

Question and Quest

Peer out into the wild evening. See
the play of forces in the dyed dusk.
Earth kneaded in her blue bowl.
Oblivion and the death-dark egg.
Intermittent storms, and beyond form, breathing.

It is an inland ocean we walk into,
down a sloped beach, a dropping off where
it is not known how we will return.
Having discovered we already hold
wind, whale, anenome, fire, house,
anger, faith, city, skyway, mountain.
And freely releasing (if not becoming)
the homing birds who have waited
to be born for just this moment.

Big Girl

“I’m a big girl now.”
She’s said it with pride for months.
Sleeps in a big girl bed. Talks, runs.
Eats raw carrots and nuts.
Is friends with her potty.

But yesterday at the park she watched
fifth and six graders laughing,
talking, teasing under the manzanitas.
And to the air, quietly, said
“I’m not a big girl.”

And Still the Choir Remains

And still the choir remains
that calls the hidden stems
to grow, and calls the rains
to wash the mud from gems

left for us long ago.
The masters' mysteries,
the choir and its echo,
world-speed and rusted keys

all fall to us, abundant.
Abundant: drought, rain,
dispersion, and the rampant
found voices in refrain.

Of Toddlers and Meditation

You stay still on your cushion while she circles the room, always moving, her blocks or soccer ball or stuffed pink elephant in hand. Though you open your eyes slightly when she comes close to you, just stands there. Will she cry, pull your hair, hit your face? No, she does none of these, she is only watching. You stay still when she moves away again to her drawer of toys, to the window or couch, and even when she comes back, puts her gorilla book in your open hands, walks off to the kitchen, replaces the book with your water bottle. But when she puts her arms around you and holds you a long, long time, her heart (as she stands and you sit) just touching your own, your stillness breaks, your arms go out and around her, and the sun of this world enters you, perhaps forever.

Midwifery

— *at the passing of Sadie, our old family cat*

Two hours before and two after
hold the body of the dying, the dead.
She is held like an infant in the blue chair,
homeward, this most perfect passing.

Oh template of breathing and the balm
of silence in living room light
from twilight into night and beyond,
with the silence so full of what is living
as what is met in death streams onward,
here by the couch and there,
outside under sorrel and sand.
And beyond.

Oh call the balm in the living room
afterwards, late in the night,
her love unconditional.
And all that is coming and going,
the inarticulate streaming: *perfect*.

And which of us dies, is dying,
delivered? And who is newborn?

Grease Stains

Restraint is a bird with a body
like clean glass. He cannot be seen
and leaves no traces. But for Christmas
he gave the woman grease stains
on her favorite tablecloth, visible forever,
after her daughter made salad there
and drops of olive oil fell,
and the woman, for once, kept quiet.

Morning Prayer

To work and sow another day
into the body's earth, play
densities of toil and yearning,
joy, stasis, mourning
in harmonic fugue: We lock
the front door, yet again walk
down the steps and out into
the whole, waiting, a world sent to
be our very seed. On Geary Street
the bus arrives, strangers meet,
move, see different signposts,
trail disappearing pasts
under overcast skies. Day is to trace
the echoes of cities concealed
in a magnitude of grace, revealed
slowly or suddenly as we stretch
to touch notes alive
in the breach between notes.

Soul and Sacrifice

Rainless winter,
and there she was
on Sunday morning,
the first week of spring.
Perfect monarch butterfly
almost perfectly still.
It had showered in the night
and she lay, for all to see,
on wet brown concrete
just outside the laundry room.
Dying and ashine.

The Esoteric

What flower given to work,
what fragment in the dust, always
waiting, nourishing, the nourished,
will not be lost?

And what same hidden flower
again trembles, again dies in dust
at untold cost, a death
known to so few, wounding so many?

And again, below cacophony,
what is lost, that almost
inaccessible body rising
in tragic murmur? Barely
amidst the masses a breath,
shade of a greatness even
their young children have forgotten.

Heart, do not turn, tragic,
to find too late
above and below the loud
force field of man's earth,
home in which secretly,
in bold hope, you burn to birth.

The Buddha's Palm

If Monkey, with his great cloud somersaults,
could not vault it, why should we expect to land
anywhere but home? But we walk out early
the last evening in December, hoping against hope
any sidewalk will lead us to our true path.

We go down into the backyard, a winter garden
where blackberry vines have overcome
the grass we once planted by hand.

We tend what we can these days, but we too
are cracked asphalt, grass overcome,
and in time will be more so. We ask:

Who answers our footfall, our coming and going?

Isn't search our long circumference,
and every arrival a new night of search?

Kneeling, we are left holding in our own
minute palms only the humus, dark and
sweet, that was never of our making.

And courage, a wing-flash, descending.

The Heart Before the Winter Solstice

Our new gold curtains,
glowing in August,
are now too thin for December.
It seems they cover the windows
but not the heart.
They let in all
the world's suffering,
so heavy a wind
that every organ in the body
revolts, cries out, drops back.
Falls even more hidden into its recess.

All but the heart itself
which is truly unsheltered.
It stands in the living room naked,
doubting the suns of its native land.
Stranded between what it sees
and what it knows.
Perceiving day through thin fabric
but unsure of its power to meet
the parting of curtains,
so cold, cold this light.

Caring for a Dear Child Later in Life

Soon she'll be able to walk, and I'll take her
down to my drought-dry lawn and rake
the many layers of leaves already here by October,
remove the dry dying plants I'm too busy to water.
Time now runs slow, full and filled. But she
who is new and fresh, a challenge to the dead,
and even more to the fallow, asleep under the surface
in wait, is blessing to my sacrifice, to precious things
given up in mid-life, and most of all to that wind,
intelligent and unknown, before which at moments
I remove the protection of clothing and sit, exposed.

Inscription Near the Gate of the Labyrinth

Would you see, and see again, an alternate ending?

Not to know yourself is the only error.

Fragments of a wounded planet, winding

their way back home, reside in every mirror.

*E. Dickinson Connotes the Mystery
of Patience to One Living*

Your Honeysuckle stitch – forbids –
Temptation – of the Sky —
Too large a Gulp it tries – to take —
Descend – enough– to try

Sculpting a tiny Moment —
The clear glass, the clean
Wood of a cold Dimension —
Not only – merely –seen —

And holding fast the Netting —
That darkens over – Time —
Push to one side – a Grandeur —
Obedient – to Design –

Obedient, my Friend, to speak
The nature of Retreat –
Before again resuming
The Tapestry – complete —

Your Honeysuckle – died away —
Your Pine went on – and grew –
What Saturday does not destroy
What Friday thought – it knew —

The known – a perfect obstacle —
The true –a stolid Wall —
But Follicle – of urgency —
A Shimmering –a Call –
Burst open to the New —