

winter solstice

I wake in the darkness, again
and outside, snow is falling
on the ice like icing on the streets.
It's this part of year that breaks
me down, mixed with the constant influx
of terrible news and those hushed conversations

in the car like confessions
only, somehow, I have become the priest
and you parishioner so desperate to unburden
yourself from the crushing, from your own darkness
raging out from that gaping hole in your chest. All you want
is to remember you are human, and that this world
belongs to you just as much as it belongs to the saints.

But we are no saints, and I am no priest.

At some point, this point, the sun decides
she's had enough of the dark, of the fitful
sleep, of the hibernation,
the hunkering down. Down
with the lying, and the lying
in wait. Soon,

like the snow, something new is being
born in the muted daylight. Soon, the sunrise
is coming in fits and starts and no amount of heartache
can stop it. Today is the darkest day.
It only gets lighter from here.

mend

the wound is too deep
to stitch back together

the needle too small
the thread too thin

there is no going back
and yet, if we are very quiet

forgiveness might sprout
from the frozen ground and the irreparable

might begin to mend
which is not to erase, but to remember

to sow the seeds
in your tightly clenched fist

to honor the echoes
of the scar as your own holy

history book, it is not
a clean slate but it is daring

to imagine past the river
of blood spilling

from your body, the bridge between
what was and what will be, the heartache

that tills the dirt deeper
and wider, and prepares a place

for the garden to grow

freely, as before

after the piece for piano, "In The Waiting," by Chad Lawson

this ought to begin *with generous pedal throughout*
like grace to cover the cracks,
to smooth the places where the gaps

between the notes are just a bit too far
apart to hold together with only your straining

fingers, to allow the ringing under the fermata
to linger just a bit longer in the almost
silence, the moment before the moment

before the breath where you're not
quite sure if the piece is

over, if the disjointed interval will leave you
nearly broken, unresolved, or
if it is only elongating that pause

a breath longer. it is as if someone might just be
counting to *three* instead of *two*—

one-two-three, one-two-three—
it is that imperceptible, like
a measure of a waltz breaking

in between the even halves.
the *allargando* follows with a question

of termination or persistence, and then
the music suggests: *freely*,
as before, which you were sure

was no longer possible—and yet, there
it is in black and white

dots and lines and curves,
the words first asking

about forgiveness, the melody

trying it on, one finger at a time
in this flying suspension, the mere

question of possibility an effulgent,
echoing miracle, a swooping measure
of mercy, of intentional unbalance

begging you to consider how the music
actually sounds, how it ripples

through your aching body like rain, lingers
like smoke, *crescendos*
through your heart and tapers again

before it lands, a grace
note on the top of your head.

To a Stranger Born in Some Distant Country Hundreds of Years from Now

(after Mary Oliver and Billy Collins)

This morning, after the rain, my mother
is beating the brains out
of the dense clay earth, taking great care

to avoid slicing the pink worms returning
to their still-damp soil. She places zinnias
with dangling roots into the holes she has dug

with great tenderness,
a rare gesture. These days,
we, too, tend to burrow

like those elongated invertebrates, forgetting
to look at each other altogether and entirely
shocked when we find ourselves

spluttering on the sidewalk
after a spring storm. O Stranger,
do you still carry your heart

in your eyes, and do others notice
that weather in your face? When it pours,
do you stop to smell the delicious air

rising up from all that concrete?
Wherever you are,
I hope there is more of that.

I hope this is not wild
to imagine but is as familiar as the particular
patch of earth where your mother,

in her denim overalls, tends her garden.
I hope you, overcome
by the fragrance of living

things, crouch down in the soft

dirt beside her, forgetting
for a just moment to care

about your small anxieties, and impress
your handprint into the dirt.
And I hope you love this—

the garden,
your mother,
the sweet lungfuls of air.

the maple trees

The maple trees in the still Wednesday morning
quiver with anticipation
as tiny red blooms burst in celebration

from their fingertips, just because
they're trees and that's what their body does
in the springtime. No wonder

they clap their hands
as they sway to the quiet work
of being made new.