

Sacrifices

The day I lost half my hearing I became
a partial mannequin. It wasn't so terrible, sort of
like being walled in by cork board,
water sloshing between knots, music gone mono,
everything heavy: joints stiff, speech thick.

I kept hitting my head,
trying to dislodge something, or holding my breath,
then waiting for the pop. None of it worked.

Eventually, days later, I had impressionistic vision denatured,
intensely staggering, a kind of round-the clock-migraine
turning to Turner's storm.
Next smell, taste knocked me out. Where did they come from?

Pine needles invading anchovies, sauerkraut on bougainvillea,
all crinoline of the hormonal laid forth like a feast
one could swoon to, a drunk hippo, fanned lightly by butterflies.

Then touch heightened pinpoint sensitivity, a forgotten type of
aria brought forth from the cat, this brocaded wool rug
scratching soles like I had a saint's skin-----

Oh Mary, Oh Vincent, a buzzing, star-clotted, how
could you, we, I, possibly relinquish-----?

Plums in the Rain

Deepest ruby, wet, ready for a tongue,
the mouth wholly vulnerable.
Yielding is first sight, then touch.
Skin-real is the distance closing in:
face-full & firm with a knowledge,
compelling.

What plums have we stumbled upon,
balls which could be called cheeky
if they weren't so subtle,
in droplet thrones, in leaves?
Fingers feel the richness,
shadow-lit & suddenly there,
entirely shamelessly naked.
How they glow above puddles,
the reflections of trees bent over,
a garden locked in drizzle
melting to thaw.

So a dream came upon my Mother
after the death of her mother,
the difficult slipperiness & sticky meat
of the fruit, that dividing of possessions.
"Away--everything--you've taken."
That voice was the juice of blood,
black running sap.
Through the veins came a gathering guilt,
guilt gathered like a clot.

Mother, I remember you shared this with me
while we did dishes, & there were no stains
on your hands. There is no reason
for the hoarded blame, the lacerations
nature gives & may heal, heal,
for we've been doing that pure
as preserved jam spread
by any slow knife.

So this night spreads with rain & Gram once more,
in my mind but, listen, this time she understands it all.

Hold the voluptuous plum & the next one, & another,
a whole purple series, these earth returns
as bruises ripened to give life, life is given

as we pass under trees, the poems of our days,
if not the world's, if not-----
then some kind of legacy
not quite kind or easy,
but love bequeathed no matter what.

Avenues Of

Cherry blossoms litter our minds,
the buds broken & drifting, the garnet
on the grey...

These were the colors of my mother's school,
her graduation gown, her yearbook, & these,
the shades, accompanying, wind shook,
our rainy nights.

Where are the ten hundred umbrellas
for this Japanese tea garden turned upside down?
Where are branches for the capsized to ferry them back?

Streams of asphalt & streets of candles,
the lotuses passing with the passed on,
the names of passion...

Be it age or AIDS, we are the beached,
clinging amid the flailing & the drowned-----
We, with our trying to focus on a scent
or texture, & passion again as good news, a medical
breakthrough, when our hearts are anemones
in the clutches of big hunger & pain's
bigger pinchers...

Oh love, at midnight, flashlight bright,
I come upon a possum in our back yard, she of
the ratty girth, lizard tail & eyes of demons...
She is rummaging through your hospital scrubs
that the cat sprayed on.

That animal glares at, then ignores me,
indifferent as a bureaucrat, as the systematic
insurance shuffle wreaking havoc with my mother.

Breeze comes, more blossoms fall & the possum
remains unshakeable. I hover over, move on
with flashlight, umbrella, big boots of needy
puddles, the reflections, the faces going over,
overflowing...

Still I wade & wait.
there are more streets, more turns, & these blossoms,
blue by dawn, mother, lover, know them, reach,

better than I.

Pilot

(For my friend, Tom Stephany)

Taken by the skies or - *up from*,
are the expressions which come to mind
for where you may be: one & exhilarant
in a steady flight of endlessness
through more and more bright blue invisibilities.

The small model plane which you made
sitting nearby on this desk where I type
is now lifted to fit so snugly as a left-hand talisman
guiding the control panel of these keys.

Watch fingers open & close around it
like the slow pulsing fluctuations of wings,
each opening between the digits
a span of translucent skin feathers
expanding, outstretching & now how easily to hear
the humming of a small child at play,
making that jet engine sound come alive,
the palm's mounds a terrain in a crayon drawing
with a hangar made of waxen lines
& little stick figure people milling about,
preparing.

I can easily sense still too
your own thin nimble fingers on this smooth metal frame,
attaching the tail & sets of wheels as if through
a magnifying glasses & the smallest dropper of glue
where your breath was held for every precise drip
compressed perhaps by eyebrow tweezers
until the unguent stuck.

This determined creative technically-skilled spark
was the very nature of you even after the Parkinson's diagnosis
& you choosing to refuse to be stopped by ligaments stiffening
tight on muscles - no- fighting it all
with cycling & yoga, with swimming & even boxing,
this finesse of combat to stay useful
should experimental trials come up & you volunteer
cheerfully even, your spirit set on an adventure
more than making the best of while staying in the moment,
engaged with interest concerning what medical science might do.

Pressing your toy jet to my chest now a cavity opens up

with fury & sorrow regarding how, of all the selfless people,
Covid should claim you, all your valiant humble hopefulness,
all your quarantining stickling with precautions
pricked by a fluke, like a pinhole through an oxygen mask
with the whole plane thrown by turbulence
into the out of balance, the out of hand
as are these times with our lives as specks
falling, falling & what few parachute-fortunate
this time around?

Still, Pilot Tom, a Glam Major from Bowie,
around time you go & go,
spaceman through stratospheres, eyes their own clear vessels
of light going through distance upon distance, closing
in on more cosmos - there is now no stopping you.

(poetry-art hybrid also available)