

Upon My Diagnosis

The Halloween hurricane took me by surprise,
upending sturdy oaks, their angry branches
grabbing at me while I shivered on the phone.
The blue spruce surrendered without a fight.

Rivers welled up, overflowed their banks,
lapped at my furnace. Raindrops on my roof
sounded like God spitting bullets, no--
more like an army of angels with chainsaws.

The wind roared round my home like a tyrannosaurus
on a rampage, gnashing its teeth looking
for someone to eat.
Is it ironic that *harm* is part of *harmony*?

The hurricane ate up power in wide swathes,
leaving me in a midday eclipse of
the sun. My cell phone ceased its celestial
aquamarine glow, and all went mute.

The air acrid with ozonic fear. The ocean
whipped into unrepentant meringue.
Mother Nature became a whore.

When the blood-shot eye of the hurricane arrived,
I almost relaxed, but in the distance,
I heard the sound of children sobbing.

Small Truths

With his cane and his cap, Leon totters onto the balcony,
his craggy shadow long in the florescent dawn.

He bends to clip a potted miniature red rose.

He knows if he squats he'll get stuck, as if Satan
was pulling him down. He remembers when he had
a real garden bursting with roses,

five glorious bushes of hybrid teas-- deep red,
purple-pink, sunset red, baby pink and something else.

Creamy white? Plus azaleas, pink rhodies, tall dahlias
in the yard of his home in DC.

Not this puny three by six excuse-for-a-garden
in Nowhere Virginia. Was it just seven years ago?

Leaning hard on his cane, Leon rights himself
with this offering for his wife of 76 years,
grabs the door jamb, thrusts his unwilling body inside.

He crab-walks the dozen feet to the kitchen,
gives the rose to his wife. Her blue eyes
shining like the Hope Diamond.

They kiss gently on the lips, each unconsciously
aware of the other's dubious balance.

With her quivering Parkinson's hands, translucent
with glacier blue veins, Sylvia pours his Cheerios,
slices bananas for extra potassium, avoiding the brown parts.

She peers at the date on the skim milk carton,

wrinkling her brow to get her trifocals in the right position.

“Damn glasses,” she mutters to herself.

To the side of the table on top of the *New York Times*, brochures for assisted living their oldest daughter silently dropped off with the paper. They intrude, rip the music of their life like a 9.0 earthquake. *How dare she!* Sylvia thinks. *How dare she*, Leon thinks. She cajoled them out of their house into this drab cinder-beige condo. *Now this*, Leon thinks.

Now this, Sylvia thinks. Sylvia maneuvers herself to the table, lands on the chair with a soft plop.

Every Sunday, they do the *New York Times* crossword together—the hardest of the week—testament to their mental soundness. Sylvia squints at the puzzle.

Is that 6 or 8 down? She calls to Leon washing dishes, “Gnome.” He, at 98, has been going deaf for twenty years, boycotts his daughter’s attempts to get him hearing aids. Even a small truth can be deadly. He replies, “Home?”

Sylvia repeats, “No, no, gnome.” Leon asks, “No one home?”

On to 15 across, “Eschew,” Sylvia bellows. Leon, “Shoes?”

Sylvia cries, “Never mind!” “You know I can’t hear you when the water’s on,” he rationalizes. Sylvia shuffles with her walker to Leon, plants a kiss on his neck.

Leon wipes his eye, puts two dozen baby pink roses on Sylvia’s grave.

Butterflies

He was 13 and did not step on cracks and sometimes talked to cats because cats did not demand attention like dogs; and he knew everything about butterflies, different species, what each one ate, the different stages and their peculiar mating rituals for he was not to mate; he could tell a Monarch from a Painted Lady like other kids could tell Superman from Spiderman; he would launch into long Lepidoptera soliloquies staring at his shoes unaware of the listener's boredom; and he could recite all the palindrome dates of the century; his classmates called him "freak" and "faggot" and he was picked last for kickball for the ball seemed unpredictable as a mosquito, how could he kicked a mosquito; but he knew he was an alien from another galaxy; sometimes he took his antidepressants, sometimes hid them in his socks; thinking, thinking of a future day; his bedroom window faced south and light waves of bullets were too blinding for him so he moved to the basement preferring moldy dark to light; there were moans and bangs for his tongue felt too big for his mouth and when he bit his tongue he had to bang his head against the wall to make the pain stop, sometimes sobbing; I don't know how the six live Monarchs with fire-orange wings got on his silent chest or why a painting of a

black butterfly with huge proboscis was on the ceiling

or what the note on his desk was;

but did it matter?

Day of Fear

I was making whole grain waffles and gulping coffee
and trying not to think and where two walls meet
the ceiling, a daddy longlegs was in his silken bunker
and I started to swat him with my cane, but thought
who am I to take a life and I stumbled to the table,
cracked like a sarcastic grin and the rain sliced
through the ceiling seams dripping down
the wall made the face of my dear cranky dad
and you could smell the ozone
although there's a hole in the top
and I tried to read the paper but my mind
was in a vise and you could smell anticipation
because anticipation smells like not knowing
if you're going to make it down the stairs
without feeling you've been mugged
and outside feral cats were wailing like a
bad jazz improv, then I turned on the radio
but all I got was static, I dragged myself
to the bedroom, leaning on my good leg
and I started ironing, the feel of ironed
sheets was so sublime and someone
should mark the date, I think it was October 11th,
and that should be the day of fear because
fear begins then and I almost felt relief for

I had stared fear in its robber's face,
although the worst was yet to come,
yet to come,
and gargoyles hide their acorns
from the squirrels and werewolves
begin to migrate south, and despite my
failing muscles, I try to focus on
what makes my wretched body sing.

Desire de Vivre

Once I was a gypsy aerialist flying high
on my trapeze spinning midair, while smelling
the sweet, soggy, sawdust below, star of
Cirque du Soleil and dreamed I woke in a
hospital bed and you could smell disinfectant
mixed with piss and I had a thorny vine going
up my nose and down my throat and my nurse Luigi,
huge and hairy, signed his name with hearts
where the dots over “i’s” should be
while at the dock in back of
my room the owl and pussy-cat were preparing to go
to sea in a beautiful pea green boat and though
it’s hard to explain except in terms of desire to live,
or you might say “desire de vivre” though I would
have said I was Lucy in the Sky in Van Gogh’s
“Starry Night” creating a soap bubble world and
would have stuck to my story even if Luigi
flooded my veins sodium pentothal,
for I was determined to fly, a shooting star
with a triple twist but the rosebush stuck
in my maw was scratching my throat so I went to
pull it out and I was aghast—
my arms, my body strapped to the bed, and
my legs refused to move

and the vine was a breathing tube,
I, the great aerialist, shrieking, inexplicably
earthbound, I live to soar,
and there were other atrocities.