

Tearing the Curtain

There's a moment after the final breath
a pause pregnant with eternity—
still waiting for the next breath to come
still expecting the lungs to expand and fill once more
just as they always have.

It's one moment, made up of millions.

Of course some are the memorable milestone moments
but also
the long-forgotten
small stuff of everyday life
the countless fleeting seconds
that are born
and pass away
and are no less precious—

no less holy.

It is a mystery, the eternal instant
between the final breath
and the realization that *it is finished*

but

it is in that mysterious moment of moments
that the temple curtain is forever torn in two.

For Straight People Who Wonder Why Pride Month is Such a Big Deal

He woke up one morning
and found the world had flipped
being gay was now the norm
and straightness an aberration

And in English class, when she smiled at him—
She of the Flaxen Hair
She of the Starlit Eyes
She of the Tight-Knit Sweaters—
a dormant cocoon burst open like a ruptured aorta
and a hundred rainbow butterflies spilled out, filling his stomach
with a strange, unexpected feeling
not joy, nor excitement
but loathing.

Loathing She of the Flaxen Hair, Starlit Eyes, and Tight-Knit Sweaters,
Creator of Sixth-Grade Butterflies.
Loathing his desire to kiss her
when he was supposed to desire a boy

but knowing that no boy
could ever be a Creator of Butterflies for him
and loathing himself for it.

His preacher assumed he was gay just like everybody else
and unwittingly called him an abomination that Sunday
an unrepentant sinner
a danger to God's ordained order
when he preached on the sins of the straights:
the unnatural lust for the opposite sex
the sin of noticing She of the Butterflies and Other Beautiful Things
the sin of wanting her to be his first kiss
when God created him to be gay,
instead of an unnatural,
unrepentant
straight
sinner.

He desperately tried to rebuild the cocoon
and force the butterflies back in,

to talk himself out of it—all of it—
yet the butterflies remained
despite the damnation
despite the danger if word got out
despite the slurs he knew would begin
despite how hard he tried to stop noticing her
or any other girls

he remembered hearing his parents using “straight”
as a slur
and he knew deep down
(the butterflies whispered to him)
that’s what he was
and that his family
would
hate
him
if they ever found out.

Gethsemane

It's a real place, you know—midway up the Mount of Olives
(which is also real and not just a fantasy landmark
in some young adult dystopian novel).

I could find it on a map with other real places
like the Nebraska State Capitol
or the Brooklyn Bridge
or Cincinnati
but its existence was nothing but a dead gradient-lined label
until

I stepped through the gate and found myself
among the living olive trees
whose leaves shone in the Mediterranean sunlight

and on the night in which Jesus was betrayed
they probably glistened in the moonlight too
with the soldiers' flickering torches
creating *danse macabre* silhouette shadows
as Judas
gave Jesus
the kiss of death.

I've been told that some of the garden's
wizened, ancient, living trees
are more than two thousand years old—
silent, living witnesses to the arrest
of the Son of God
and I wonder
if on moonlit nights the deathly shadows still sometimes dance
illuminated by the memory of a betrayer's kiss in Gethsemane—

which is a real place, you know.

Kristallnacht

It is a familiar time of *Kristallnacht*.
An entire people already confined to ghettos
now punished for an assassination,
and the laundry needs to be put away.

We're out of bread again.
Do you have time to stop at the store?
I'll get started on supper
if you can pick the kids up from soccer practice
on the way back.

It is such a simple thing in such a familiar *Kristallnacht*
to turn off the news
to shield myself from facing
the mangled faces of other kids
who once went to soccer practice

now blown into unrecognizable bits
and referred to as terrorists
by their genocidal killers

Palm Sunday Protest

A man rides astride not a stallion but a donkey
with a crowd shouting hosanna psalms
while waving palms
in a parody of pageantry ridiculing Rome.

A red carpet entrance
of ratty blankets and peasant cloaks
pay homage to an intentional pretender
to a human throne
play-acting the part of a worldly king
entering the city gates.

It's a Jewish Lives Matter protest parade
where humility subverts imperial power
and exposes the emperor's nakedness.

No new clothes can cover the obscene scene
of an occupier stripped bare
by a man
and a donkey
and a makeshift procession of the occupied
with nothing to lose
and liberation to gain