

*No one knows what makes the soul wake up so happy!  
Maybe a dawn breeze has blown  
the veil from the face of God.  
-Rumi*

One of Many Questions I Have for Rumi

But what, I wonder, makes the soul wake up sad?  
In a sodden lump  
damp as bath towels  
the ones that never quite dry in the Cincinnati swelter  
musty lost smell never washes out  
moldy summer, thick throat-pinching air

Makes me droopy  
as a firefly-chasing child being led off to bed  
sulking, dragging feet  
lagging, flagging  
there's no good reason  
to leave the night air  
leave your happy cousins, squealing as they play  
Which makes it all the more futile

Age—there's one thing to be said for it:  
wisdom, hard-won  
I've wrestled with my sweaty self enough  
to know I can win again in the end,  
biceps twitching, not giving in —  
tomorrow, or next week, or next month  
I'll wake to a windy dawn,  
see a damp veil flapping from a tree limb  
like a sail snapping in the breeze  
God will laugh, belly-deep, and I —  
I will laugh, too

### Repurposing your rock collection

You lug your anger around  
like a rock collection, fossilized pain  
so heavy, those sharp rocks, jagged, cutting —  
you're bleeding again, and your blood smells like Bordeaux

Frantically you conduct inventory  
unclick heavy lids, empty storage cases, line your specimens up,  
small and large, try to make sense of them, senseless things —  
then hurl them at walls or windows or sometimes at people who love you

you, with your blown glass heart, throwing stones  
that ricochet back, break you down  
granite hard, slate sharp, so many —  
rock by rock, let go

think how far you've traveled, carrying so much weight  
time to mix lime and water and sand, make mortar  
press those stones into thick slurry, form an archway, step through —  
make room for lightness, make room.

After the storm

*To the west:*

fingers of light point heavenward  
sun burns bright through  
thunderheads pillowing  
billowing white against a cobalt  
so blue it freezes me, dumbstruck, in the street

*To the east:*

sky gray, dark as wet slate  
a jogger has stopped cold, her iPhone held aloft  
you're looking the wrong direction, I think  
until I see the rainbow glowing  
a bridge out of my mind

Fire is a wild thing

A fox creeping across Morrison Avenue at dusk,  
shape-shifting —  
cat-like, dog-like, neither:  
something else, a stealthy rhythm,  
an apartness that speaks to me tonight

Overhead, a foursome of grebes flying fast,  
an arrow against the coming night,  
pointed to the Mill Creek, a family, together in the wind,  
heading the same place at the same time,  
how I envy them that

I smell the smoke for a mile, more.  
Now I see the fire, ablaze in a cheap metal fire pit,  
one of those Target specials, piled with logs.  
A conflagration, throwing huge sparks into the eaves,  
the overhanging trees, threatening the house,  
it's too close, I think, too close to that house

A middle-aged lady stands next to it,  
alone in the blue night, firelight dancing on her cheeks.  
She's stuffing more wood scraps and sticks into the cage,  
feeding the fire  
Like I did today at lunch

Fire is a wild thing, wild as the foxes and the grebes stirring in the twilight.  
I feel the heat of my words, and your answers,  
smoldering hot, like embers stirred up  
Ready to cool to ash or to flare, I can't tell which,  
but tonight I smell our house smoldering

## Faith

I need to dig up the mustard seed necklace  
from my Episcopal childhood  
find the tiny speck of faith buried in my jewelry box

Faith, you assure me, sprouts from the tiny mustard seed,  
though it is smaller than all the seeds that are on the earth  
it grows great branches, to shelter all the birds of the sky

Contained in a pea-sized glass globe, strung on a tangled gold-filled chain  
that mustard seed is all I need to get started, you say. Let it bloom —  
How?

You are a page-turner of contradictions —  
make me bite my knuckles bloody, and then make me laugh  
your faith is your one conventionality, orange life jacket of normalcy

Holding you upright in a sea of tidal emotions,  
in the rolling waves, your quiet faith seems a leap beyond rational thought  
believing as you do while the shoreline's ablaze

Trusting that God holds you in his palm while the fire burns  
what is to burn bright,  
what is to give light

Must endure the burning: can you?  
Please, God, I need to find my mustard seed.  
I want so badly to believe.