

## Meditation on Money

I am thinking about a day forty years ago  
when we were down to our last fifty cents,  
and our friends drove up  
with a month's rent and groceries,  
and after we ate and talked, we sat together  
on the edge of the dock, saying nothing,  
and watched the barnacles  
slowly open their feathery lips,  
slowly close them.

## To Skin a Cat

Go with the grain of the hair,  
a sharp scalpel and a dorsal cut.  
Flense the skin like an orange  
till you get to the face and paws.  
It's tricky to trim around eyes and nose,  
delicate, no longer wet.

Then, as you sweep, or reach  
to water the pachysandra,  
you can glimpse your stuffed pet,  
curled in artful sleep.  
Does it bring some kind of comfort?

And if your infant died in her crib,  
would you stuff her, too?  
Some would, I bet.  
Some would.

## Last Words

Packing up the machine  
that sucked the water  
from the sodden floor,  
I think about the note  
Lt. Kolesnikov, the ranking officer,  
penned in the submerged dark  
of the Kursk,  
as it lay on the bottom  
of the Barents Sea  
when whatever happened  
had happened  
and there were 23 of them  
left, all in Section 9,  
farthest from the reactors.

He wrote it  
as the backup systems  
failed, and despite  
tapping SOS on the hull,  
they knew they were not  
getting out.

As the air supply  
thinned, the note  
changed from military detail  
of the hopeless specifics  
to a love letter  
to Olga, his wife.

I am thinking about this  
while I coil the cord  
and hoist the heavy body  
of the machine  
into the trunk of the car,  
because we are always thinking  
about something, whatever  
else we're doing, mostly  
not knowing how much time  
we have left, in the dark hold  
writing blind.

## Endless Chores Ode

Drifts of laundry spilled along the couch, the sink  
stifled with dishes, no counter  
that doesn't need wiping, stove top  
layered in magma, don't even open the oven door.  
The surprise of cat shit in the closet,  
the grime in the shower, dust bunnies  
instead of lust. And even if you clean it all up,  
if you somehow summon the energy  
and focus and get it for one moment  
under control, as soon as you put the last glass  
on the shelf and go for a walk, it all starts  
over again, the sink full by the time you get back.  
And the repetitive, ineffectual nagging that goes with it,  
so that I become the harridan, the hag of chores.  
The tyranny of this life of scrubber and rag,  
need and need and need the basso ostinato,  
the ambient drone of the ever undone  
a mountain of sound I am stuck under,  
struggling for oxygen, desperate  
for one uncluttered spot, my only escape  
a wormhole to paid work.  
How many years was my path  
obscured by junk? When was the first time  
I stood at the sink at peace  
with the suds and the crud?  
It must have been the day the house  
stopped seething, the floors steadied a bit, the day  
we made shortbread and cleaned up together, eating the buttery  
squares from the pan. Maybe the day  
I discovered the beat in the broom,  
the dance of the daily, Aretha pulsing  
through all the unplanned griefs and loss,  
the failures, the terrible,  
unpredictable phone calls, the relief  
of something to do, my familiar,  
my reliable, stalwart companion,  
always available, when nothing else  
was getting me through.

## Theodicy

Sleep-deprived, confused, your nipples so sore  
you can hardly bear the baby's ruthless gums,

and when they cry, you pick them up again,  
and wander the few rooms your life has narrowed to,

the soft floss of their hair, the bluish pattern that blooms  
under transparent skin, the tiny nails so pliant

they bend when you try to cut them. Soon  
they begin to know who you are, they reach their chubby arms

towards you, they smile, they nuzzle the soft bones  
of their fontanel into your neck,

and there has never been anything more delightful,  
not sex, not the best meal, not driving fast

in a convertible on a winding road by an azure sea,  
and you would do anything for them, and you do,

you give up nightlife, adult conversation, hour-and-a-half  
massages, spicy food, uninterrupted thought,

and they learn how to walk,  
to swim, to read, and you've paid for the orthodontist

and endured the teenage years, and paid for college and  
helped out with grad school and they're launched,

with their own lives, their own ways of salting meat  
and slicing it, their own partners and opinions,

here they are, flawed human beings with adult problems  
for which it turns out you are the cause.