

Property

When I was five or six
I walked out on the coldest February morning's snowcrust

and for a creaking half hour: heaven.
I did not break the surface, fall through.
My name small in my mother's calling—

I lived a while in perfect privacy.

Death,
it is your own business
how our preservation comes

under your care

from such an early age. If the walk is iced
the sun clears it.

I need to learn
not to ask for help
with every little thing.

Because you are blind and have no information, I must take the lead.

Elegy for a First Husband, Cause of Death Unknown

A very brief marriage of secrets.

Then we were private citizens again; the polite appearance
of public cooperation—

you drove me home from court along flooded roadways

though I cannot place where home was,
only that you took me there.

It was late April in New England, the air a buzzing timeline, a haloed
bioluminescence.

But when had it rained?

How deep had we gone
into the Hall of Records

to miss this particular
wet shattering of wind and new-minted leaves and branches and mud

littered to make every surface you drove
by swerving
slick?

Up-cradled root balls
asked some new permission of the sky. A group of grubby kids

fished earthworms in knots from racing ditch water
as they balanced on an iron grate, shrieking—what were their chances?
We receded from them.

I did not know you well. We were young. I am surprised

I had a home
to go to. In the end

I stepped out of your car into standing water
and thanked you. My embarrassed decorum.

I think I even waved
as you drove away.

Thirty years later, I am told you are dead. The news arrives
from a great distance
without sentiment or elaboration, a dry postscript

to a civics lesson,
more or less.

Thirty years without a single word but *dead*
passing between us.

We were married once, three quick seasons of record heat and falling and
freezing.

There was no purity of form.
No claim, no permission, no useful decorum,

only the downed material
of our time together. I don't have to tell you

I was half asleep
the whole first half of my life.

I stepped out of your car.

A pock-marked moon was beginning to show,
a stone fruit,
and the seasonable cold un-ripening. I was already wearing

my old loneliness again,
my mutant couture.

Trees dripped, the bright green air begging to be breathed. I did not look
where I was going—my one good pair of black shoes
ruined.

It was a short marriage.
Nine months, no children. Lucky.

I do not know why

you chose me. I do not know the names of the other women
you slept with, or how much scotch it took

to pin your deeper
secrets down. At the end of the day

you did not love me—hardly a crime. I'm sorry I said
I hated you for a while.

You were just a little ahead of me. Rising
when I had barely opened my eyes—
I was a newborn, crying,

almost formless thing.

You dropped me off at some apartment or another, did not wave back.

Without ceremony delivered me
to the life I live now.

Thank you.

And down the late blind drive you spun, water flashing, flaring.

What Those Who Qualify Receive

When Jesus dies each year, I like the part
about the curtain
being “rent.”

The mystical storm tearing itself
agonizingly, thrillingly open,

but parting, too,

like curtains at a theater
so plot
can begin to take.

Maybe that’s the point:
in the end, when the darkness opens,
we get a little peek.