

Open the Windows Anyway

Rain arrhythmias
fast and blathering, smacking
still entire, off-tree leaves flat,
then slackening to sweet mist:
I listen for gusts
or some other explanation
for this odd swirl of almost-December air,
spun with warm, dizzy molecules
that stowed away on a jet stream
slow boat from China;
I found a flowering quince branch —
earlier, in a steady fall of drops
that caught me as I walked —
with three bold red-orange blossoms;
I could use such heedless,
mutant optimism,
opening without regard for
winter's quick closing step.

Widow

What is
not
is larger than life
dark alone silent
even in the swollen heat
you sit cold
thinking what happened
was a bad
dream
until you realize
you never slept
waking to the wait
of some other outcome.

Unseasoned

There are always things left unsaid
about fall,
just so simple
they go unremarked:
a skein of green
runs through autumn
until its late days
when it frays pallid
fibers back to skinflint soil;
autumn tangles
under the weight
of its own issue
and the madness of harvest
stained finger purple with grape,
not so much the fruit
that matters
as the heavy sunlight
across a crackling meadow.

Something else about fall —
as you're giving it chase
it will turn and nip
puppy-like oblivious
with its milk teeth,
and the snipping nights
that come,
but winter is another time
and there are things
best left unsaid about it, too.

Labor Day In Juneau

Juneau took out its false teeth,
hung them on the bedpost
and swallowed the townsfolk:
we had the place!
Followed piers,
pointed at pot-bellied boats
and wharves
banded
with barnacles, black mussels
and deeper in heavy green water,
frail anemones;
I put a monkshood flower
in one braid and two alder cones
as we laughed, closing in
on the harbor
stumbling gulls
lifting, settling, uneven flock
brusque fish-salt smell
ripening the sea spray.

Ceramic Cup, Looking In

Drinking beyond the cup:
gray, that is, the impression of gray
bunched through fortuitous
limp winter sky blue
over leaves once-wintered brown;
gray, that is, the impression of gray
as weather-drubbed rock
wont to lichen.
Tight on glazed sides
tiny bubbles — eggs of a silver frog and
one might soon see flickers of tadpole hatchlings,
twists and glimpses of light
on bright skin as they fastly brush
noses against sheer crazed walls
of this deep rock pool.

We Sat and Watched the Ice Break Up

Who could have slid a fact
under sky, lifted
it away from sea?
I swear they grew into one —
We hung in their pouch.

So Simple, Summer Love

Under a sometimes wind
waves made gull wings
on shore,
white feathers lost their birds —
they'd hiss and suck and
I knew just hearing
how water met land.
Behind the door,
I knew just hearing
you had come,
pause of sliding cloth
while words dropped closer,
until under the sheets;
I felt that sometimes wind
still on your breath, your face and
gull wings in my ears.

Starts

First thing the
cat's ear
brushed my lips
an artichoke bract
stiff but soft with warm
butter;
the geometry of morning —
breakfast —
I see you so briefly but
the day fits together
after.

April

One morning, after one night
it always happens —
a green film;
then, it is surely,
cross my heart,
spring.

This year
I hurt wildly
and remember my dying...
but haven't yet, only held
to grayness too long.

Now I am stabbed by petals.

Origami

I fold my eyes
and see a swan,
crease the new day
into an iris, a butterfly.
I fold my eyes
and see
each day as I choose.

Nostalgia

Don't cry on my shoulder wind.
You've come unbidden
pulling mould and
forest-earth crumbs
into my night —
untoward bursts lisping
of cloud change tomorrow;
trees are used to your frettings
but they unease me
from my chair;
somehow wet-woods smell
leaks under the door —
as if disquiet weren't enough
you creep into my nose
and fill my head
with warm, soft nights
already resolved.

Morning
you're always gone;
so just leave now,
and take
what is yours.

