

You Might Want to Try This

When the deep root of a tooth rattles through
the jaw's ridge line, when an unexpected
amount of hair turns up in the shower's drain,

when the sky sickens and shows up bruised
as an ex-girlfriend who says her eye was blackened
when she slipped on the ice and fell, it's natural

to wonder. The girl in the white dress, walking
along the boulevard, has a date with a dribble
of red wine. The boy in the wheelchair

smells of an abundance of cologne. Incongruity
stumbles like an old acquaintance up the front steps
toward a door overgrown by vines, its handle

a rusted handshake, its threshold chewed through
by all that desires to enter (or leave). Cue
a child's unreserved laughter at a table across

the room from this black hole of contemplation.
That's the antidote. Shake that last dash
of paprika into the stew. Turn the volume down

on the Intermittent Anxiety Hour station.
There's a nail in a board in the basement, but
there's no need to go down there, is there?

Follow the white streak that every star wants
to make, a little marker to navigate the dark.
A gift, a splash. A haven, a pillow to comfort

the ache. Put on your top hat, if you must,
but there's no one here to impress. Just reach
like a heartbeat for the next instant, and

the next. Steps on stones being swallowed
in autumn's soft mud. Another morning
wrestling its way toward your window.

Dining at Purity's Margin

At the table beside us,
an ensemble of diners arrives
with violin, bass and cello.
After the young waiter with the ring
centered through his lower lip
takes their orders, everyone
liberates their instrument
from its case and begins
to play. Why not turn
a noisy bistro
into a rehearsal hall?
It's just the type innovation
this humdrum carnival needed.

Even the old man in the booth
nearby forgets about his satchel
of curses and lye-crusting hemlock,
when the strings respond
with vibratory elegance
to the bows' passing embrace.
Such unexpected solace
at the rough end of another day,
a day undistinguished before
music's marginal miracle chose
the table beside us
for its impromptu appearance.

All through the walk home
the echoes accompany us, nudging
awake other senses. The stars cut
the Cambridge haze, and
for a moment we're back
in the Laurentians—at the crest
of clarity transcending
horizons—the polar air resonant
with wind transfigured by its journey
through Siberian forests. Who
could condemn such a world
as this for its lost purity?

Space Wonders

Near the Connecticut border, we witness
the brilliant demise of an indeterminate chunk
of matter. Gravity's scorching friction
claims another victim. In the vacuum depths
beyond our habitable sliver, uncountable cousins
to this lost astronaut must wonder
if an atmosphere's smothering embrace
is worth disintegration. To feel
in the brief instance of descent some kinship
to molecules of oxygen and hydrogen
must warm the core . . . must animate recall
of hazed legends that all once were united.
At eighty meager miles to the hour we must seem
as snails, sliding along our asphalt trails.
Accidental cosmic observers, we imbue

this random phosphorescent streak
with meaning. Cursed to seek
meaning, we sense synchronicity
in any meteor's oblivious entry into
illuminati's arcana. We pull over into a rest area,
amazed as Saul stumbling into Damascus.
The washrooms' fluorescent aura dimmed
by hands soiled and in need of more than water
can offer—this flare, amid all the universe's limitless
inconsequences, has drawn us back toward heaven's black
inscrutability. And, why? We'll not accept
any possibility that precludes a divine curiosity
that wants to unite our existence with a pearl of purpose,
as fragrant and faultless as this dollop
of soap dispensed onto our waiting palms. We sense

dissolving kinship with the crazed mathematicians
who shatter lead ions at almost incomprehensible speeds
to unlatch the chest that holds the formula for all beginnings.
The only key we seek is the pretense of solace . . .
some comfort bestowed along our highway.
A thoughtless amalgam of materials from
the first efforts of our solar system to coalesce

(stanza continues)

will do. We head out once more, reassured as children
tucked beneath blankets in the back seat,
watching for another stroke of brilliance to arrive.