

## I WANT TO TELL YOU

I heard Joyce Carol Oates say writing  
was like pushing a pea across a warehouse with your nose  
you crawl crawl crawl along  
& when you look up—  
dirty floorboards as far as you can see stretching to forever.  
I think she was talking about a novel.  
I think she was talking about *Blonde*  
a novel she was writing about Marilyn Monroe.  
I am talking about this poem.  
Pea & no princess, nose in the dirt  
pushing pushing pushing & so little progress.  
I am talking about poetry.  
I am talking about breaking out of the neat little box of humorous lines  
rising to a zing  
of cosmic meaning at the end.  
I know—I've written them too. Still do—  
poems too damn much like Methodist sermons.  
First the joke about little Johnny & God  
(Johnny thinks the hymn "Bringing the Sheaves" is "Bringing in The Sheets!"—  
I always thought it was "Bringing in the Sheep"—  
Oh well guess I'm damned).  
Then the metaphor about how the minister's windshield wipers  
not working in a terrible rain storm  
is like trying to fathom  
The Will of God  
(in both cases you have no idea where you are going).  
A quick reference to scripture & pass the plate.  
What about everything this sermon/ my poem has left unsaid?  
About how we are dying all dying how people I love are already dead ?  
this year my sister-in-law  
sixteen years ago in April my mom  
eighteen years Tuesday my dad  
in a day or a decade me & you too don't kid yourself  
My daughter told me she doesn't want to die or get married

Some days I know just what she means  
Now in the other room I hear her & two friends who spent the night singing  
*LoveLoveLoveLoveLove Makes the World Go Round*  
My daughter who turned 12 last night—*New Year's Eve*—  
& we all stood on the frozen grass of the Capitol square  
watching fireworks           explode off           the glass bank across the street  
*Glad that's not our bank* my husband said  
when he saw the fireman poised           hoses at the ready  
*Hey just like 'Nam* he added as a joke though he would know  
Each concussion           a fist           in the chest  
Each burst red/green/gold sizzling twisting  
stars falling out of the universe & into our eyes

I start to laugh & I start to cry  
& even                   at the end of this book  
I'll still have no earthly idea why

## GOD HAS NO NAME.

My great grandmother had many  
but no one knows them now.

My name is Jesse. I write this to remember.

My mother's name was Olive,  
her mother's name was Ethel.

Will I live long enough—I wonder—  
to see Ethel back in style?

My mother also had a cousin Cumi—  
*Talitha Cumi*, Jesus said & raised her from the dead.

The devil, fallen angel, has such pretty names—  
(Satan so like satin) but then he

is not God.

God has no name. What will I call him

when he comes?

## I'LL CALL THIS DEATH CHARTREUSE, HER FAVORITE COLOR

She fought. Stabbing tiny slivers of watermelon with one chopstick long after her body had given up on all matter.

For this, I don't blame her.

She took first to wearing no underwear, then to wearing no clothes, her body the bars on her window, her body the door swinging open.

She never paused between hours.

For this, I don't fault her.

She didn't know she was hurrying toward death when she was hurrying so, her long strides swallowing kilometers miles meters feet inches then not moving at all

She waited out her death in the jungle she'd planted, the jungle paramedics hacked their way through the night we called them.

For this, I forgive her.

In the name of her avocados, I forgive her—  
heavy fruit that fell on her tile roof like bowling balls  
dropped from an airplane, like angels thrown out of Heaven,  
like my heart—that scarred, that bruised.

Until nearly the end,  
she wrestled the skinny Miami squirrels for every one of them—  
squirrels that stirred only when she stirred.

The sound of her front door their signal to run.

Then cancer took her breath.

Then cancer closed her throat.

Then she stirred haplessly or not at all.

The squirrels, puzzled, watched the closed door, the yard full of avocados,  
as they waited for her to race them to the finish like always.

*The Finish*—her heart buckled and bunched.

Her lungs, velvet, tore open.

For this, we wept—faulting her for all those Winstons and Camels.  
The ashes of her body those ashes.

For this, in the end, we forgave her.

For this, in the end, we shut her green door behind us.

Her world a lush robe—far too heavy to wear.