

## A STONE DROPPED

He moves backwards, sidestepping,  
Nearly tipping the grain bowl,  
White hooves crossing, skin shrinking  
From my fingertips as if I've punished  
Him for some crime he doesn't understand.  
I haven't punished him  
But I didn't protect him,  
Maybe that in itself is a punishment  
And now I'm being punished  
For my neglect, my weakness  
In not being able to keep his trust.  
It's all about trust  
Everything  
And trust is easily lost—  
A stone dropped into water  
And gone before you've realized  
You dropped it—  
A flower that wilts in the sun  
Even when there's water—  
Too much thirst  
Too much trust  
evaporated—  
Coffee gone cold on the kitchen counter  
And you there wondering how to get it back—

Day after day I feed him from my palm  
Hoping  
Quietly waiting  
For trust to return  
For him to stop punishing me  
For my crime  
—an inadvertent crime is still a crime  
Punishment justified—  
But I long for it to be over  
Waiting, waiting  
“Patience is a virtue”  
Perhaps trust is built on those worn-out words  
But it's all too cliché  
Life is a cliché  
It could all be a joke  
And yet we all still work towards

Some kind of trust  
Some kind of fulfillment  
Some kind of release from punishment  
When suddenly we're allowed  
To sink our fingers into the softness  
Of a shoulder  
Feel the muscles quivering there  
To understand with frightening clarity  
That we will always need forgiveness.

Maybe forgiveness is the basis of trust  
Maybe I've got it all wrong  
Maybe punishment never had anything  
To do with it all along  
But mind and body don't always connect  
There's static that disrupts the linking  
—static on a radio when you drive  
Just a mile beyond range  
You can hear something  
Riff of guitar  
Beat  
A voice  
But can't quite make out the words  
And can't quite hum the tune  
But you know it's there  
And maybe that's all that counts in the end  
Maybe just being there  
Being here is what matters  
What counts towards trust—

And every day he comes that step closer  
Or I do  
Every day I relinquish that much more  
Or he does  
And I see it  
His eyes darker now  
The white rim no longer showing  
And he tells it  
A soft whinny at the fence  
A single scrape of his hoof  
This time I'll back away before he does  
I'll let him occupy the space  
Allow him to press into my bubble

For a moment  
Maybe more  
But not enough to pop it  
—pressing a finger into a balloon  
It indents, but it doesn't break—  
This time I'll be the one that gives  
The one that backs down  
Because trust isn't about winning  
Trust isn't about getting even  
You can't "win trust"  
There is no lottery for it  
No golden ticket that you find  
Inside a chocolate wrapper  
Trust is knowing  
Trust is understanding  
Trust is not a punishment.

## ETCHINGS

I'm awaiting your words.  
If there is one thing I know it'll rain  
before there is an empty world  
for all of my tears  
to fall on. I've closed  
the curtains on all unknown

and I'm afraid to be known  
to be described by imperfect words.  
Daylily blossoms are closing,  
each petal folding in on drops of rain,  
dew on eyelashes, not tears,  
not yet, not in this world.

I've walked the circumference of my world;  
the corners I left unknown,  
pages folded in a book where tears  
have ruined every other word,  
a newspaper left out in rain,  
and this is the moment I feel close

to you, but that once open window closed  
and I thought it'd change my world  
like colors of the land when it rains  
and all things that are known  
come tumbling down in a jumble of words;  
this is why my tears

become part of the tears  
of the earth. I am close  
to grieving, the pile of words  
too tangled to describe the destruction of the world.  
Birds have disappeared as if they know  
that the ending will come before it rains.

But maybe I can stand in the rain  
and call it all back, tear  
the page out, start over with what is unknown.  
In the shade of the fallen tree, I'll pull close  
each piece, each particle of my world  
and hold on until the words

fall into place. Words etched like rain  
on my palms. Worlds between us, torn,  
to be put together again and known.

## ECLIPSING

*How far away the stars seem, and how far is our first kiss ~William Butler Yeats*

In this light you look like half of you  
a moon waning, fatalness of a partial eclipse,  
balance of the world taken by you.

Your worth and mine shown in fading light  
while the sky empties around us, our paths finally in reach  
--and on mine your moon face shines a light

like distance, like space, like space between us--  
rising up as a twisting river, a sinew rope into sky  
and I could climb it hand over hand, 'till it is just us

jumping from planet to planet like stepping stones  
as they spin beneath our feet through darkness  
lighting our way and we turn over stones

to find secrets of Saturn's rings  
sliding around brilliant glow of planet  
brushing against stars like engagement rings.

We could get caught up in the chase  
of the next falling star and maybe I'd reach for you  
but you are gone, snatched by a different chase

and I am the swan, my wings reaching to both horizons,  
ripping my feathers on your crescent as you fade  
toward blue light of your new horizon.