

Getting Through the Night

I've grown a heart
inside my heart
made of lead

Its weight tugs
on lungs & breath
pulling on my words—

a world without
two of the five
I've always known

There are worse things
in middle life
than knowing this new
heft will also give out

Why not praise even
this clipped breath
this new organ

this changed body
that will not turn back
will not not be heavy

A.D.

After my brother and mother died
is a dependent clause or noun phrase
in every sentence I write now.

This morning: coffee in front of a fire,
box scores and election results
after my brother and mother died.

Year zero—talk therapy, running,
salt; often it hurt to breathe—
is in every sentence I write now.

Year one, month five, my doctor says
no melanoma in your lymph nodes
after my brother and mother died.

I'd thought about tattoos and instead
got ten inches of scars: back, hip, chest—
lines in every sentence I write now.

Two mutts snore next to the fire, and no
light, except one, spilling onto trees.
After my brother and mother died

is the shadow phrase, whether said
out loud or sotto voce or unspoken
in every sentence I write now.

It's not *sentimentia*—that muddle
a teacher said to find and cut—
to say *after my brother and mother died*.

It's fact. Whatever time I have left
with my beloveds—animals, humans, trees—
every single sentence I write now
is after my brother and mother, who died.

At the Game

What I hate most are games that aren't fair—
one team with all the fastest players, who cut
and skate around the others, and the referee
calls penalty after penalty on the losing team.

Brought home from the hospital after his body
gave out, after eight years of fighting for more
days, my brother, those last few days, in a bed
in his study, could have railed at the universe—

and he did, one night, in his narcotic sleep,
as he thrashed and we tried to calm him, there was
a hockey game and he cursed the ref, and fought
for the puck with a friend who'd died years earlier—

but when he was awake and lucid, he held
my hand, something we never did, and cracked
wise while my mom filled the quiet with talk
like one fills a birthday balloon with air before

a party, which this was, of a certain kind.
He told his boys, fifteen and thirteen, how proud
he was. He laughed with friends about Dead
shows and flatulence before death.

He said the quiet things to his beloved
he needed to. Whoever put *fairness*
in our heads? Old word from older words
for *beautiful, fitting, to fix, to fasten together*.

In *Caddyshack*, after some kid lists all
the many things he wants, his grandfather says,
you'll get nothing and you'll like it, and we laugh.
I'd sign the contract that says my team will lose

and lose if I could sit with Leland for five
minutes watching a game, or run with him
and Doc, his first dog, up Section 16—
a trail straight up a mountain—which we did once

huffing and laughing at the slope. That's only
possible in these lines. But I see you
here, Lee: sunlight dips below the rocky
peaks, you smile and grab my arm.

All I Know

Sixteen months after my mother left her body—
after the energy we called *Cathy Fay*
joined my brother's in whichever vast

invisible pool that I still have no name for—
all I know is I can't call and tell her how a doctor
cut out a piece of my back, then took some lymph nodes,

three down where I cinch my belt and another up
under my arm, then stitched nine-inches to scar.
I want to talk to my mom because the bruising

has risen like a sun, and my hip and groin
feel like someone beat them with a baseball bat,
and I know she'd listen and vibrate with sympathy

and stand next to me from a thousand miles away.
And she'd know to put my brother on the call—
he knew better than anyone what it is to be cut

and treated for cancers, and he'd laugh with me
at the absurdity of both of us with the same
dreaded disease—though his was a thousand

times a thousand times worse, a fact he would
not mention. And I would hear in his voice,
which is my voice—two voices even our loved ones

could barely tell apart—I'd hear his gentle nod
toward the bright hooks that my beloved and I
screwed into the walls by the back door,

where my family hangs all manner of coats and bags
for school and work. If I somehow missed that message,
he'd just say, *G, get back to work*. My mother

smiled often, and so I do the same and know
anyone who thinks our teeth a sign of meekness
doesn't understand what strength is. My brother

literally taught me to fight—nail, tooth,
jab, swing—taught me to be tougher than
I am— *stand, hop, one foot, the other, clap*

*your palms together like this—because he knew
he would not always be there to say, I'm
the only one who gets to fight my brother.*

The Stone

I find a stone a little smaller
than half a human heart inside
my chest again this morning.
I forget about it, but in the early
dark when I am quiet and sipping
it is still there. It rises and falls
with each breath—my right
lung, my sternum and ribs
make space for it, as there is
almost always room for one more
on a crowded bus. I first felt it
sometime after two people I called
mine died within two months.
It is oblong and smooth
along the edges. Twenty months now
with this inside my body.
I whisper, *Is there something
you'd like to know? And: what
are you protecting me from?*
It gives no answer I can hear.