

Ashes Settling on a Frozen Lake

I built a fire near a frozen lake,
fixed my world to rising sparks
though each was claimed by winter.

An Asian girl was on my mind;
the first girl I ever cried about.
She couldn't date me because I

was white and never right, with
sparks of defiance; so said her father.
It was all so ironic, since that

was in the sixties, when peace
seemed just a reach. Stars
must be have seen this too –

a fiery ash glanced my shoulder;
glowing, still hot on blue-white ice.
I wish I'd spoken to her father,

or learned his language first.
This ungloved hand must be mine,
and can even be a culture,

reaching, through frozen air,
to find its own numb cheek.
But that was in the sixties;

so was the Asian girl, who said
good-by behind an iron fence.
Every step I took that night

crushed leaves in smallish ways.
I returned to the lake when spring
revealed the glistening of water;

the Arab Spring was on my mind,
now broken lands and ashes.
I broke some birch and fallen pine

for a fire near the thawing lake.
Something wistful still remained.
I'll come again in summer. I'll dive

to the lake bed floor – among the ash
and silt. I won't disturb it further,
nor the other silence there.

A Simple Gift of Flowers

It's though we're on a train
passing a field of brilliant doubt,
where shadows defy the desert sun.

You ask why this life hurts so much?
knowing I don't have your answer.
Notice, we cannot keep this simple.

Even your gift of flowers, placed
carefully between us, speaks
to me as a crowd; the stems cross

in passionate abundance, magnified
in thick clear glass. I see in them
a lady, a storm in wheat, a muse.

You know so well my leaves
of threes and fives, how reeds
and zinnias bring the sun

to our room with the Japanese
lamp. White dahlias and roses
witness us from wood vases.

I can't tell you what to live for.
I must rest in the pockets of air next
to the thorns. Argue all you want;

it's the stems, wonderfully tangled -
not asking to be pleasing or wanting,
dancing off the crystal floor, where

your sacrifice was made. The stems
are where my eyes are drawn
and where I join you now.

Ode to My Broken Gate

I named my gate
Clarissa -
risking envy
from unnamed
fences and doors.
Her dusty white
picket slats,
uneven
with arching tips,
hold fifty
loose nails,
and I tell you
she is beautifully
broken: intolerant
of being closed.

I refuse to fix
her broken latch.
It would silence
her soliloquies.
I've come to love
her grateful sighs
when those
with tender touch
bring fresh
her lithely ways.

I'm partial
to her hinges:
grey wings
of mourning doves,
tapered to the frame,
painted white
a dozen times
before I came.

Gates make peace
with symmetry,
but Clarissa shatters
equality. Witness
how one hinge
gets to sing,
while the other

bears weight
in silence.

Twice, to keep her
new, I replaced
her broken slats -
my skills no match
for her maker; I ask
at last to let her go.

She shuts
farewell in April,
when white-crowned
sparrows leave,
but opens an extra inch
in June when wisteria
comes round
three times or more
to court her
elegant posts.

When sweet,
broken Clarissa
next swings herself
to sleep, I'll ask
no more from fence
or boundary gate
and take her down
on Sunday next,
then I'll see her
evermore, in every
slightly open door.

The Keeper of Shaw's Cove

The keeper of Shaw's cove
doesn't live in the white gazebo
or sway in the northern palms.

She's kin to tides and sands,
and inhabits some who come.
I'm an impatient one. I want her

to find me next, but she's with
a young Latina, leading a blind man
by his belt. The girl lends her eyes

to guide the old man, so he feels
the sand untroubled. She carries
his tattered shoes like jewels, until

I see – the best things are humble.

I keep a respectful distance,
then a memory startles the gulls.
They gather on offshore rocks,

while I, at water's edge, remember
the girl who died in high school.
I was planning to ask her

to the next school dance.
The keeper sends Renee to me,
a woman now, wet from the sea.

Our natures haven't changed.
It's odd we can be so natural.
I warm her in a thick blue towel

yet she asks if I'm the one
with a chill? I taste the brine
in her hair, so close, then she

bends to find a scalloped shell,
knowing I love to spin them
in the curl of a perfect wave.