

Things We Think About on Midnight Walks

Rabbit Dreams

You snore on the couch with your eyes open wide.
Once in a while, after rabbit dreams, you turn
To reposition, get your bearings on a new, cool, side
And groan. It's a groan of pain, of burden. I've learned
To touch your head and nod to agree
With your heavy heart, your worries, your plight
That life has offered up. You gaze into me
Before closing rheumy eyes again. The fight
Is all in your furry mind, Baby.

But maybe no. Do you wonder where they've gone?
Children of your left behind backyard play,
Driveway waves and disappearing taillights. You yawn,
Not of boredom but of disrupt, upset, days
Splayed out now before you with no sprinkler or balls
Or school bus brakes screeching in the street.
Tail wagging madly as they disembark with bags
And papers and promises of racing hearts and child sweat

When it smells good, like bird, some of them come
Again, finally, and stroke you, hug and hold.
For a moment or three you know they'll stay home,
But no. The driveway says it all, you fold
Back with a sigh and watch the road, your enemy
That launches them again, as far as we can see.
Do they play with better friends than me?
Do they remember the red bow and the tree?
The snow play and the running free?

Or was it all just another rabbit dream?

The Last Father's Day

That spring we watched as white oaks fell, with rain
that weighed their branches down and snapped their boles.
Now settled on the ground, just one remained.
We made our ways around those fallen souls
to find the wound once hidden from our view,
a secret rot, and now a living space
for groundhogs, possums, mice or coons, who knew.
The tree man came and sliced it off earth's face.
That Father's Day, so sick, but still you stood
and wobbled back and forth like in a game,
as if to show us all that nothing could
uproot our father's strong, athletic frame.
"You see?" you said. "I stand just like your tree.
No one can see that Death's devouring me."

Bridges

We'd clasp hands
and let other girls walk beneath our bridge.
We'd sing: Falling down, falling down.
We'd trap them and laugh.

Or, there were games in our mothers' cars:
Hold your breath past the graveyard,
And while you're crossing that Fifth Street Bridge,
Lift your feet!

Suspended over time, suddenly what matters is below,
what passes beneath. All that water.

You are just a shadow in my life,
but one of the longest shadows, at that.
As far apart as we can be and still be in this country together,
I can hear your laughter like it's coming from my backyard.

You are what made my childhood a childhood.

Oh, to climb a plum tree again!
To eat until we're sick, then move to an apple tree to eat some more,
to lift the creek's mossy stones for hidden crawdads,
to let our Easter ducks swim free there, then
to return the next day to feed them and call them by name.

To jump rope,
to hit a tether ball,
to freeze in the beam of a flashlight.
to fall over laughing.

To hold our breath past that graveyard, hearts pounding.
To hide,
to seek.

I do all these things, still.
I seek you out and meet you many nights on the bridge,
to help still my ancient heart, my racing brain.

I become nine again.
I hide behind you.
Then I sleep.

Sonnet to Mr. Frost

When I see golden buses on the hill
I like to think some big dog sits and waits.
On board, some school-tired boy shields eyes until
He spots the dog beyond the neighbor's gates.
The friends take off, their path a jagged line
And flowers dip their golden heads to watch
As does the screened-in woman, drinking wine.
She throws the boy a candy, butterscotch.
It's when the world has weighed me so far down
That boys and dogs and wine and golden field
Acquaint me with those treasures not yet brown
And years from now those memories will yield
A lesson straight and true: While gold can't stay,
It's worth its weight in daydreams, anyway.

Midnight Walk

On a whim, we meet at the old house,
to walk the walk we walked
when you were just a son
and I was just your mom.

We've picked a pearl of a night,
the kind where the moon swims behind giant swaths of cloud,
and like strippers, the stars show only a portion of their constellations,
but enough to be revealing.
"There's his belt!" you whisper up at Orion.

Your backpack holds just a couple of Coronas.
Nothing like the burden of beers we used to carry,
night after night as we walked away
the grief of losing my father,
your grandfather,
your girlfriend,
our dog.

Now, at last, we are both grown-ups
who have learned to stand without stumbling.

After a mile's circle, we look up at the old house again.
The new people have learned to string the Christmas lights
up and up and up the split rail fence
for its full sixth-of-a-mile stretch.

You laugh and give me the look.
All right, then. A tenth of a mile.

We tell stories of shoveling that godforsaken
driveway, the snow breaking my back,
your nose dripping like a fountain.

Funny how you can miss something
that was so much work.

I miss you,
the wonder and worry of you,
the work of washing, drying, folding,
the waking up production of our mornings,
the wee-hour-waiting for you.

But most of all, I miss our walk,
when the neighbors were long asleep,
when the work was done,
when all that was left of the day was the moon and the stars
and the beers in the backpack.