

All Our Types of Hoarding

Gas Mask

She's asked me to clean up again.
Asked me to vacuum and dust and mop and,
time permitting,
pull the matted hair stuck to the toilet.
Stiffbrush the mold in the shower stall.

She's asked me this hundreds of Sundays in a row.
As if I might forget.
Perhaps even one day rebel.

I want to damn the toilet all to hell,
make the shower unfit for humans or dogs.
Watch the tiles get black and yellow,
as mold and piss fight for control.
I want this house to smell like a rodeo latrine.

I want my cats stumbling around towers of yellow papers,
torn magazines held up by house corners.
See their furry bodies tangle with bags and bags of Fritos,
a cardboard fort of old pizza boxes,
other cats--caught and killed by my walls of garbage.

I need a team of men in gasmasks gagging,
and a tiny woman, in an unthreatening cream suit,
talking about anxiety and "letting go".
Want to have my children crying and screaming,
tell me about a "special" home they plan for me to go,
and how this is the last time and giving up.
Have the youngest one feel guilty into helping.

I want to forget the hair and the dust and the smell,
those things returning every Sunday for me.
I just want to write this poem, now.
I want to clean myself first.

Broom

In just five quick nights, the cinnamon broom
you nailed to the bedroom door
stopped working.

After that excited first unwrap,

we were certain Christmas had come to town.
It was mid-August and we thought we heard carolers.
Tried to remember where we packed the tinsel.
House smelling like pumpkin pie and safety.

Google said cinnamon was a sedative,
a homeopathic peace trigger,
a definitive cure for everyday stress.

We believed her.

Now, the scent is gone.
The broom, still impaled, is just
twigs and knots of wicker.

It looks like we've ripped
some dead stalk from such dry ground.
Splayed the desiccated roots.
Punished it for its exhaustion.

Going Public

I am so done with this private crying,
this dry-eyed staring into space,
this wait for tears to break the drought.

I've become sick of the mechanical swiping
at water rings long ago etched into all this furniture.
Same green rag—same clockwise arc.

Does not matter what the Sears portrait says.
A gone wife ain't coming back into the frame,
a lost boy and a lost girl will not sit still—
here, anymore.

But these nights punching at the mattress,
aimlessly revisioning history,
will stop at sunrise.

Tomorrow, I'm going public with these ghosts.
Do all my crying at the mall.
I'll walk the storefronts redfaced wet,
heave this pain out on a bench in front of Radio Shack.
At the food court, I'll bury my hands in my face,
let the teriyaki congeal around the balls of rice.

When I am ready,
truly ready to let this all go,

I will clutch the handrail to the entrance gate
of the kiddie slide.
Holler out my demons.

Casket

When I was a little boy,
I assumed they nailed coffins shut,
because it would keep away the spiders, the worms.
Keep away the foul-fanged creatures,
feeders of the fat left on the bones.

They nailed it tight.
Only Jesus, the magical carpenter, could pull them out.
He'd remove them sometimes all at once;
sometimes only one nail at a time,
ever ready to change his mind.
Decide to leave you there.

I knew he came for my grandfather and my father,
removed those smooth iron pins,
so bent and caught deep in the wood.
He came to set them free from the ground,
the living dirt still hungry for marrow.

Today, as a grown man,
engine screaming down the highway,
the doors of the panel truck in front of me flew open.
There it was, coming 60 miles an hour at me,
a dark varnished casket, splitting open to the world.

The very moment I swerved,
I did not see its little pink pillow, or a cloudsatin lining.
I did not see the brass handles,
the ones my friends will grab when they carry me to my hole.
When it came at me,
gaping in all its hurtling whiteness,
the very moment I swerved,
I swear I saw teeth.

Mail

My wife receives the most interesting mail.

Last week,
despite my excitement at my "good driver" rebate check,
she was sent four books of poetry,
a postcard from Venice . . . the one in Italy for Christ's sake.

She received three magazines in languages we don't speak,
a pamphlet on growing marijuana . . . unrequested,
two gifts from old students of hers,
and a keychain of the London Eye.

Once,
on the day I got my new Discover card . . . the purple one,
she received a holy Catholic relic,
some saint's microscopic fingernail scrape,
embedded in a Swarovski crystal rosary.

When we're both dead,
whoever finds this box of junk mail,
the one I've been keeping balanced on the printer,
will know I was staid.
Serious.
A rectangle of nothing with a silly decorative stamp.

They'll know I was one of life's unnecessary calendars,
some charity's mass-run reward for my sucker check.
They'll know my overwhelming fear of making noise,
my paralyzing quiet.

But when they reach your bedside.
Oh, the glorious things they'll find.
You, my dear, you'll be the gypsy heart,
the insane tumult of the world in carnival spin.
They will know you've been a saint,
a reveler, a traveler, a slut.
They will know you were my voice.