

Part One: Life

Poetry by Season

Summer

Wild Rose

June

You

August

Settle

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Your body will be earth

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All things are different and the same

March

Garden of oranges

Cathedral

Summer

Wild Rose –

You are no tulip, no rose
No small soft mammal.
You are no porcelain doll, no plaything,
No decorative pet.

You are a wild rose, thorny and fierce
You defy trellises
Tear them apart with ivy
Turn them to earth with moss.

Your roots crack rocks
Your leaves search the sky
You breathe rain.

You are no quiet dewy dawn,
You are the moonless night,
The howling wind,
The cold ropes of lashing rain.

They say that you are too much,
Speak too much
Move too much.

They say you have too many edges

Tell them you are full of edges,
Crevasses and canyons and cliffs
And that your curves are too big for them to see
Rolling plains and verdant cradling valleys.

If you are too much, they are too little
You powerful, thorny, wild rose.

June –

Sunlight is forever, day after day
Of sweet, gentle, still-young sun
Kissing our cheeks, browning our forearms
The mornings still chilly
Clouds of cold fog on the lake
And the nights full of frogs singing
And young loon heartache
And the rustling of the forest come alive.
In June the last traces of sunlight linger
Like old friends after dinner
Until long into the night
Stars in deep blue bleeding orange streaks,
The last traces of sunset holding hands with the night.
And somehow the days that last forever
Seem like the always, the eternity
Painting every day for the next thousand years
in watercolor and peach drippings
Like snow was only ever in old photos
Crumbling corners, black and white

And the sun shines on forever
And all the insects buzzing, singing
I'm alive, you're alive, everything's alive
And the sun shines on forever.

You –

You are rain in the mountains

Soothing my

hot

sunbaked

rocks

Slaking my thirst even as I crave more

As dirt that is too parched cannot drink

Rivulets of water

run down my spine

Until every inch of dirt learns

to taste and drink

Until you've caressed every part of me

And leave me sparkling with dew

Blushing with sunrise

You.

You are rain in the mountains

Unexpected and welcome

Gone again too soon

Come

fill my valleys

slake my thirst.

August –

Sometimes I think I'm melting
Or falling, slow and smooth
Like a pebble
Sinking into molasses
When I look up at you
My eyes stick, half-shut
And through the slow brown dimness
I can't tell if you're smiling
Your lips move, a question, waiting –
Can't you tell
That I am mouthless, tongueless, skinless
And that if I just
Slow

each

breath

I will melt into the wall
Into the floor
Baking into the grain
Like a wood stain
And the lips keep moving, your eyes bright
It's a movie, on mute
And in black and white.
And I am sinking
A smooth pebble in molasses
Until at last, sticky feet on clay
I touch the Earth
Slow

each

breath

I will lie among the dying things
My body warm and glowing with rot
Until flowers bloom out of my ribcage
My belly full of moist dark soil
My toes will be mossy, quiet and green
And blackberries will shoot out of my throat
Once mute, now dripping
With thorns and sun-baked sweet
And you will pick them, tart purple, juicy black
And your fingers and lips and tongue
Will be stained
With all my answers

To those waiting questions
That hung, buzzing like fat flies in August
So long ago.

Settle –

Settle your mind
You are racing
Like running in the dark over the meadow
Half tripping on rocks
Feet flying faster than your eyes can see
Under the starlight
And your mind, still faster
Is up there twirling on galaxies
Flitting, faerylike, sliding down Orion's belt
And hopscotching Cassiopeia
Only to run unrelenting circles
Around the Pleiades.

Settle your mind.
It is buzzing like bees
A busy hive in wildflower bloom
Blow smoke into the hive
Let yourself sleep
Let yourself be the slow-changing colors of July sunsets
Not the sleepless twinkle of the stars.

