

songs for a soloist

Butterfly-minded

Do you write upon delicate places?
Imagination is the storied undersides of lepidoptera wings:
scales seamed together—papery and trimmed
to triangle arcs, graceful for flight,
wandering from thorn to blossom.

Do you feed upon surprising things?
Make meals from an insect's food-stuff:
fennel, milkweed, aster, daylily;
find shelter in a hollow tree
and travel among tall, wild grasses.

Do you grow in stages?
Nothing is certain except metamorphosis:
egg on leaf, caterpillar slinky-crawling,
chrysalis dangling susceptible,
and bodies winging wonder.

Have you journeyed generations in a day?
Poems are pollinators, flitting
across oceans, the migration always
for a flower's sake and
our delight.

Are you, like me, butterfly-minded?
Velvety in the dark, then
all manner of speckled and variegated,
and become emanations of alabaster, or
iridescent and sorrowful in blue.

Do you wish to unleash every fleet thought?
When the butterflies in your stomach
stir a hurricane with their wings,
churning fear and discovery, do you
wish to release them, through seppuku?

Hike

I like
to pick
my way
through
a trail
of rocks
and roots
a moving body
in the still earth
wild wind
companion creek
sun blaze
tree shade
lazy magpie
foraging squirrel
white noise of
waterfall descending
lichen-blanketed granite
beside wildflower bounty
and scent of
dust and dry pine
in the air
til afternoon
rain
releases
dampening life
and my soul
long buried in
paved tombs
exhumed
enlivened
and feet
find
their way

Cliffside

Half the world is drowning;
half the world is on fire.
The earth is warming and
our tempers flaring.
The total eclipse of the sun
marched across the length of our empire
northwest to southeast,
stunning us into silence,
its corona a net to rescue us,
stirring us to whoops and hurrahs,
then gone, and
a normal sun in the sky again.

The world is turning;
the world is ticking
toward some glory or menace,
slipping toward some
cliff's edge—wanting
to see if we have wings.
We are sending our castoffs
to hurricaned regions
as our sun sets red
behind the haze of
trees turning to ash.

We are driving with our eyes on our phones.
We are dropping our eyes from
each other's gaze,
for who can look and live?
Who can stand
beside our neighbors,
let alone reach a real
hand toward a real
forehead with a cool cloth?

We are left alone
and right alone,
brittle and stubborn
in our stances.
Humility is exiled
from our hearts.
Too many or too few signals
lurch out of the noise.
We are sound, fury,
friend, phony--
naked under the sky.

Psalm

Change is the invisible whisper
underneath everything,
the silent source of wild things—
green, growing, and filling
our senses.
Snow crystals become water drops and,
given time,
carve cleavage into mountain bosoms
to nurse life and wanderings.

Glacial blue ice peeks out
from a snow field's farthest regions,
nether-caverns of ancient colds and
deeper freezes than the ones we've known.
When the road curves or the cliff climbs,
and the way is blocked,
then the only way forward is back.
Find the future in geologic past;
realize it is all we've ever had.

Rivers wash rocks and float salmon
up to birthing grounds.
Bushes bubble viridian on slopes
toward frothy, snow-topped peaks.
Every valley is a respite in a climbing world—
soft carpets between razors.
The mountains are out of time and going nowhere,
filling everywhere with
what was and is and is to come.

The wild is beckoning,
watching for our willingness to howl.
Peaks tease us toward heights
which halve our reason;
we are passengers in time,
lasting only a blink of God's eye,
too loose and shifting to last,
while the pack and density of mountains
adhere them to eternity.

Rain comes at intervals like a shroud—
a respite from wonderment—
dimming the displayed creativity of God.
I lift up mine eyes
to the hills.
I cannot look away.

They are on top of me and
I will bury myself at their feet forever.

Astonishment crashes like an avalanche
down to the highway of campers and
cars caravanning back to civilization.
The fools—abandon your vehicles!
Run for the hills,
walk till you must climb, clinging to vegetation,
to the highest holy places.

Holy is the variety.
Holy is the mutation.
Holy is the menace of predator.
Holy is the meekness of man in Nature's maw.

Multiply the leaves and tree needles.
Multiply the grasses.
Multiply the raging and rambling waters.
Multiply the salmon and the bears they feed.
Multiply the pollinators and the honeycomb.
Multiply the rainstorms.
Multiply the mosquitos who know to drink deeply
the lifeblood in the place.

By Myself

I spend time with you when we're apart.

Watch the sun drop behind the horizon from the back deck with you
sitting next to me in an empty chair.

Wander a mountainside, circumscribe a meadow;

I am a solo traveler and you're by my side.

Sing along to old rocknroll as I drive down the highway--
you laughing at me from the passenger seat with no one in it.

Sigh inside a poem like a room unto ourselves
together as I sit alone.

Cry into my pillow and you place a warm hand
on my shaking back in my deserted bed.

Laugh at the joke you haven't whispered in my ear.

Dance in your absent arms.

Nest my nose in your distant neck.

Dip our toes in the sea, ankles lapped by waves,
a wide and solitary beach the setting for our excursion
by myself.