In February

Where it's now iced night
the afternoon ran rampant
over fine-stemmed,
wafer-leafed
weeds
and shin deep snow;
wind rasped puckered seeds,
chimed dry oak leaves
against a pearl-gray sky
stubbled with tree fans;
bright colors were round and hard,
bittersweet and rose hips,
or soft and round
scorched orange underbelly
of the towhee
beneath a tree beset
with puffed cardinals;
leathery-green honey-suckle
leaves
not letting go
and lavender veins of blackberry
canes
as tearing sharp under snow
as under berry.

Day
light leaves piquant air,
drains down rift-barked trees
frays off drifts,
finally puddling in footprints
that cradle
moonfall.

Solo

Morning falls
all over itself —
I danced all night
god, I'm tired of knowing
how to be alone.

We

The past has found
its boundary
I won't push
Now
You and merely I.

Let's Play

Here we are:
I'll win my father's love
and you can reach your mother,
dress up, make up
we do this so often
I can't find myself
and overlook you.

Our Gift

We always feel
easy,
woman,
in loving:
keep your legs
together
soul closed
suffer empty.

We may as well suffer full.

Feeding Hummingbirds

It isn't so much
a thankless job
but translucent,
and just sometimes
comes a wee chirp and blur
through the insistent
trumpet vine
hanging its orange
flowers around
as if
we wanted them abundant,
a quick stab of sound
in the summer bug and bird
symphony
darts past —
elemental bird
model of an atom
dense in the middle
and electron wings
whirring about a life
occurring mostly elsewhere —
beak quick to the sugar water
and zip into the hedgerow:
between episodes of hummer grace,
I think about
other things
I've done and doubted
that throw their own light
more elsewhere
but nonetheless everywhere
and refill the feeder.

Dream Message

I have heard it said,
pay attention
to your dreams —
and I dreamed
my eyebrows
popped off
two lovely furry crescents
in my palm
and double-checked
my dream mirror
to see only wispy shadows
stayed
on my forehead;
I briefly wondered if all
my hair would follow
but the dream moved on
as dreams do
into landscapes
and gardens leaving me with
surprise, knowing that
this isn't really how
eyebrows are
except under dream rules.

Harmony on God's Lips

There was at first
a moon
thin, round rice-paper disk
translucent on a morning
sky
until disappearance
right after the laboring squirm
of geese
called for autumn
to come faster
out of the green
still surrounding us;
the pokeweed bloomed —
always declaring its own season —
purple berries and green,
alongside waxy-white flowers;
a frog spoke
quickly on the jump
as insects danced and verged
and made lace over the mud;
ragged spiderless web
hung in tatters
festooned with scrunchy blue-black
old leaf fingers
caught,
trembling
while the wind strummed
along blue spruce needles,
humming of what might yet unfold;
on the fence row,
some trees escaped the height
rule set by rusty-wire and
stuck
up tall
carrying tiny patent-leather grapes
in community bunches
up nearer the sun;
crow caws and tawny soy bean leaves
married ear and eye, I didn't know
how like caterpillars
soy pods looked —
a ravenous hoard indeed
if they were chewing, not ripening;
swifts stitched and twittered over
water, a scattering of sunlight tears
breaking, winking, and flowing in golden
ribbons, bounded by shore-muck,
rippled back onto themselves —
and, sweetly, the wind breathed
away pain,
letting loose our grief with milkweed
explosions.

Open Heart

I have hidden
behind a heart of stone
in darkness
too long
held fast to suffering
unlovable
in ways known only to my
soul —
so certain of being
unworthy,
frightened like the tiniest
quivering birdlet uprooted
from woven stick cradle of
softness and sustenance
by a wind that only blows
unknowing, unaware —
afraid of being loved,
afraid of being seen and
still being loved,
barely feathered-over
beating tender bird-flesh
heart,
no protection
except behind the stone
which holds fast and cold
against
the wind.

If Only

Perfection
is a stubble-tongued whore
who clacks her bedroom
slipper false-teeth
and twitches well-oiled hips
knowingly
you coulda done more
you shoulda done better
if only and if only
you'd sweated harder, never slept, tried again,
double-checked, revised, replaced
been worthy
deserved to be right
it would all have fallen
into place
by now.