Slow down, sweet sunset honeybee
Close your eyes and breathe
Do you smell the soft sweet grasses?
You're in a field of lavender
And sage, sun-dried and warm
In the dusty heat
And the sun bakes on your skin, on the flowers,
On the earth
And a breeze kisses you cool, brings you dreams
Lets the earth breathe.

Fall

Your body will be earth –

Little one with the gentle heart:
Someday your body will turn to earth.
For a brief moment in the universe
Blood will flow through your veins
And you will dance and run and learn and die
And then for all the rest of eternity
You will be earth.

Your ribs that cradled your fragile heart
Will cradle grasses and weeds
A flowerpot of delicately curved bones
And your heart
Knew love and loss and love and loss
But all people die alone
And all names are said for the last time, someday.

They say that is the second and final death.

Little one, you have fire in your soul
You are a warrior, defiant
But your fingerbones are small and crumbling
And mud is helpless, not defiant –
Your least favorite thing to be.

Little one, your feet that took you wandering,
They will forget their footprints
And the feel of sand
But you tried to go so far
Following a bottomless yearning
You didn't know how to stop
But there are thousands of mountains you don't get to see
Millions of creeks you never swim in
And anyway your footprints are long gone
The trees don't remember a single song you sang to them.

Little one, your lips tried your whole life
To say the words that feel the way you feel
To cry when your heart ached and when it was joyful.
To whisper sweetness when you were in love
And to spit out all your anger at an unjust world.

And you wrote and you wrote

You felt and ached and yearned and exploded with joy
And it all seemed too much to fit
So much so that I almost wonder if dust can feel
As if the chalky white dust from your spine
Could be more melancholy than the rocks around it

But in the stillness and the growing things,
The thoughtless birdsong,
I know that your sea of emotion
Is as gone as your footprints and your defiance
Vast though it was in your spark of existence.

Little one with the gentle heart,
Do not fret, for all things are temporary
Even the stars
And nothing matters, not even the stars.
So go ahead – love and sing and cry and wander
With this body that will soon be earth.

November –

Settle down
Soft and slow
Warm and sweet
It is time for dreams now
Everything is thin and papery
Old and dry
The leaves and your skin
Both thirsty and tired
Crackling gently
Like the ice in the morning underfoot.

Outside smells of fragrant woodsmoke
Hanging in the air on doorsteps
As if waiting to be let back inside
And the late sunrise wakes a grey sky up orange
The sun dim enough to look at
Quieted by the blanket of wildfire smoke
As if it, too, is hiding in bed
Alone and still
Candles on windowsills
Forgotten tea whispering curls of steam

It is time for dreams now
There are so many questions
And the world is so very big
But everything is slowing down, breathing soft
And waiting
So don't go
Settle down, soft and slow
Warm and sweet
Time for sleep.

For Blue Jay –

Don't worry about the world before birds
For there were fungi and Lincoln logs
And little fishes in bogs
And yes, some things were real good
The lakes and sky still blue and clean
And no there were no birds yet, of any sort, nor mammals
But I suppose that wasn't right or wrong just as this isn't
It is the time that it is –
Things are different then and now
And you can go to sleep dreaming
of a world before birds

But don't worry
Soon the ravens cawing will wake us in the sand
And sunrise will see the flutter-drop-flutter-drop of cactus wrens.
Then you'll know we're in the now that we're in
The now with whales and lizards
Oil wars and energy crises
The now with these rocks
Instead of the rocks an eon ago
The now with you and me instead of two other people or two other microbes
Or two other little fishes in bogs before birds.

Winter

All things end somewhere

Tower of Babel –

You and me, we're standing in a great white tower
And there are no windows
But some of the walls are painted
Like trees and sky
And all of the people walking about
Are wearing fortunes
Of tissue-thin fabric made in a country they've never been to
Shipped across oceans in black belching barges
Made in the hands
Of the slaves to poverty
Who are made to kneel down and open wide
For the corpulent First World greed
That looks the other way with piggy blue eyes
And throws two dollars down
Pennies rolling in the dust.

