

New Year's Eve: Sitting on a lawn chair in my front yard in Dillon Beach, California

Down on the beach
shadows of families
huddle around exploding fireworks.
I am far above them.
My house is black,
made bigger by the darkness,
smaller by the wind
that slurps up the last of the white paint.
Next week, the new owners move in.

Fireworks pop and scream
as if the beach is being bombarded.
Ships materialize in the fog.
Waves grow and open their mouths.
Ice plant sucks the soil dry
and takes the hill.

Is it too much to ask that everyone gets a turn?

The piñata,
beaten to death,
bleeds candy on the lawn.
It was once a giraffe—
neck so thin
it broke on the first swing,
the fatal blow delivered by a boy
no one wanted
to invite.

Living room

The old man had made clear plans for his death.
He was not buried in the family plot.
Nor was he cremated.
His ashes were not scattered
on the lupine-covered hill by the ocean
where he had first kissed his wife,
wind carrying the smell of driftwood and dead fish,
twisting her hair around both of their heads.
Instead, the local butcher cut the meat from his bones,
and a ninth-grade biology teacher
glued him together into a standing skeleton,
just like the plastic model the teacher displayed in his classroom.
The old man's daughter placed his skeleton in her living room,
an elbow resting on the grand piano, as specified,
so he could still greet the neighbor's cat when she pawed at the door
and get to know his grandchildren better.

Waves in the dark

I'm alone on the king-sized bed
of this hotel room that smells like a hotel room.
The ceiling groans
with the weight of others.
My uncle was a merchant marine in the Mediterranean.
In the worst storms
he had to tie himself to the bed at night,
waves knocking at the porthole,
superstitions of old sailors warning
that the moans of the boards
were actually the creaking bones
of the dead
tightening the ropes.

Willamette River, past midnight

Light from a faraway houseboat
reflects off the water
like a gap between curtains.
I turn my body sideways
and slip through.