I Want My Own God

What I need most
I cannot take —
Faith is the fish-hook
always barbed
to hold
first the bait,
the lure,
then the catch
without mercy
snagged by rules
someone else spoke,
held fast to a god
someone else wrought;
I wriggle,
trapped by my own needs
so pressing
a golden point
and sodden worm
will hold me fast
to emptiness.

Pain As a Fine Vintage Wine

Pain grows
in many seasons,
each batch bearing the
special mark of the flesh
in which it roots;
even as I ache and twist
its bouquet draws me close,
to sip again
just in case it won't
prick back,
hoping it will only
envelope my tongue,
sweeten my throat,
in case the intoxication
at last warms me joyfully,
but each swallow
drives
caustic corkscrews into my toes,
bedecks
each finger with burning rings —
I know it will,
even as I put my lips to the rim
because I know it so well,
so much better than the unknown
of not hurting.

Pain As A River

This thing
this pain
is inside out —
its definition,
its course
is mine, alone, to name,
and I know it as
tributaries of nerves
like little brown creeks spilling
alongside railroad tracks
banked with patent-leather leafed laurel
and green-feathered hemlock
through coal towns
at the mercy
of slick-mud, clay-cheeked water
spinning
creamy eddies higher and higher
until everything — outside in —
swells over the moment
and I am up to my neck
pulled along, thrashing,
to yet another whirlpool
or tar-black stump snag
and plead for deliverance
instead I am a headline:
*FLOOD CLAIMS ONE,
NO KNOWN SURVIVORS.*

Where I Am (Not)

And I thought,
it is such a perfect autumn
day
I should go somewhere
to enjoy it – more –
where the cloudless
blue sky
is bigger or
bluer –
I should go where
the trees tremble more
exactly in
the breeze
better – more quaking
and scintillating,
green-yellow blades twisting
each on a fibrous
cord
in the soft and silky gusts:
it is such a perfect autumn
day
to be where I am
unable to see
I can never be
where I am not.

The Path of One

You are many
skins -
wax paper thin
laminates
of wants needs expectations
stuff-yearning
love-lorn disappointments
and clutch your
crinkling layers
to an aching longing heart,
bunched squeezed
clutching death-grip tight
as if these casings were
real
and mattered;
release fingers, one by one
or a hand all at once
and let the shadows
slough
fall away
lay at your feet,
nudge them away
with your newly free
toes;
walk out, walk on
do not be afraid
of the first surprise of life
on exposed self-skin
welcome its authentic breath
on who you are,
be it
and be it!

My Parents' Unhappy Childhoods

Blame shame
knit purl
pick a bale of cotton
bad good
bad bad
blame shame
again
again
I am I
in eyes of my parents
at fault for being
a baby bundle
of pointless soft love
and needs, please
feed me, carry me, change
me, hold me, feed me,
talk to me, look at me
at me
at me who I am
too exuberant
too knowing
too caring and speaking
so much I overflow
my want banks
and am dammed
and damned
and blamed and shamed
but that was yesterday;
today I am I
in my own
eyes
and I am now
myself.

Making Scents of It All

I am skin.
An integument of odors
and clandestine
wishes
like for bacon – forbidden
pleasure salty, fatty –
and taboo Indian Red
bleeding all over
and between my toes
under the influence of
sharp, nose-knocking nail polish
remover, hiding persistent carmine
in the valleys of my feet;
as well, the honey-salt
pearlyfish scent of warm
enclaves –
along with Vadalía onion
lording it over the lavender
floating on my palms:
I pull in smells and try to store
them up like nuts tucked
in tiny meteor holes by
squirrels whose maps must be
better than mine
or they'd starve –
the aromas are elusive
runners away when I try
to dig them up, the
smoky sweet perfume
of mysterious
wisterias
or mellow scent of autumn
and its winds -
part loss and part
revelation.

