

We were a Self for the Night

Black Locust

Behind our elderly house
the black locust

has always shadowed you.
Now I live under its shadow too.

We cannot say how timeless it is.
It will always be before and after.

First flowers a spray of cream
pale yellow-blushed butterflies.

When they fall, still fresh
imagine our wedding there?

I will brush the blossoms
from your grey hair.

Maybe two groundhogs
for best men, a sparrow chorus

chipmunks' cheeky grins
crickets chirping congratulations

confetti of sunlight
gifts of love

finale of spring
a gay marriage in June!

Seed-pods in summer dangle
earrings to the shoulders.

Its rough branches trespass
the neighbor's fence.

And when his dog is loose
provide an escape route for the squirrels.

Before you and me, tenants
hammered a nail into its side.

On the rusty nail
I hung a sundial

to make use of the wound
the unnecessary wound

so the bark can keep time
on a golden watch

encircling the years
(with secret rings)
kept hidden in a trunk.

Last time I counted your rings
you had seventy-three. I, forty-eight.

I'm a sapling.
You're reaching your peak.

Remember the tornado
that twisted up the land?

You, black locust, did not budge
no matter how strong

the intractable wind
bullying, headstrong argued.

I hope not to see you fall
(unwavering monument) on our city

over which you tower
floor upon floor of branching

architecture
a façade of gentle foliage

which we grow proud
of at our peril.

Leaves of the locust fall late.
You can hear their approach.

They clap on their way down
applauding for the view

of the rising and the setting sun
they've enjoyed.

Their season pass
they're reluctant to let go.

The neighbors insist
on raking

but that seems futile
that October ritual

when I can crunch
what's left not to forget

of our black locust
under my winter boots.

Joy Ride

Thought we might
go for a ride.

Where to?

I don't know.
but let me drive.
I will get us there.

How far are we willing to go?

Until we get lost
or found.

God willing.

Promise I will take my time.
You hate when telephone poles fly by
reminding you of prison bars.

Close your eyes.

What is it?

Nothing.

I won't tell you
we passed a deer
struck dead
on the side of the road.

The car's shadow
races over the surface
of the steely river
as we cross the rusty bridge.

Where are you going?

I will give you a hint:
It smells of maple sugar.

Will you buy me truffles sprinkled with salt
shattered bark, peanut brittle?

Yes.

Miles stack up.
The road's windy as ribbon candy.

Lone trailers, old cars, barking dogs.
Silos, concentric hay bales, grazing sheep.
Free tomatoes, fresh eggs, cords of firewood.

Garage sale!
Pull up, say hello.
Stainless steel coffee pot
worn car seat, polka records
paperback Stephen Kings.

You find two flowerboxes
five dollars, like new
with scalloped sides
yellow tulips hand-painted
on a blue-sky background
perfect to replace
the weathered ones back home
you filled with care all seasons.

I think this is the way
to the Silver Trout café
overlooking the vast wetland:
barren tree trunks half-submerged
sedge grass waving
white rise of the whooping crane.

If we're lucky
we might catch sunset
on the glassy pools
the reflections
that make me
sneak a kiss
from across the table
hoping some man
grows jealous
wanting to kiss
him too
his best friend
secretly on the lips.

Probably should head back.

I'm not too tired to drive.
Close your eyes, take a nap.
We'll be there in no time.

Don't worry.
I won't speed.

But that's a lie...

While you sleep
I'm stepping hard
on the gas
thrusting
against the rushing hours

oncoming

the collision
with our journey's end.

Poem for Two Men in Love

Rise early. At dawn,
the biting fish like cool water and a slow current.
He never would have known this.

Potato chips, cat toys, medicine bottles.

Where are the spare car keys?
In the box on the bedroom shelf
with our wills and our birth certificates.

Ceramic blue bird, electric blanket, wind chimes.

A younger man and an older man
live together on the hill in the middle of the city.
From here it is possible to see stars of many ages.

Fur hats, rosary, flat screen TV.

He said: I love you.
He said: Still?
He said: Always.
They slept sound.

A golden clock, bowling bowls, Bahama shirts.

They went on vacation.
One was sick in the motel room.
The other was right outside the door looking out at the view.
He tells him of the rainbow and the single dolphin.

Ice fishing gear, greasy tools, books of poetry.

He told the story of the young boy
trapped by a water spout while fishing on Saratoga Lake:
dark spot on the water surface,
spiral pattern, spray ring, funnel, decay.
Pushed under a tree's roots hanging over the water,
in his rowboat, the boy found shelter.
As a man, he dreads the sound of thunder.

Sunflower seeds, a violin, old photographs.

He is wide-awake in the emergency room at 2 a.m.
The other is being seen.
Under his breath he whispers:
it is not time, it is not time, it is not time.

Making a Living

One waits for his social security check.
The other his pay from the university.
 One day they will rise above zero.

His HIV medications could cost him his life.
Every year he applies for a subsidy.
 The other would dare rob a bank for him.

Christmas-time: they both say *don't buy me a gift.*
 He always receives chocolate truffles.
 He always receives a bird house.

A gallon of milk: \$4.38
Twenty-two ounces of coffee: \$10.24
Forty-four ounces of fresh raspberries: \$5.38
An ounce of gold: \$1671.00

Sometimes they splurge.

Their favorite place to go is the Greek Diner.
They have excellent specials.
The owner is ancient.
 Her name is Aphrodite.

Or sometimes they go to Sally's Hen House.
It's on the way to Vermont, worth the price in gas.
 The egg-yolks are golden orange peel yellow marigold.

They always break even.

It's like that time they drove up the Green Mountains,
and as they started down the squiggly road,
a cloud parked itself over the visible world,
and the lines on the road flickered away,
and although he was not a good driver,
he would get them there safely,
breathing deep, chit-chatting,
his senses heightened,
knowing how to ride
the edge of a cliff,
like always,
laughing for
their good
fortune.

Toward the Rainbow

The room watches me sleep.
A guard dog with a scrupulous face.
Many strangers tip-toe through
trying not to disturb the brittle leavings.

Remember when you slept here?
You must. Nights a different color then:
white or pink hibiscus, jade, mandarin.
I tried to identify the taste of your dreams:
yucca petal, pineapple guava, cilantro.

You refused to listen to a word I said
preferred your tongue in my mouth.
Honestly so did I. Its flavors brighter
than those of the northern flowers I ate.

Most seasons are safer now
since I have chosen to sleep solo.
It is sound. My empty room
cares for me. A guard dog with a sly face.
The polite passersby know not to step too close
to the pile of weeds. I'm underneath.

But you upheave me.
Why only you? Always.
You to woo me, bed me, bend me
with your tropics. I prefer the cold.
It's no use now to try to melt me
under your palms.

Winter thrashes.
Can't you hear it? I learned to love her
after your lightening lashes.
Winter, she packed me in ice
sealed the burns.

Time you go back to Spanish accents
bleached pastels, blistering blues
clouds you claim spill coconut milk.
I will not follow you toward the rainbow.