

CONFESSION

Sometimes, late at night, when the sirens
from the police station a block away
begin their incessant crooning,

I think they might be coming for me,
have found a way inside my head—
for there are those who I would trade

to have you back among the living,
people I know and talk to often,
whose stories of gloom and doom

keep me on the phone night after night
while I sit on the porch by candlelight,
the way I used to listen to your stories,

though I never had murderous thoughts
about you, my friend, because even
in the darkest talks your twisted humor

poked through, snapped us out of ourselves,
and it's something, to get and be gotten
in so few words, the way Dickinson

in so few words could say,
"One Sister have I in our house,
And one, a hedge away."

I always thought of you as the one
a hedge away, but now I think that maybe
you're the one left in the house

and I am in the bushes, keeping watch,
feloniously thinking, the one
they'll eventually come for,

and I would go willingly
if it meant you got to stay in the house
a little longer.

THE FIFTH VITAL SIGN

There is only one antidote to mental suffering,
and that is physical pain.

—KARL MARX

After the body's temperature,
breath, pulse,
and blood pressure
are checked,
they evaluate pain—
a consolability chart
that measures
the level of hurt
with cartoon faces
or color scales,
numbers from 0 to 10
with operatic language
about bearability
and distress.
But there is
a type of pain
that can't be defined
by red lines
or twisted mouths.
If she only had a scale
that included barbed wire,
one that measured
glass or bone.

SUICIDE IS A MIND STRIPPING PETALS OFF FLOWERS

Not roses or carnations, chrysanthemums or tulips.
For her, Gerbera daisies, not because

of the 30 species, the fifth-most cut flower
in the world, their heads perfect halos of dazzling colors

that draw even the darkest of minds,
but because each flower is made of hundreds

of smaller flowers, and so there is no single bloom
that provides more chance,

extends the game of He Loves Me,
He Loves Me Not. Compelling is the urge

to work around the center,
dismantle a thing of beauty into the least

of its parts. How it finishes depends
on sheer luck, a numbers game of odds and evens

that often ends badly: if I could,
I'd have planted a bed of flowers in her head

to elongate the game, increase her chances,
or hope that one sturdy bloom would seed

and take root, spawn continuous subdivisions
of itself to keep her plucking away

at a Möbius strip of a garden that would end
to begin again. But she only had the one flower.

With it, she climbed the tallest mountain
and looked out over the edge, her mind

tearing at the petals, each dark thought
a synapse, an impulse held and then released,

held and released, until only the stalk remained—
I might, I might not, I just might.