

Eastern Winter Time

I was entirely asleep, moon at my window
Like a burglar come to steal the darkness inside.

Letting go of everything—that was Buddha's dream, not mine.
Mine was to hang on by the slippery tip of each finger,

Even if the rain blew sideways in a bloat of wind
Like the swamy voices of the Mormon Tabernacle Choir.

Mine was to scratch a living from the empty page,
Not to proofread suicide notes before the blood dried.

Did it matter when I woke? For my alarm,
I should buy an hourglass cramped with snow.

Out in the hunter's dark, the stars glared down at me.
But the heart is a moving target.

Evenings Homesick for the Absolute

The day turns in its half circle, east to west,
Wheel that grinds the hours
Down to shadow and after, spindly twins of the dead.

From noon on, I could hear the wind thinking out loud,
Panic of vernacular
Through the long wires and hard sky.

I could lip-read the leaves, in their curl and twist:
Wait. It's not over. A last inch of revelation
Will still unroll.

Orphan of the lost beliefs, I want to
Feel those words warm me, the way the sun
Mothers up the new blooms.

I want a second chance at the absolute,
Wherever it is, whatever it is,
The late years creaking through me like a pack mule.

Inside, candles sniff the air for a dark scent;
Amber of brandy holds its own glow. All over town, the lamps
Go on, go out, like random firings in the brain,

And stars set off their neons of permission,
Hot blink at the end of the odd:
Vacancy. Room to let.

And room enough for me, too, if sleep,
Like St. Christopher, would
Carry me on its back to the other shore.

But who lives on moon soup or bread
Handed down from thin women? Refugees from the real;
Pilgrims paring themselves to pure bone.

I mop my plate with coarse crusts
And lick the spoon. I know too much of exile
To disappear into myself—

Even in this raw dark, slow and cold,
I leave my windows open for
The vast eccentric innocence of light.

Regression Analysis

Back to the sleepy years, rise
Of the rear fin and the crenelated pompadour,

Moon like a hubcap rolling loose
In a night sky, more sex than science,

Beyond the evils of geometry at three in the afternoon,
Back to the long muscles born out of sweat and throb,

Soft hair cradling a face at the sock hop,
The nudge of new breasts under blouse and arousal,

And records spun at the speed of crazed wheels
Taking you somewhere far from yourself,

Stars in a thin glitter, burnt out above
A swagger of smoke in the parking lot,

And then the Sunday bells and church doors open
To the half dead and the bed wetters,

Past the end of Genesis and deep into Deuteronomy,
Black book from which no one escaped,

Wound where the scruples put down roots,
Years before the fallen protocols and the undertow,

Before the wrought-iron agonies, sudden ripples in the heart,
Cordage of veins and the ropy tendons,

Before the ice, wind-whetted, at the lip of the downspout,
And sirens scaring the air with a bloody scream,

Blockage of wrecks on a gravel road, plunge of fire
In the tapped-out flats built by sawtooth and stud nail,

Before the darkness drained over everything, except
The unforgiving light in the guilty room.

95% of Love Is Half of What You Want

And there you are, shaking your maracas
In a backless dress. And here I am,
Slash pockets and a center vent, cool
As that blue-cut zircon nesting in
The small white hollow of your throat.

Dust on the dance floor wheels and frets
Like the atoms of my appetite,
And I can feel the friction: heat
Sliding up through my shoes;
Sizzle of silk from your seesaw hips.

Light drifts around us like the grain
Of old photographs, and we pose
In a slow pivot and swoop,
Acrobats of the loose erotic,
Revels in the blind unraveling.

Death makes it all more desperate,
More sweet: the density of flesh
Weakened by desire, giving way
To the plunge and flow, welcoming
Whatever comes to the wet thresholds.

My muse goes naked to the bone
And takes her vinegar straight.
But you want the soul of roses,
Marrow of the mind, beyond these
Crude codes of dirt and darkness.

And you tell me: Fool,
Forget the guzzle and the bungalows,
The mad reversion to the mean;
I don't believe in numbers over two
Or zero at the breaking point.

And so we spin, like straw into gold,
Smoothing our steps past

Blister and gristle: me with a tongue
Cured in black smoke, and you cresting
At the pleasure of the moon.

Moon Amour

Pale sister of the sun, veiled
In a hand-me-down light, don't believe
Everything you hear about
The sultry attraction of blondes. In your own
Elusive way, your cool beauty
Keeps coming back, younger again,
Glow to vanish to glow.
Faithful and inconstant girl, you float
On the dark above me, as if love
Weighed nothing at all, though each night
It drags my heart down
From heaven to the heavy earth.

Hermetically Sealed

Stanza, little room in which
I've locked the door
And drawn the heavy drapes,

Let's keep the lamplight low, the fan
Turned up so high
My mind won't weaken in the heat.

In this dry air, the words stay
Calm and tight,
The syntax closing in, cool to the touch.

I've seen too many poems
Spoiled by a loose line, a damp eye,
The creepy breathing of hysteria; I've heard

Pale ellipses longing for
The steel-toed boot,
Subjunctives cringing for the whip.

There's something to be said
For leather and wet silk, or the bijou
Theories of the Eurotrash,

But not here,
Where good things come in threes.
Stanza, my last stand,

Small cell in which
The strict laws of the letter
Set the spirit free,

Like a heart speeding its beat
Against the bony spokes,
I know my place.

Somewhere between
The soft bed and the hard
Rock on the radio,

I put my native tongue
To work, open to
The dark instincts of ecstasy.