

In the Garden

Then the Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. - Genesis 2:15

The world curls in on itself
while the weeping willow remains
its pale green self
twitching and dancing in the sun,
long arms twirling, hula, when night comes,

coyotes yowl from beyond the tree line,
while an owl hoots
across the distance,
though it is light, I imagine darkness,
look forward to a bonfire with my friends,

a tradition forged in COVID time,
sustained on summer nights
when we feel like it or
when loneliness rattles our frames and jambs
and the glass through which we see ourselves

grows smudged, unclear,
I remember gathering with mittens,
hats, hot tea in battered thermoses, an orange moon,
Lindsay's sheep huddling close in the windy barn,
mahhhhing while we told the truth as we knew it

into the freezing, smoke-burned air,
resentments we carry
like backpacks or stones,
laying them down, kissing them away in the smoky air
between us while the fire burned

the way the sun burns, now,
the flat gray stones around the swimming pool,
dogs dozing under the chairs,
life goes on, is what I'm saying,
life goes on, is what the willow would say if

willows could speak our language,
O, help us to not destroy this earth.

The Minister

Someone should really pick up that wad of white Kleenex,
blowing around under the folding metal chairs
while the rain pours down, and that woman's red jacket
doesn't match her coral skirt, it clashes, and
the pallbearers are clearly struggling with the little white-topped pins
that attach the white roses to their lapels,
and the music is tinny, and the clouds are gray, like tin.

But you'd have to be numb and sightless to miss
the tenderness. The way the gray-haired woman
steps over to the young mother rocking her infant in the rain
to share her umbrella. The children nuzzling up like damp lambs
to their extra-large moms, swiping at their elders' tears
with minute hands. The way the song that's playing reminds
us not to be afraid of love.

I'm afraid of love and I parked where I could make a quick exit.
It's always what I do. I'm over by the trees.
The funeral director is thoughtful and points a way out
around the cars with a pale, manicured finger.
I do not belong here and yet I do, I belong here.

On the way home, eating cashews from a blue tin,
I wonder who will mourn my love, what
I will leave here when I go, what
songs should be playing while the rain falls down
on the red umbrellas and someone bends over to tie a shoe
and the thunder sounds like something rolling fast
down a mountain.

Wondering (for my mother, 1933-1922)

You were a magician, in the background, a witch,
a six-foot fairy hauling beet greens from the garden,
watering honeysuckle, begonia, petunia, lazy
Susan. Hunched in the garden. Weeding. Shelling peas.
Hummingbirds thrummed at your windows.
Your dusty shoes sat, quiet, by the door.

Pushing the wheelbarrow, stirring pots of long green beans,
making jelly—pickling jars all over the kitchen—grapes
dangling from the shaded arbor like stolen gems. Horses
would trot to the gate when you called,
and clip-clop into the hay-filled barn
through the gaping door, spiderwebs

catching light in the corners like dreams.
You, making dinner, and even clothes
from onionskin patterns and pins, darning our knee socks,
braiding our golden hair, on mornings before school
when the dew was icy on the grass.

There is no one like you anymore. I know this
because I have been looking.
Everyone is so disappointing after you,
and I am bruising so easily, while coming to the
slow realization as the earth turns round the sun
that it was you

who was the magic, the golden patina on things,
the light that made the dust dance that way near the window,
the very grace of the whole green and orange world,
and what will it be without you, is the question I think I'm asking, or
how will I be. You didn't leave a recipe. Or instructions. And
so, I am wondering.