And after the slaves to poverty in foreign countries
And the cargo ships with black breath
They parade about in their finery
Closets so full that they wear their favorites
Every other week
Before the tissue rips and away it goes
To sit in a stinking pile
Somewhere on cheap land where we can pretend trash doesn't exist
Because if we all had to live with our trash
We wouldn't sell bananas in saran wrap
Or water in plastic bottles
Or use paper towels like trees are the only obvious way to clean up messes
And maybe it wouldn't be counterculture
To buy in bulk and bring your own jars
As if reusable containers are a branding
Of what it means to be crunchy, the new age of hippy
Because unsustainability is so normal
That anything else is foreign and weird
Thrown in with granola and reggae
And backburnered in politics like a niche group
To take a brief nod to
After the tax code and oil wars.

And in our white tower
We feast on far away foods
Coffee from Ethiopia and mangos from the tropics

Like kings who ate pies of lark tongues
And drive everywhere, cursing traffic
Wishing we were in the carpool lane
As we burn liquid dinosaurs to get coffee downtown
And we grow avocados and almonds in California
Half on fire it's so dry
Leaving layers of ash on mountains
A message in a bottle for alien scientists
"THIS is when it all burned down"
And 13% of Americans don't have enough food
While 1 in 3 dies of heart disease
And the rising, acidifying ocean
The cemetery of oxygen-producing coral reefs
Threatens half the world's population –
But don't worry, it's the poor who suffer
Who can't afford to move and get blamed for living
Where Katrina landed because it wasn't enough
To blame the victims of rape
We had to pretend that they were stupid enough to deserve a hurricane
To deserve poverty
In this bizarre land where the poor are fat
Arteries clogged with cheap calories and malnutrition
Where the rich are thin
And the concept of dieting exists
Because half of our food isn't real
And we have so much of everything
We gorge and gorge
On a bender of excess
While millions starve
Bellies swollen, eyes protruding, fingers like feathers
And it is a crime to sell drugs
People getting by however they can
And it's not a crime to bankrupt the planet for your own profit
Almost comical, like the tophat man from monopoly
Who flies to his golf property every weekend
In Mar-a-lago
And says that the poor are asking for handouts
Those lazy bastards
And laughs on yachts with champagne from France
And feels victimized on stage
As he lurks predatorily behind women
And grabs them, doughy hands claiming their flesh
As millions shout his name in adulation
To make us great

To return to this American dream
In the land of plenty where we pretend
Resources are infinite
So let's get richer
And richer
And richer.

We are standing
In a great white tower
Feeling like the only ones looking down
At this monstrosity we've built
Like the Tower of Babel
Built by men wanting to touch God
And laid brick by brick of insolence
Until they were miles up into the sky
And you and I, born on this tower
Growing our rooftop gardens
In urban compost
In smoke-tinged acid rain
We are so far from Earth
And as we peer over the window ledges
Our heads swim with vertigo
And like the old story, will God strike us down
And let us fall crumbling
Crumbling into white brick dust
Like a funeral shroud we grew up sewing
Since we were small,
Our clumsy hands stitching uneven lines
Born to contribute to the brick-laying
And the grave digging
And the tugging at God's skirts
Until Mother Earth calls us home.

January –

The wind chills, a slicing cold
And the watery sunlight trickles through the trees
But does not warm
It has a filtered, surreal quality
Dreamlike and muted

The weak grey light slows one's thoughts
And though it is clear I feel as though I am lost in fog
When I speak the words drop from my tongue
Unnoticed, like overripe fruit
Disconnected
And in slow motion I watch the corners of your mouth
Hoping my words were the right ones –
And around me the bare twigs of the oaks stretch toward the far-away sun
As if dreaming that they still had leaves
And I too
Dream of green fingers
And growing tall and strong
The watery sunlight sings
In a distant whisper
Harmonizing with the deep echoing silence
Of the trees.

