

Flurries

An early release brings time  
to sit at the kitchen table  
watching flurries blow up from  
the ground, down from the trees,  
never to accumulate beyond  
the desire to sleep and be  
released from remorse and the  
random, tortured limbs of lost time.

We all need sleep more than poetry.  
Reluctant to move amidst external  
frenzy, I try to focus on the idea of  
sacrifice but remain confused.

"Once upon a time there was a scientist  
who took people's blood and animal's blood  
with a special tool. He was so evil that he  
hated the whole earth. He wanted to kill  
the whole world. So he did and  
lived happily ever after."

My son wrote that in first grade after  
attending Baptist Sunday school  
with a well-meaning neighbor.  
*It's only a story*, I told myself, but noted  
the lack of remarks from his teacher.  
In fact, ambivalence is everywhere,  
worse than flurried exhaustion,  
leading us to a sort of truth:  
As animals we could learn to live  
but as degraded humans we are led  
as easily to violence as to peace.

## Time Behind

*If a cat swallows a string, let it go.  
If you try to pull it out you might cut  
up the intestines.* Heard on the radio,  
along with some explanation now lost to  
me of what the phrase about having the cat  
swallow your tongue means.

The old gray cat none of us likes lies by your  
side incessantly, until I go to throw her outside  
and you cry, reaching to stop my hand, *Time!*  
*Has gotten behind!* Yes, my dear, it has.  
*I love you beyond measure.*  
Reaching for my arm, then pulling me down.  
*Come! Let's go!* No. We must wait.  
*What? What are you doing?*  
I'm putting her outside. *Why?*  
*What are we waiting for?*  
*Let's go!* Pulling yourself  
up half way with an effort  
only the dying know,  
falling back.

You have swallowed the  
string that is your life and  
all the time behind through  
all eternity can not give you  
strength enough to die in peace.  
All the truth, all the lies,  
winding you up inside,  
you of such will to survive,  
always asking why.  
Where are we going  
and why?

Lois

I believed in God after my mother died.  
At night, wrapping my arms around myself,  
binding hand under hand tightly so as not to  
suck my thumb, I prayed to be saved.  
Was I was afraid of death or of life?  
I wanted God to decide for me  
which would be mine: this dark  
old room, mattress smelling of  
pee, or the white casket,  
grave and white tombstone.

In the next room, my sister woke  
from a nightmare and came to  
sleep in the bed next to mine.  
Did she pray too? I never knew.  
We mostly fought, as siblings do,  
and became teenagers with too many  
secret truths to bear being together.

Julia

Tragically preposterous,  
spoiled by Death, all I ever  
see of her is a denuded  
heaviness, lying on the lawn,  
oddly bleached by the  
plantation sun.

Her mother, Paine,  
Blanche DuBois without pathos,  
slim and quick, a gross stereotype,  
smile brittle from facelifts.  
*Don't you see the dirt?*  
Grabbing the broom away.

Oh, I see. For all our fine talk  
of emotions, many people  
simply feel, not as an animal  
sensitive to its environment,  
but as tortured beasts  
turn stupid, fierce,  
murderous or suicidal.

## Dog Disposed

She should have chained the dog we'd taken in  
some years before, for our good if not its own.  
Or told us it was disposed of, dead.  
Better to grieve openly than pretend that  
what we feel is less than unreal,  
beyond acknowledgement.

Forty years past her death,  
I remember the dog better than her.  
My grandmother said it had *disappeared for good*.  
*Too soon*, I sensed. *How can she know?*  
My mother was silent—and somewhere I  
first felt anger turn to mistrust, hatred:  
*Is it easier to lie?*

But I feel for her now, overwhelmed by life's cruel  
ironies, the greatest being how we search for the  
essence of life in a language of opposition, lies.  
Having danced, prayed, learned to forgive better  
day to day, it seems now that all deaths must be  
reconciled as fate, just as all lies have an  
exhausted truth of their own: no last, gentle  
word of encouragement for the loved, but  
only beautiful, more beautiful still, still silence.

Surely, once or twice, I must have looked  
into her eyes and felt what she felt:  
that river in which, muddy and wide,  
the dog we both loved drowned.