

THE TIME HAS COME TO TALK OF MANY THINGS

BEFORE SELLING THE FAMILY HOME

I find barnacles on the bottom of our old sailboat
upturned tortoise-style in the backyard;
they are brittle as a gang of great-grandmothers

and easily scraped off with my bare hands.
I fire them effortlessly like I used to throw snowballs
over the peak of our bungalow roof, now burnished copper,

drenched by sunlight soon departing the day.
The yard becomes a blur once the sun deserts the sky, and,
until my eyes adjust to dusk's bathing every blessed thing,

I see mother lying beneath the elm, her skin the chalky
color last it was once they cut her down.
Even blinking rapidly will not dispel that flinty image

and tears long thought dried sit bitter on my tongue.
It's hard not to think about the men swaddling her like a mummy.
No, no—more like something cocooned really—before taking her.

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IN LIEU OF FLOWERS

I found you in the deaths today
—over coffee and dry toast—
and wondered how it is you
could be gone and me still here.

You went suddenly, it said.
In lieu of flowers, donations
to the Humane Society please.
I *knew* right then you had given in.

Remember making fun of that
lady in therapy when she talked
about this...how it couldn't be true?
And now, now you've proved it.

You crazy-assed son of a bitch.
I really can't believe after
all the promises we made to each
other, that no matter how bad it got

that out was never going to be an option.
What the hell happened?
Why didn't you call?
Why didn't I?

By the time I stop weeping,
I see they're holding a memorial for you,
find a florist's number. Yellow roses mean
I remember you, I'll send those.

A BLAZE INGLORIOUS

I don't care if I never see anything like it again.
Like a moth, I was lured to the flames,
me and everyone else, just standing on the sidewalk
staring up at what we thought was an empty
building, when there—at an opening—a figure
in one of the windows, blackly silhouetted, then
poof — he was ablaze—at least I think it was a he—.
It was hard to tell with the body swallowed by flames.

And you know how you see something horrific
and you want to look away, but you just can't?
There's nothing for it, you stay fixed to the spot
even though every filament of you is shrieking:
“Stop looking—nothing good is going to happen,
leave now before it gets worse,” but you don't,
and I didn't. At first it seemed as if the guy
was going to drop backwards into the building.

But, he must've made a herculean effort. Suddenly
he came crashing out the window, and for what
felt like the longest time, he shot like a flaming
arrow through the air. A fireman said he was dead
before he hit, and they were hosing him down.
The air smelled sickly sweet, as if there had
been a campfire, not a building burning, and
surely not a person, no - not a person.

THE DARK HOLDS SWAY

It's late on the ward and quiet;
not a good sign, for those used
to the vagaries of this place
where preternatural calmness
suggests storm clouds gathering
in the minds of those who come
here often or even those
who would be initiates tonight.

As is not unusual, I find I'm restless,
pacing the halls, trying for invisibility
to staff lulled complacent by the calm.
But they too seem antsy, startling easily
at nothing—the elevator's ping,
a door on another floor closing,
a patient calling out in the dark.
Without warning chaos reigns;

a commotion near the front doors.
The sound of lockdown—bolts
being shot home, vacuum doors
sealing shut—occurs throughout
the place. A patient strapped to
a stretcher—wild-eyed, raving,
incoherent—is being admitted.
I shrink into the telephone cubby-hole,

become a watching shadow, wondering.
Was that me? Ever? Have *I* come here
out of my mind, so completely gone?
Bile sits at the back of my throat, mixes
pity with wonder. Back in my room,
I stare out the window as long as it
takes to believe the dark will not
give up any secrets tonight.

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MY POEMS ARE

My poems are an accident you just cannot drive by,
and the herd that comes to grieve with no invitation nor notice.
My poems are death and ashes, and the color of smoke,
the promise curled inside a baby's fist, released.
My poems are candles of hope in windows dark,
and hurricane lanterns at the end of a dock.
They are a stand of old growth paper-white birch trees,
and a rose exploding its petals in death.
My poems are passionate indignation, wolf-culls, enigmas,
and flag-draped coffins,
test-tube griefs, asylums, and those seeking refuge.
My poems are rage at indifference and injustice;
and struggling to stay sane in an insane world.