

Entry Title: Beside Loss

Luck

Spine long, chest back,
Arms wide as hawks' wings.
And so, luck can come.
On the radio, a man
Sings to his lost son,
And the song passes through
Glass into what had been
Silent sky. And it
Too lifts its wide chest, throws
Out its wings, sings to the
Winding clouds that gather
Snow. The flakes
Fall, writing the song
On every street, on every face
That dares to look up, to
Catch notes in their throats
So they too can sing a father's song.
A young girl dances down the grainy
Sidewalk. Her version is full throated
As if the notes idle inside her,
Small motors to a larger life.
This isn't what she planned
When she spread her arms
And let her small red tongue
Lick the falling white love.

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Gathering the Sap

I tap syrup
From a bare maple,
My back bent with the
Bucket's yield,
My dogs attending
As if sugar were a bone.
The night freezes
And the sun releases
The flowing sap
And dark seals the buds
Offstage.
Nearby a man totes
Full buckets on either end
Of a wooden yoke,
His shoulders the balancing scale.
The children throw their legs up
Dancing toward a woman
Who ladles syrup onto fresh snow,
a girl in lavender
Waiting for a lick.
Here is the smell
Of wood burning, and the work
Of yoked oxen, and sugar maples
Wearing their necklaces.
I can see where the forest slopes
Into nakedness. I step into the image,
Choose to be the girl throwing
Her leg behind her, sure
without looking that
her sister follows.
If it were that easy to pull
sugar from you
I too would hang a sweet bucket
Around your heart.
All I see is cold but each person
Is alive in work, paths crossing

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As if they follow the lines on a map,
Until at dusk, they disappear
Under roofs thick with snow.
Even the sap slows, seeping back
Into its sweetening wood.

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Bulbs

Although the insides are scraped raw,
A worker has hung bulbs along the empty rafters.
At night, the building hugs a sky of stars.
Below yard loaders pull gravel into an ordered square.
The stone crusher rips away the side
Like the mouth of a hungry dinosaur, its clumsy
Jaw swinging right and left until its bite connects.
Night offers an odd peace, the lights
In the arms of blue sky, flirting with the gargoyle busts
That lean from next door. The lights hang
On the hooks of ugliness, now our hearts' compass
On the dark walkways home, and shine
Into our windows when we wake at night,
Roused by the dead who keep blinking too,
Recalling the spill of candles on the bedspread,
The strings of lights along the living room floor,
Testing what bulbs brighten, which ones burn out.

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Retrieval

Last night, I thought of a line
Of poetry I knew I would never forget.
I snuggled back into my coat
Of covers, my paw over my nose.
This morning no poetry exists,
gone like the larger moon.
I browse my memory as if I am in a
Christmas department store and
come up with the word *bacon*.
In front of me, bulbs hang like
Pearls, a filament of light down the center.
They have no idea how beautiful they are;
They too will forget what waiting means--
And loss too. The line that existed is gone.
So, who am I talking to? The young girl
I was, bewildered on a busy sidewalk,
Brushing soot off her white fur coat.
The sky was pink and the air smelled
Like cocoa, and in a moment,
When I stepped away from her,
From anything she had to say,
I left her my language, my sadness,
My flaming hair, my whole future
Squatted in front of me like a waiting word.

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Genes

A mother and son,
A duck and duckling.
Their looks connect them
The way red hair
Links me to my mother.
And identical Christmas skirts,
With the long skinny ankles she donated,
With her lipstick and permanently reddened finger.
But I see more of her now in the raised blue veins
On my hands, in the wedding ring once hers.
So, is my mother here?
On both sides of me, men and women talk about money:
Making more of it, having too little of it.
I hear one woman trash her co-workers,
And I wonder if I got my mother's heart.
If my heart stepped behind my mother's
Would we be duck and duckling?
Today two women rolled their eyes when
I laughed loud. Did I get my mother's laugh,
The one I can't remember? No, what
I got is her smile, the one that met
The afternoon school bus. What
Are the ducklings who follow me?
A father walks in with his daughter,
Her hair a bird's nest, her energy
Fluttering like the resident bird.
Genes return again. There goes
my brother, my sister, my father.