

Shoe Beneath the Stairs

Time itself must have loosened the tread,
years of enough foot traffic hitting just the right spot
for that rusty nail's *pop* pinging down the rest of the steps
to that old damp farmhouse cellar.
Lo & behold but a child's shoe is folded & tucked
in that revealed chamber where the wood has swung off.
Circa early 19th century, it's a worn leather button-up,
the sort which took a hook to fasten tight
round the ankle's delicate width.
This superstitious burying has been linked to heritage
far-flung as Brittany to East Anglia,
found in monasteries & churches, workhouses & manor,
but with no empirical proof to explain what it's all about.
Fertility, most guess, as in *there was an old woman*
whose children spilled pell mell out of her house
which was a boot. Other archeologists theorize
of a spiritual midden
protecting against the troublesome
or more diabolical evil on the move
though here these words coming as if via Ouija
call forth the familial, name the shoe Aunt Anne's
taken too soon by scarlet fever at nineteen while her brother, my father,
ran as a frozen howl, his grief matching the wild rose brambles
tangling our farm's plentiful back hills. Think of lake willows
drinking the water deep under sandy mud to know the bottom
of such sorrow catfish sweep with their whiskers,
converting what ails to a nurturance only those
living in such currents know. Are the tragedies of our days
just news fodder from Reality TV compared to an age
where loss traveled by horse or mule? Oh saddlebag, oh satchel,
your interiors were the dusk bringing ducks to shore
as sure as that bible the heft of an elephant's foot
in which Aunt Anne's flower drawings - graphite, pastel -
were pressed to float forth before eyes & into hands
white-gloved and magical as a shop of lamps,
a home of lustres, the benevolent museum
of the Past's precious gas flues.

(Also available as poetry-art hybrid)

His Mind's Inclined to Math

I'm beginning to understand he knows a sort of poetry
my own mind rarely touches. What is it that eludes me-----
Perhaps the room behind his gaze made entirely of windows
numbers cover, numbers as elements & all they can do.
Perhaps he finds shelter there, a way of reaching
as my wants, curious, start flowing from these cogs.
Also I suddenly see us as scribes in a house of membranes.
We are so different & get to know poles as magnets.
Then too there are the stony disagreements.
Then too there are shadows, some; offerings,
others; throngs with crosses, with bombs.
Oh my friend, you whom I've often taken issue with,
I am afraid of seeing brutality carved on your face
in an open casket. But where is my hope?
Lead me to your fingers scribbling figures in little light,
the dark digits, the shimmering hands I will take
'til this fear forgets itself.

Precious Jade

From the rubble comes walls of growth, maybe moss
or ivy, something thick, herbaceous over
the peeling and charred.

This is my secret place.

Don't cross it without knocking, wiping
feet, expecting me to pretend
there's nobody in.

While you stand there at the entrance,
its wood all scarred, shadowed by battles,
the legacy of our age, I'll be considering
tenderness despite the clear hard line
taken, coming from an ethic of quiet doers,
quiet bias with the husk, just partially,
thrown off.

Of course, if you were hurt, on the lam,
would I think twice? I'd rather like
a colony composed only of friends,
each more real for being a bit sad.
You see, they've earned comfort,
have proved the superficial the sham that it is,
lasers of pain looking through, suspicious
but stronger, smarter, discriminating
not by race, sexuality but truth
for its pure tough knowledge.

Well, perhaps you're not up for that
It's alright. Understanding is a landscape,
these little time pieces of patience making a jade valley
though surprisingly quilt-soft and green
with an outsider's openness always glimpsed between cracks.

There touch is a luxury of the utmost importance.

Cities

Here is the magnification of insects:
earthworm tunnels, subways lurching,
the bustling hive's apartment complex,
the merchant district ant farms.

Nature replicates nature,
that grand industrious scale.

Here *being* still means belonging
to a particular genus and species.
Hear the system breathing,
functioning anonymously autonomous?

This overview glimpsed ticks on, off and on
as a neon sign for the voice mail's
answering machine intimacy,
the busy breath buzzing,
the mating call drone.

White sound fibrous as Muzak filters,
filters over us bugs, metal-encased,
and rain-splashing wipers throughout traffic
echoing the lives under windshields.

(Also available as poetry-art hybrid)

Bestiary Lessons

Beneath my sister's bed
at three in the morning, a baby
rabbit's screams shattered
somnolence like fire.
The cat dragged the thing in,
proud, playful, unaware of being
merciless. In my sister's good
hands that rabbit lay: hurt, quivering,
while rage promoted tears, apologies
in the face of the fatal.

Despite all the world's loving care,
it took three days to die, at first
cradled in a laundry basket, and then
left beneath the shadow of an Oak.
Nothing else could be done. Even
the vets had surrendered.

Once, in Boston, I rescued
an infant squirrel, shaking, afraid,
beside the tire of a car about
to pull out. A metropolitan crowd
gathered, full of admonishment,
warning. "*Don't touch, don't-----*"
Yet, ashen fur, that animal hopped
from my grasp, scampered through
dandelions asserting yolk yellow.

The crowd was amazed.

Tonight, following a party with only
a few guests left, topics turned
solemn. Nazi Germany. Hiroshima,
the acts regular nice citizens
stood by without word or committed
as if mass slaughter was unconditional.

How could people? Where is the meaning?
Look between the act and the fear
and you come up with
a stance personal as choosing
whether to do something, anything,
or look 'the other way.