

Gathering the Rain

Maybe it's the light this time of year, the wayward gray
half-spent light, that calls each thing

out of itself, insists the slightest entity
harbor both shadow and form,

leaving you to marvel a moment
the green, green of elms so green
that any other season seems instantly a lie,

a dream, which it is,

but no more so than this, this infant autumn
or the brief seasons between each drop of rain,

the first fat drop, a tap on the shoulder,
and if you turned

you would see

yourself, 16, scuffing the other way down Division
toward a vacant filled with vacancies—

the migrant affections of half-drunk schoolgirls,
the self-surgery in sweating rooms,
two boys practicing their manhood

in the alley, pounding each other
as the crowd pushes close and cheers, satisfied

no matter who wins, who is lost
forever to that scuffle each of us plays out

inside ourselves—but you can't follow him,
because that vacant is a pet store now,

and the cheering of the crowd
is only this whisper of lightly falling rain, each memory

stitched so loosely into the last,
threaded through by rain, by loss itself,

the luster of the trees already growing tame.

§

If what is lost is more than what is carried,
are you a thimbleful

of water offered to the ocean? A drop of rain
touching its borders only as it falls?

Are you still staring at a tree
as cars cascade past, as the old homes are torn down

and built up and torn down again

in the time it takes
you to turn back toward yourself and
button your coat? Oh, right,

you never turned. But why then this feral feeling
rising with steam off the concrete?

Why this urge to wear your eyes
like the boarded windows of a vacant? To see

nothing and so be
blind at least by choice? To carry him

the two miles home
only to hang him up by the door with your wet coat?

If what is lost is really only lost?

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Then maybe it was your father's life that found you
staring down some other trees

from the far end of a park bench, chirping
for birds that had already flown

or knew you had nothing to offer
but pocket lint and words. So easily you could have slipped

away, settled into the passenger's seat
of that primer-gray Cutlass idling

in the parking lot, those black windows reflecting
the anticipation of junkies and kids

like you. So easily you slipped away,

into your father's dreams, where bright birds pecked
the corners of the day

until each day was small enough to fit
into his breast pocket, to be carried, piecemeal

as the rain that found him
heading west from West Virginia

until the Pacific rose up and whispered, *no farther*.
Your father, almost your age then, when

he stepped down from the running board
of that battered blue Toyota pickup
onto the ash-soft earth of Oregon, stepped

into your mother's hands, hands
years later bent by arthritis, two small white bowls

to hold the rain, to hold a son

or the shape of his leaving, driving east
as the rain tapers to almost nothing,

as a blue pickup passes going the other way
with your father—you nod—behind the wheel.

§

There was a girl, because there's always a girl.
She was the Pacific. She said, *no farther*.

As if on cue, the rain spilled over, and you
offered her your coat. She scuffed the other way

down Division. She left you stranded
like a tree. She was the dry circle beneath a tree,
a place the rain never touched.

You saw her in the back seat of each passing car.

Sometimes you're not sure
you've ever seen her, only

a jostling in the leaves way up where
the rain begins. But that was years ago.

You are bone-soaked, now.

You are scattered

as the rain. You are

walking the two miles home to her,
to climb into that vacancy in her, which is

the shape of your mother's hands,
your father's hunger, is everything you can take,

besides pocket lint and whispers,
the light this time of year,

these dreams that catch the world awake.

§

The rain unravels and moves east, easing up, lasting
longer than a thing this slight should,

so light and constant it might not even be
rain anymore, only the white noise

an infant falls asleep to each night, the last
scatter of seed spilling from an old man's hand

where he sits on the far end of a park bench,
the pigeons massing at his feet,

a few drops, a few more seeds,

a slight palsy in his outstretched hand
that seems matched by the motion of the birds

bobbing to fetch the seed, the gray-white cloud
of birds so dense they resemble a tiny sky,
a storm of birds maybe making a tiny rain.

But the rain has stopped. And the pigeons,
all at once, scatter and drift east, all

except the last, brave or too badly maimed,
pecking aimlessly the black earth,

its wings rising and falling and rising, the feathers
white against gray and darker gray, ash

against almost black, the faint storm
of greens and purples, glazed, as if with rain,
the palsy in the wings settling a little

as it finds his fingers, as it climbs into the empty hand.