Diyenu –

Carrionbirds of hunger
Feasting on our own rotting carcasses
We are but blind rabid harpies
Gifted, brilliant, winged
With a feral lust for life
We'll hunt more and more and more
Unstoppable, our rank talons and jeering cries
And having sliced the world to ribbons
We'll fall on our brethren
To gnaw them down to steel and bone
Before they can gnaw us
Knowing we are but the next step
And yet unable to stop in our savage momentum

The dialogue waffles –
Did we shackle ourselves here
To feast on the bones of our neighbors
Before we starve to death ourselves?
Or did someone put us here –
The bigman with the money and shackles to spare.

Victim or villain?

And while we stew in this conundrum of guilt
We suck juicily the marrow of the earth
Like a toddler crying because he stole the last candybar
His guilt-ridden, chocolate-smearred face
Tear-stained and inconsolable
And no amount of crying will undo his deed.

Australia is burning.
And we are full of useless questions
Like *whose fault is it anyway* and
Who should be president and
What can I do?
No one thing is enough and I so want to believe that if we all do one thing it will be enough

Diyenu.

But in my heart I know
This 6th extinction will be over only long after we, too, are gone
And the skyscrapers are but concrete fairy dust
And the scaffoldings but trellises for wild things
And this fact I do not celebrate

I am in mourning
Mourning these tall hairless social apes
Who sing and dance and paint and write and love
And are so drawn to create
To better, to invent
That we built a great cathedral of our own oblivion.

Wet forest –

Come down soft
Let your toes sink through the snow
Into spongy pine needles and wet paper oak leaves
Put your knees on the earth
And look up –
The sky thinks it's summer.

Breathe once
Drop down onto your belly
Stretching fingers out in front of you,
Dig them into soil and snow
Pull them out tingling
Dirt under your nails
Breathe once.

Rest your cheek to the ground
And listen
Feel the earth's cold, clutching winter close
Listen for the water sinking underground
Breathe once.

Turn over, your back wet and cold now
Goosebumps on your skin.
Breathe once, look up
The pines tower above
Glittering wetly in the sun
And their tops look tangled in clouds
As if to remind you how small you are.
Fat, heavy droplets fall
Punctuation marks, and they feel more like joy
Than tears – but they pool in your eyes and
Run down your cheeks
Cold and earth-smelling.
Breathe once.

Listen.
The bright, wet forest melting
Raining melting snowing melting
And glistening in the sun
Could we melt with such grace?
You think, eyes closed and full of snowmelt.
Could we tumble off branches

And sink into the earth so joyfully?
You think, shivering, cheeks reddened by wind.

And the wet forest melts
In drips and drops
The wet forest melts.

Spring

All things are different, and the same –

The air is thick with living
The reek of flowers
Little purple tubes and reaching grasping yellow stars
All open and lustful and alive
And the slow sticky buzzing of bees

The green things are drinking last night's rain
And the wind tastes of a desert rejoicing.

Many things are true
And always true
Like love and death
A plague like a somber chord
Underlying the silver laughter
The sweet sounds of friends under the sun and the stars

And there is a tension –
The chord and melody dance
In the same key, refusing to resolve
But some things are true
And always true:

Where there is joy there will be sorrow
Where there is death will be love
After drought comes rains
After winter, the fecundity of flowers
And that winter and drought come again
And that nothing is certain,
That each thing that is alive
Rejoices each moment that it is
That nothing feels so good as having a body
Feeling the sun burn my skin as I lie
Under the soft musk of dry lavender
And the lavender rejoices with me,
And the bees
And the small sand bugs, curious strangers to me.

And this moment is an infinity of big and small,
The future and the past and all things cradled in the space
Of this one small, precious, present moment.