Too Early for the Sting

Where August
butts into September
the sun slip-slides
into yellow jacket light
swarming us
with fair fire
that never burns
but scorches leaves
into scrabbling colors that dun
and drop
divulging the twig-lace:
I wonder how apples
newly born each season
know
anyway every year
how to turn ciderish
where they land.

I Am Always

ready
to be
left
void
unfilled
alone
and my chest
under the skin,
tight to the bone
is tattooed with
burning ache
scarlet ink message
squeezing my breath
down out of the way,
don't open little heart
no point
it all goes away
sooner, not later;
always ready to be
let go, turned away,
frozen out
I see it all through
a prism
of abandonment
because, after all, I
am less
not so much to love
or they wouldn't
always
go.

October

I know
the roses have gone
but for a curled crisp
afterthought
but
I go outside
anyway
in the sharp air
blunted with early sunlight
and my breath
puffs softly
white
like pollen
promising
bloom then fruit.

St. Valentine's Day

I wondered if I pierced
a tiny hole, blood let,
let rage
squirt out my head wouldn't ring
with knowing
my mother, my father couldn't love
because they could only speak
in tongues of loss and lack;
the first time I almost exploded
in my brain
was over love, or rather
over not love
and I wondered if my mouth
would let the spew
rage out about
having to stuff my own
heart into valentine shape
with snatches of words grabbed
from other lives –
how good, how sweet, how funny, how glad we are
she is our child –
closing my eyes I could almost pretend
as I shoved the filling into the saggy velvet heart
hanging loose in my chest -
I was that wanted child and not
an accident, an inconvenience,
a warm body of need, need, need,
what did they know of need except their own
which sucked the air out of my lungs
and left me gasping until I thought
about a tiny holes in my flesh
for relief, instead
I sprayed my green Quaker parrots
into globe artichokes
round and full of feather-bracts,
joyful in the water trusting
ready to dip into the love I have
tried to grow on my own from
seeds I found around.

Leaving at Midnight

After hearing her
story,
my skin seemed to float
out softly
billow
like gauze curtains
around my bones
and felt unmarked
and safe,
an uneasy boundary
sometimes –
thin border
claimed by two
sovereignties,
surely not protection,
because some women
have their crust
pounded flat cannot
cast off
blue-purple staining yellow
black blossoms
like their wedding bouquets
death do
them part,
as if they were
unmerited
simply by being woman.

Umbrellas for the Walrus

One of the great
summer surprises
was an invasion
overnight, which along the
Arctic Ocean
is waxing and waning always light -
tide pools each fitted
like a glove holding
a giant beribboned parasol
softly pulsing away
its peculiar, precarious
version of life:
we were just sky
and tundra separated
from the sea by rounded magic
rocks that bloomed from gray
to flowers
in the mist -
and of course, the
sudden jellyfish.

On Being the Center of the Universe

Young green
earnest in the truth of
myself once
feeling all eyes
on my skin thinking I
was the center of their gaze
the target of their words
recipient of opinion
but they were focused
through me to some other
place
of their own.

We Are All Too Something

Odd fish, square peg
misfit
disconnected
glorious in our imperfection,
gleeful with self-pity
because
we are wretched
like no other on earth
until we see our tooness
makes us one:
too much, too little
too early, too late
too fat
too skinny
too intense, quiet,
black, white, red or blue,
yellow, too rainbow,
too transparent, too fast,
too slow
too up or down, too poor,
too rich, too well,
too ill, too busy, bored,
compulsive,
careless, too stiff,
too dumb, too smart, too
floppy, flabby, rigid or
crooked, too straight,
too deaf, too blind,
too broken or together,
too soft or hard, tough or
easy, too strong, weak, powerful,
meek, selfish, selfless,
too hot or cold, too ugly,
twitchy, still, too lovely,
flashy, dull, glum or silly,
too sweaty, too dry,
too mad, happy, asleep,
awake,
too godless or godful;
as for me, I am too loud
even
when I whisper.

