself caught.
Unsettling, as the motion of another car, a boat, plane,
always at the farthest angle of sight,
and I startle to press the brake harder, find a fixed point,
when all the while it’s the other
moving away.
In the seconds we know we have
(it *doesn’t happen* like this in real life.
Does it?) we hug goodbye, knowing the odds
of ever meeting again to be—
well, the same as that people hurrying
past in casement glass swung wide are real.
That you are more solid than diners inside
the *café* you undulate over to enter.
That tired faces on lighted glass
trump a country night falling away beyond the tracks.
And that is all the time we have.
I am on the platform, thinking perhaps to wave,
but no; you are picking up speed already
and I can only walk, and walk, to that far end,
emerge to wait in the chilly air once more
where signs recall a grim fortress, walls
people pulled down stone by stone.

Cataract

We prepare to launch lying flat on our backs, drops flowing down cheeks to the wadded gauze dams, nurses, on-task, working down the row adding them to our staring eyes, repeating their questions (the curtains between the gurneys are thin, and we are very close). With I.V. in place and my hands restrained, stoicism is getting hard to maintain, along with any pretense of not eavesdropping—though that's dull, after all, and what do I expect, all of us weeping, needles in our arms, claustrophobic view of the ceiling? Anything might happen. There's no way of knowing as we embark, one by one, on our narrow journey: how far it will be, whether we'll hear the rush and roar, yell with glee at shooting the rapids, hit pool or rocks at the last— and will anyone remember to snap a photo?

O Fish

O fish
we've come so far together—
you, so quietly from the start
I never saw, and
only felt you when we rested
after hauling ourselves up a climb,
mowing on a summer day, the primal
surge and flow of coupling.
I could count, then,
our shared rhythm for what it was,
pounding clear and separate from the bathwater,
flicking, flicking from side to side.

O heart
is it all the times I gave you away,
the shattered you I received back,
that I wasn't careful enough of you?
Is it how I asked you to be big,
needed you to be strong,
tried to keep you open after all that,
"bleeding," they like to say, if I chose
not to be -less?
Stay yet a while. I promise not to change.
That, you can trust.
Old couple that we are, I know you, too.

O fish
why this flopping,
the thrashing against ribs
as if truly a cage, when
they only ever sheltered?
Is the great salt beckoning, calling time
at a pitch beyond my hearing,
the long inevitable tsunami rising?
Tell me: is it now we go back,
by quiet undertow back to the wild?

The Nature of Happiness

Looking out into bright, pale morning,
I feel the tug and glow of happiness swelling,
the way it does: inexplicable, unbidden;
and think nonsensically,
this time I'll hold onto it,
mark the sensation to know it always,
pin it, a butterfly dosed, relaxed,
treasured in acetone and mothball nostalgia.
Of course it doesn't work that way. I know that,
know it's more like whistling into darkness
again and again from the porch
for the dog (long unwalked since my surgery),
unleashed, off on a personal jaunt.
I know just where she's gone, up past
soccer fields, independent, but then I'm
an hour later to bed.
Not a pinned butterfly, but like—
well, look: like earlier, stepping off
the deck into thick leaves as into
a sea, wading out toward the back fence
where, here and there, they gleam
wetly from the streetlight, bare trees
a block over silhouetted in a colder
future not quite upon us; how the leaves
come with me no matter how hard
I resist, off boots, or blown through
an open door, so that I look up
to find one under the kitchen chair, all the way
into the living room, or as yesterday,
leaving the doctor's office, two of them beached
on the runner to the door, content, out
of the rain, and I smiled to acknowledge them,
our secret, old friends.