

Things You Should Know About the Future

The neighbors would be too loud, too rich, too tan.
A dog with three legs would make you feel small-minded and ungrateful.
A branch brushing against the window would make your heart ache.
Silence would offer escape.
A revolution would take place while you were asleep.
Peculiar words and a rain of alphabets would call out to you
and your ability to ignore them would dissipate.
The bees would die off.
The ones who acted like they knew they would have it all would have it all.
You'd be drowning in options.
The furniture would match the rug.
Your forgetfulness would become your refuge.
Hyperbole would grab austerity by the balls.
The audience would laugh at the wrong parts.
There would be not one, but many red balloons.
Your benevolence would win you nothing.
Kale would stand out from the crowd of vegetables.
You would devote yourself infinitely to one child.
Certitude would come from having once lost everything.
The dog would be your heart and soul.
You would understand what people meant when they said heart and soul.
You would complain about summer coming too early.
Watering would become your meditation.
The drought would ruin all of that.
The Mormons would keep watch over all that information you couldn't live without.
You would come to resent your loose-limbed intelligentsia.
You would move in circles and know that straight lines are fools gold.
Your mad machinery and foreign grammars would threaten vast conspiracy.
There would be no vast conspiracy.
You would be part warrior, part fool, part epistolary novel.
In that silence, mercy would unfold.
Your daughter would be bold beyond measure.
You would come to love, even worship, your strangeness.
But only after the exile.
Simone Weil would change your mind.
Leonard Cohen would pull your dead body out of the trash.
Milosz would deliver you to your own ancient self.
And the matted thickets and chimeras of your being would inform you:
It is worth remaining.

Things I Have Given Up On

Four marble apples (heft)
Small sailboat carved from wood (limited space)
Pocketbook anthology of Modern Japanese Poetry (torn)
Ceramic dog, winking (kitsch)
Book on integers and polynomials (impenetrable)
A wool herringbone dress that surely Monica Vitti would have worn (size 6)
A small globe filled with sand (hole)
The letter B (oversized)
Blue corduroy pants with lazy zipper (heat)
Wool scarf with white fringe (outnumbered)
Wooden pig with chipped ear (damaged)
Dutch clogs size two (duplicate)
Brown leather color with metal tags (sorrow)
Stainless steel vase shaped like an upside down question mark (hideous)
Three lapis blue boxes with yellow lids (mold)
Porcelain woman reclining (regifted)
Stack of poems via 1996 (freedom)
1956 copy of The Birth of Tragedy and The Genealogy of Morals (limited space)
Navaho print backpack inscribed by Elizabeth Cheney New Brighton Middle School (stains)
Dutch clogs size 10 (impractical)
Unknown metal dancer in arabesque (pretentious)
The letter P (haste)
Blue and white pin-striped blazer that I wore to an interview for a job I never got (symbol)
Mauve knit sweater size infant (hysterectomy)
Red leather cowboy boots (too narrow)
Regret (too narrow)

Past Lives

1.

I was once a poet. Words came to me in my dreams untethered, free of meaning a hem-stitched hemisphere asking nothing. A brief careworn carnival. An entrance. Some days they arrived as a telegraph: word thought word thought thought stop word word stop. Other days, like a fish that suddenly remembers how to breathe without water. I was a poet, so there was light. Szürkület, half-light. Everything that remained was habitable. I listened: cascade of mind, always threatening to betray me with doubt, rousing restless thoughts, the zig-zag of your inner life, a bright heedless color.

2.

Flag-stepper, renegade, word mensch. I found a brood of radiant elemental fleshy constellations, then named them. I continued on, interceding, intercepting, with occasional obedience to the future. Then came that moment in which the world changed, chromosomes scattered, then arranged, determining everything. That moment, a prelude, dancing the length of an hour, I came to be, over the kaleidoscope of human breath, the point at which every motion must insinuate matter. I was a poet then, and poetry was my covenant, my cord. Of course there were others. Narrative impulse. Portmanteau. Leitmotif. Mnemonic device. Caesura. (Probably a thousand of those.) Prologue after prologue. Elegy. Eulogy. Euphony. No plot. It never came to me.

3.

I wandered through the days, the years, until there I was, suddenly old, steeped in habits, helmsmen, head stones. There I was imagining some grand infinite overlook would override the daily arrangements one must make to live. My mistake was how I approached memory, as if I could ever enjoy the pinning down of rare birds. My mistake was in believing in mistakes. Those of us who remain must reconcile with age, its ministers and machinations. It follows us everywhere, digs its claws in. Chronos, that terrible monster that devours time. Even if I knew beyond shadows and reflections, perception is always partial.

4.

Imagine you hadn't looked this way, over here, where I am standing now. Imagine your mother and father hadn't rendered you. Then what would you have to say? What would I have to say? Find what it is that exculpates your heart. What detains, decomposes you. Find that frontier. Attune every sense, delirious and hawk-eyed. Find that netherworld. I was a poet, mended by merriment. I put my ear to the ground, was overjoyed, and with a headful of strangers gathered the courage to open my mouth and speak.