Crows In a Moment Passing By

I caught them
almost
quiet:
pine tree dreams of
slick black rainbow feathers
within branches armed
long, spiky needles
clasped by sweet sap,
roiling caws
started and black shapes
with shaggy tail feathers
bobbed out along limbs
took flight
long, sweeping flaps
leaving the trees
still.

Hunter's Moon

It isn't the usual moon
hanging around like some
gibbous creature
waiting for completion:
this is a moon that has
been places and seen things;
large and ripe
and mellow creamy-orange
it draws our inner tides
into the confluence
of the cosmos,
coaxing our cell water
into lunatic rip tides
as we howl with
bare-branched autumn
delight
to be alive.

Midnight Sun

Fine sea spray silk
scarving
around our cheeks,
first early morning
walk
curled inland
on hollow crunch
beach ridge gravel:
we ended up
holding hands.

Spring Grievance

There are several ways
to feel about trees:
a kite flyer
sees witch's fingers
greedily seeking bright paper
and cloth
from high and gusty March airs
snatching treasures
and wrapping shreds
about the nodes and knobs
of unloved knuckles;
but, understand,
she is lonely, unleafed
so don't begrudge her
the wooden-spined butterflies
she unwings to flaunt
as spring's first blossoms.

Pain As a Pair of Red-Velvet Evening Gloves

I can turn myself
into a sack
a warm sack of moist bones
starting with my toes and drawing
heaviness
up slowly, carefully over my calves
and knees, stopping to feel the
softening, the release, then,
covering my stomach and chest
with mental flannel
all the way up over my chin,
mouth, nose and eyes —
but my arms
still don't get it,
they lie burning, pulsing
muscles pushing out against
skin like shrink wrap resisting
so I must turn them into
long, red-velvet evening gloves
from each throbbing, stinging finger-tip
on up
and then I peel them off carefully
shove them into an imagined glass cage
— a terrarium for poisonous pets —
watch them twist and squeeze
each other like deranged
tango partners
beset with sudden loathing —
and I lie quietly
breathing deeply in
breathing deeply out
observing pain in
my mind's eye
until the gloves begin to tire,
dropping quietly
in a boneless heap,
red-velvet turning
finger by finger
into glowing silver-white light;
I let the radiant gloves
slide gently back over
my fingers, across my palms
and wrists to my elbows:
I am finally fully unified.

Word of Warning

What happens
to our word waves
do you suppose
after they part our lips
and dive off earnest
tongues?
Do they creep out windows,
cat burglars stealing off with
velvet bags of lovespeak jewels
or a papersack of
grubby, muttered spitball
curses;
maybe
slide away
backs to the wall
guns drawn
out doors like cops
at the ready - leaving
us baffled
and ever uncertain;
might they stick to walls
ceilings and floors
slowly building up
like yellow grime cigarette tar;
where do these word waves
make landfall
splash,
end up,
collide or
finally diminish
into nothing
if nothing exists
maybe they live on forever
carrying every utterance
into the pulsars, nebulae, guts
of other galaxies:
oh my god
maybe we should think
before we speak.

Diagnosis — Glioblastoma

It seems sometimes
as if your tumor
lives in a safe house,
secretly de-briefing you
and you never let on
if you've cracked the code,
I am a spy —
standing outside in the
sweet fall of new snow,
trying to see what is going
on in your head.

I was there all along,
the conscious one,
out in the open,
who watched your surgeon
cry
as he told me,
"It was the bloodiest
one I have ever seen,
I don't know what I got out."

Yes, it's all yours,
subletting
your right frontal suite,
but I have to pay the rent
and find some space between
the black-out curtains
to keep an eye on things
in case it defects again and
drags you along.

After the First, Another

The glioma is sneaky
behind its blood veil,
with blunt fingers
pulls apart
the gray matter
turning it into
deranged salt-water taffy —
I have to look
but can do nothing
except wait for someone
else's cells
to turn
Benedict Arnold
again