

not writing about charleston

are you looking for a poem
about charleston, south carolina?

i am resisting the obvious inclination
to write you a poem about charleston
a tornado of events that seem as unremarkable
as seeing the twister that appears
after hundreds of viewings of "The Wizard of Oz"

i have no words
none that matter
i don't want to try to watch this movie with you
again if you keep rewinding the story
to the black and white parts, you know
that part where we pretend we don't know what's going to happen

or how splendid it is, this place called Oz
as if we still do not know the benign secret
behind the curtain;
while you are dreaming in technicolor
with a brick road made of gold and red shoes
and a place like no other to go home to

we walk the streets in monochrome nightmare
filled with the violent storm's detritus

and the flying monkeys come
you know the part, where you either
peer with an insidious glee, maybe rewind again
or turn your head or fast forward
but in our world, they are real
and fly every day

yesterday, they came again
to charleston, south carolina

blue hot sun

somewhere in the blue hot sun
i thought of you
heat a degree short
of the white hot
vapor scoured memory

my special brand of asbestos gloves
handled with care
so that i would not
be burned into something
beyond my mourners recognition

but i know you
too well to forget
the last time i was burned,
and the time before
fooled often enough
to own the title

they call the colors cold
and i believe them
with sufficient depth to never question;
like a god sun
they teach me
it is what makes the world go 'round

here i am, again
back with you
handling you gingerly
you know where
to get this special touch
but you know

i will hold you tight
until my arms wilt to cinder
and i have steamed a story
into you
that will not be forgotten
even as i turn to ash

salt/the earth

there was a river
who knew where it was going
an idea carving wilderness
into something so untamable

progress decided
to erect a dam
somehow convinced his diminutive
that it was he who walked on the wild side

the sun shines
like the eyes of god
whose sight could keep the world
spinning, green and warm
for eternity

now that my paradise
has been paved
i have learned that gray
is the hottest color
asphalt is heavy
this whole world is slowing down
for it's longest year

it is not just a pretty flower
that stands tall in soil's bed
gentle storms and bright days
that feed them year after year
and have fed us
for almost as long

he pats us on the head
calls us the salt of the earth
sows the fields with our crushed bones
dumps the rest into the sea
so that the gods will
never drink again

2) the brilliance of angels

this life is a dream
from which we will not wake
afterlife? harps pluck out
brilliant colors in three dimensions
but land on flat sheets
in pencil grey, sepia tan

we thought we were smarter
a little more brilliant
vibrant with sparkle, even firecracker
still, this must be purgatory
there are no angels here

have we spoken things
that are radiant? or
do we avoid them, those angels
breath of god
ashamed of our dull, dusty beige
can't play a tune
even on one simple string?

trying to fight our way
out of sleep, out of darkness
out of a night paralysis
tangled and trapped in sheets
sweats, terror; empty gasp
no air

that is when I forget
for a moment
about our pride, being brilliant
just long enough
for an angel to save us
maybe we wake up, are saved
undamned for a moment

but we are gluttons for the pillow
twisting in bedclothes paraphernalia
bedpost fetishes
warbled melodies of anthem
comfortable excuse for not-so-bright
laid out in something less than satin
this coward sleeps a thousand slumbers

is this how my love grows?

tears hover
over sod laying dry
limp and brittle
in long, rigid fingers
forearms of sweat

moist eyes
too little to
bring this clump of
promise
back to life

sod cutter's mark
shows how it is so easily
pulled away
from the ground on which it was
planted

and how a grandfather's hand, whose
hubris and old
naivete
made him think it would be there
forever

muddy cheek streaks
I will not wipe them
with stained hands

that only smear
sorrow
from its graceful trail
down my face

like a sad irrigator with
broken main and a
futile attempt to
water a field
already sewn with salt