

I. In April Rain

April brings return with the falling rain
as it falls on the parched earth,
a chord struck

in the morning without departures, or trains, or a morning rush;

soaks the hills, puddles in all the upturned,
and purls—

like in small open palms,
or rocks hurled to break the calm water—

on the flat lines of hospital rooftops,
and all that is pocked;

as all that beds yields itself over:

spinning children with outstretched arms,
and fields on the verge of flowering
wild spun cloth;

seeps through all that eventually cracks,
like tears through parted
fingers or the dawn:

the unchecked fissures that vein our walls
like old hands, and branches on trees
standing with their backs
to the cold,

but still holding onto the last traces of winter.

The rain's scent rises as drops splatter
and split across the surface of harder things,
its mist sliced by telephone wires,
hung between houses.

And the street light heads
on splintered poles hang there solemn
in the glistening dull
gray quiet,

a funeral receiving line, columns left standing
after all else has fallen
in ruin,

monuments that used to line our driving
except now all movement is hidden.

There's no way the world is on hold
or hushed quiet
or has been told to remain still,
though it seems so;

as if in awe, reverent of its own knowing.

The drenched bough hangs
as we no longer see the spotted birds
or hear them singing,
though they are there.

The hills don't seem to care if they're rained on,
and the creak finds its song
as I look out from behind dry walls
with a crack in the screen of the door
so I can hear

the droned call of an ancient talk
—one with mystery inflected
that throws one off

like the sudden change of weather, unexpected on this walk,

with no branch providing worthy cover,
and all the metal has begun to rust
on our dowsed braziers;

and the excess runs off down slickened curves
in rivulets passed the curbside
to spill into unseen pools
somewhere underground;

keeps the kids calm
safely bound within doors, but they see
life moving on outside

of windows, like those beyond the bedside
of the recovering
in April.

Showers fall upon the bed of the earth,
stretched with fine green sheets
—its flat lines and its curves—

and the patients that lie
on them are the hills;

they hold still, with heaviness no chest
could heave, while the earth keeps turning;

and the rain's breath tells us
that we will breathe freely again,
yet attentive, to every breath;

for, blessed are the givers

like the rain falls, but never returns
without having fallen,

and having blessed the earth with its coolness;
and the fever will lift while the world stands
awaiting this return,

stressed with Styrofoam cups in hands,
and pacing in rooms apart
waiting for a word,

trying to keep the children from running
so as not to disturb all the suffering;

and the toddlers who don't know
their own lungs' movement,
can't stop it from being heard
when they are focused

because they just don't understand what it means,
can't yet fathom the need
to retain their breathing or to keep
their mouths closed;
and the room is quiet

though the ventilator is beeping down the hall
to keep hope alive, but it dwindles once left alone
though we all know
that we never truly are

because the rain, it keeps falling, keeps soaking
and puddles in all the upturned,
and fills this good earth still
until it yields itself

over to flowering

beyond these rooftops, pocked
and stopping this rain's fall
from rushing back to the sea

to breathe its last and breach the heights
whence it has come, once more to bless

these fallen in its return.

II. Within Walls

We walk over stones into this gentle evening, a stroll in the market square;
and the skyline in the distance tears the dusk's veil

with sharp points, and hard falls of walking
soles stutter in the air,
halt and start on
once more,

punctuate the stream of the seamless white-noised voice
of strangers beneath closed shutters;

as they move, blurred fabric stitched together, a garment
hung and going as the wind picks up,

the talk never seems to be hushed, but rises
and falls, goes on

thick with quick pace, and touches
on trade, or the task at hand, or the shimmering
vaulted dark,

or even the budding of promise
or the first stirrings of love.

This scene shows in anonymous stride
so many and all alone in need for sustenance,
for something

to carry them through
no longer closed within walls,

but out in the open, and vulnerable, never truly withdrawn.

As the starlit tide rolls on,
all are swept by the same current,
hued and darkened in the gaping yawn

of the distance between them;

and wander over the same stones
polishing their rough edges worn smooth

as they pass each other
like water.

III. Son of an Essential Employee

Sharp angles lift the turnstile light,
drifting lines

slide as cars turn in,
first white then red,

sifted through blinds on walls
long before dawn

and a siren cries urgent and alone, of fear and of loss.

Up again in the midst of the parted
in the night

that unfolds things perpetual, though hidden:

a bloom in the desert exploding
silently,
this night's stars,
pebbles in clenched fists that must be left outside.

It is hard letting go.

All are to pass through the night without
torches.

Wisdom has taught us to keep
our hands free from the fire
since we were little, before

we could form our own thoughts,
since it could harm us.

It's one of the first lessons that burned,

so we will always remember
learning it.

We don't need to feel the flame to know it
takes all it touches; it never just tastes,
but consumes.

We come to know that it's not all about pain
no matter how brutal.

We come to know of fires
that save in the dark,

etched in bronze or wood
like stories,

safe from all that is out of sight,
some semblance of hunger in wolves
or fear of the unknown

that keep us dry and warm
secure in light

to keep all else back where our vision falls.

The fire is burning
in the distance,

so far away it cannot pierce the black
and that's where my father crawls
in its jaws, in the mangled

city shattered things, in filth and forced air.

My mother stayed awake for fear
in prayer, in case he would not return.

She knew the man
that he was then. And I'd watch
as the ash would pile into ceramic,

and the smoke would rise from her mouth,
swirl from her nostrils

with her eyes squinted in worry after a warm shower
couldn't clean it all off

after dinner had long since been
picked up.

The same heat was in our home, burned
for him and for his return
in the morning dew.

I wonder if he knew of that hearth's fire
consuming the night as he fought back its wild
kin covered thick in suffocating clothes

that would hold the scent of death days later
soaked in sweat, far from home, blind,
hugging walls in black smoke.

IV. Covered Faces

Are we closer now to being broken
then we ever were
before

we couldn't go to the stores
that we common

with expectations of convenience,
and faster lines,

or of stocked shelves
under sterile lights
filled white with paper
products?

Has anything really changed?

All of reality is the same.
Like the checkout lady said,
we cannot change it.

One of her sons was dead.

She said it when I told her that I was sorry.

My purchase had shown her
that I was a father of young children,

and she wanted to know of them, their age,
and I told her

but only so that she could say that I couldn't know
how much they will mean to me when they are gone,

no longer "eat you out of house and home with their friends,"
she said, and I smiled,
felt closer.

It was my turn to question.
She had two children, but only one
was alive.

I wondered if the other had survived
into middle age,

or suffered from the rage of addiction
while still a child

or taken the brunt of a head-on collision
or an unforeseen illness took his breath from his lungs.

I wondered if I reminded her of him
and I wanted to touch her

but I couldn't

as she stood behind glass
for protection,

but she looked me in the eye
when she said it

—our mouths were covered—

and for a moment I saw
passed my own reflection
and loved this stranger
like all mothers

who bear much more than their own burdens

and convenience was no longer a consideration,
but a betrayal

of the anguish of being alive and not being able
to provide solace for others

in the midst of their struggle.