

NO SMALL COMFORT

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for Tregony, Amelia, Harper, and Phoebe

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A Lake Opens Up Beneath Your Feet

Like the sound you imagine a bone
makes as it breaks if you never broke
a bone, atonal snap that's nothing
like rifle crack or thunder clap
or knot in a crackling log. Like
a twig crunching underfoot only
if you're standing only on twigs
over a deep hole you didn't know
was waiting but are now certain is
studded with sharpened stakes, your breath
gripped. There's no simile for such sound—no
metaphor for thuds, thumps, crashes, passing
seconds contracting the space around
the brain—only the sound of the sound,
every echo unsayable. Of course
if you're not alone, or if you're alone
and getting it down in lines is what
crosses your mind, then you're not really
hearing it right because it happens
so fast, so fucking fast, but perhaps
it's beside the point since even
those who've never heard the silence of
snow will know ice breaking
when it begins to break beneath them.

Landscape with Primary Colors

California hills gone gold, summer sky
blue enough to confuse, so clear, so sharp

the contrast. But there should always be three
you say, and here I've said only yellow

clipped by imponderable blue—you missed it
taking flight from a field of Spanish wheat

hackles streaked with blood: black sweep of raven
leaving behind a picked-over carcass;

raven who they say hunts with wolves and waits
beside battlefields for the fallen to die

who they say can forecast rain, who created
rivers and seas, who they say once sat

at the sides of gods, whose white was burned black
for stealing the sun and setting its light

in a sky like this; raven whose croaks and caws
when we're walking alone in the woods

remind us we are tethered to this earth
in ways that all of our gods are not.

The Morning Air Is All Awash with Angels

Today the neighbors' laundry
left on the line overnight
catches the last drops of rain.
A cup of tea is cooling
on the busy desk. Books lie

open, unfinished stanzas.
Somebody's already won
a car; the new Bob Barker
tells him spin again to win
a thousand bucks, a bonus

spin. Traffic on the bridge is
back to normal, be prepared
for minor delays along
the coast. The worst is over.
There's poker on two stations:

some are better than others
at waiting for luck to come
around. All I do some days
is wait for mail, wait for it
to be lunchtime. They say it's

love that calls us to the things
of this world. I find myself
hoping today that nothing
distracts from dust descending
in a single shaft of light.

Late Night, Walking Home

(Fourth of July)

The stoplight's steady red to green replaced
with blinking amber, tonight's sky empty

with ambient light, the road's deserted
where today you couldn't have counted

cars coursing along, coming together
and pulling apart like fallen leaves

squeezed between boulders in a storm-fed stream
the winter ice will soon be drinking up,

their rasped edges not like puzzle pieces
overlapping before they spiral away

and finally get caught up against the bank
where a kid might pick one up, let it

dry pressed in a book it'll fall out of
years later, reminder of an easiness

he once believed real: beneath a maple
before it's turned from green to red, tossing

seeds to watch them helicopter down
across a sky so blue it might break

his heart to remember on nights like this,
horizon smeared the color of fading coals.