

Let It Be Spring

When I hear a song
on the radio
that I never expected to
I will let it be spring.

When the sensation of walking
on winter's first snowfall
marries the crunching sound
rising from under my boots
I will let it be spring.

When I'm in the grocery store
debating the merits of this or that
frozen pizza, and run into
a friend I haven't seen in years
I will let it be spring.

When I'm late for work
scrabbling to get in the car without
spilling my coffee
and somehow still hear
the song of the meadowlark
nesting in my neighbor's tree
I will let it be spring.

When I'm watching a movie
or reading a book
and suddenly realize another person—
or a whole group of people—
nurtured this story until
it had strength enough to make its own way
I will let it be spring.

And should you, too,
stumble upon the awareness
that life is perennially seasoned
with occasions to admit renewal
may your appreciation
only blossom.

Lament

I go to check on the dog.
She leaves the yard—absconds—
and roams the neighborhood
if I don't check on her.
It's dusk. It's summer.
She's hiding behind the forsythia
so I don't see her before I notice
the fireflies are thick. The air fills
with pulse after pulse of illumination—
they never seem to happen simultaneously—
all followed by slowly fading
tracers. My mind
always a sucker for metaphors
flashes on your memory
or rather
the memory of you.
I am often content.
I am often living in the moment. But then
some darkness provides a backdrop
and some seasonal eccentricity
sends impulses through neurons
and I remember
I still miss you.

Putting Down Roots

I.

Two years ago I found
one of my half-sisters on Facebook
and we began
writing each other.
We met once years before but
it was hard for her to relate to someone
who scorned her dad. This time
I'm trying to be more
accepting. We are reacquainted
less than a year when her grandmother—
my father's mother—
my grandmother—
is hospitalized. The family converges
at St. Francis. My sister suggests
I come to the hospital. The family agrees. So
I go. When I meet my father
he's crossing the threshold
of my grandmother's room
and no one else is there
to make introductions. I wonder
how many people have grasped
their father's hand in greeting
without knowing
that's who they've got ahold of.

II.

After my grandmother's funeral
after the luncheon at the Senior Center
we go to Barb's Bar and Grill—
the only watering hole left in Turon.
Tables are pushed together
and those who lingered after the service
all the most firmly entrenched among family and friends
gather to dig for old gossip
and trade benevolent half-truths
about each other. Kenny,
who grew up with my father, emerges
as the raconteur of this group.
Don, another old friend, emerges

as Kenny's occasional, affable foil. They—
and many others—marvel at how much I look like Gary.
They drink a little too much for old men and
shortly before arguing over the bill
each one trying to persuade the waitress
to bring it to him and ignore the other
Don turns to me, his eyes wet,
and says, "I didn't know about you. I've known your father
over forty years, and I didn't know about you." Then
words fail him. He looks at me, then the table.
I can't see myself from where I sit.
I don't know how I look but
surrounded by my burgeoning family
I try not to give anything away.

III.

My grandmother's house—
a 700-square-foot testament to what was once enough—
is surrounded by a garden she could no longer tend.
The day after her funeral the house is inundated
ten of us there
to begin the process
of going through her things.
To thin the herd and
avoid asking for things
another family member might want
my sons and I go to work in the garden
culling the persistent saplings
that grow from the ancient elm
towering over the yard.
The work provides its own bounty
the little nicks and scrapes stung by sweat
allow me to tend to something
other than how I feel.

IV.

Beginning is hard.
Seeds must fall on fertile ground without
being seen by birds.
Nascent relationships must endure fits and starts
speculation about politics and religion
the occasional thoughtless remark

the occasional unintended revelation.
After more than forty years of drought
my father and I
and all the people who love us
are trying to put down roots.

The Scorpion

When I come home
from my 12-step meeting
the sky is black.
(We live far from the lights of the city.)

Out here, it's easy to believe the stars
burn so brightly
because they want to be seen.

Walking up the driveway
I see Orion
looming over our house.

I know it's December. I know
I'm facing east. I know the stars
don't call themselves Orion.

But I'm still reminded
of Orion's ego, and how
the misery that stings us
is often stirred
by how we think
of ourselves.

Byways

The road is so black and new it's
like an ad for fresh asphalt.
The rain is so steady it's
swept all the grit and oil away.
Out here in the sticks
the darkness is so pristine
that light reflected from road signs
glimmers over the wet pavement
like neon over a bar.
Driving over this liquid light show
provides a little pause from thought
a mood-altering meditation.

Eventually, the road leads me here
to my hand-me-down desk
where I try to steer this experience
along the smooth path of a short poem.
But it veers away from my intent
as indifferent as the road and the rain.
The most I can say is that
like poetry itself
this ride offered me an invitation
to change how I feel
by way of how I perceive.