And like an orchestra swelling,

The slow sticky buzzing of bees,
The distant wailing of a world ailing,
The silver bells of laughter in the canyon
The whispers of old things,
Rocks and wind and sun
– *All things are different and the same.*

March –

When it rains, it pours
Fire and ice burning in your veins
Grey thunderclouds boom
And it rains
And it rains
Soaking through your skin to water your bones
And it hurts. You cry.
A sobbing, sopping tangled mess
Your arms and legs and heart and mouth
Are all frozen
Sitting rigid inside your abdomen
Like so much scrap metal sculpture you can't digest.

Your ears ring
From all the noise
Of all the silence
You screamed in your head, in your sleep
And your questions follow you, hungry dogs
The big ones, like
Where are you going anyway
And
Who are you, anyway

And when it suns it shines
The sky so blue you could burst
Things starting to hum and come alive
Everything's waking up
And so are you
And yes:
It rained and it poured and it flooded
And now you're lying dazed
On the silt-sticky riverbank
Cold and wet and so alive
And when you leave, look back

Flowers follow in your footsteps.

Garden of oranges –

I am a garden of oranges
My own fragrant, blossoming orchard
Ripe, sweet, sticky and sour.
You held my face in your hands once
And told me that I am
A garden of oranges –
I say to you now
Yes, I am the garden
And the gardener
The tender flowers, sour young fruit
And the forgotten fruit fermenting underfoot
I am the storm the gardener fears
And a warm gentle westerly,
The faint taste of seasalt in my wake.
Yes, I am the garden
And the soil and the birds
I am the rain you beg for
And the drought that comes instead.

If I am the garden, I think that you became my fences
And so with storms and ivy and then quiet moss
I broke free.
I am a wilderness of oranges,
An untamed forest, a sea.

Cathedral –

You were made to dance
You were made to sing
You were made for words
To course through your veins to your heart
And oxidize in your lungs
Becoming bright beautiful bold sounds
Before cascading out the cathedral of your mouth
A Hallelujah chorus of all the shapes and colors of your insides
For you are made of poetry.

You were made to dance
To the rhythms of your own thump-thump
For you have a drum that beats unceasingly until the day you die
And you can dance to the music your own body is made of.

You were made to sing
A counter-melody to your breaths
In and out like tides, like storms
Like sunset and moonrise your constant pull and push
Your very bones humming in time
And there is no wrong note
For the pink clouds of dawn are the same air in your lungs
And what you breathe out is the mist on the lake.

You were made to dance and sing
Your body, a rhythm of the earth.

Part Two: Death

These poems, less curated than in Part One, are just all the poems I wrote since my cancer diagnosis, in order. They are raw and sometimes bad. I'm hoping that it will provide the reader with a window into my experience, and make you feel like you're walking alongside me.

- 1. Oncology*
- 2. October*
- 3. Be Careful*
- 4. Trust me, I know*
- 5. Imploding*
- 6. Upside Down*
- 7. Lake of Death*
- 8. Choosing to Live*
- 9. Honey*
- 10. Taking a Dirt Nap*

October 8, 2021

Oncology, from the Greek word ὄγκος (*ónkos*), meaning 1. "burden, volume, mass" and 2. "barb"

I imagine that I can hear it seeping
From my offending peripheral nerve sheath
From under the stitches
Under the numbness where my nerves no longer connect all the way to my brain

Or perhaps it slithers
Or thuds along - "a burden, a mass" after all

Anyhow I picture it advancing
Not knowing yet if it is in my liver or heart or lungs or blood

One can't help but wonder if it is a sludge of hate
If all the hateful or ungrateful or spiteful things I've ever done or said
Just curled up in a lump
And decided to be cancer
One can't help but wonder
Did I do this?

Is this because I shoplifted nail polish as a teenager
Because I secretly think I'm better than others
Because I love to be right
Because I didn't wear gloves around the cleaning chemicals at work
Because I drank and smoked -- the way we all did in college
Because I lie sometimes
Because I ache too much to be loved?

Or is it because of all the good I've had
A cosmic balancing out
Because I've seen so many shooting stars
Laughed so much in the sun
Cried happy tears and sad tears
And felt so much and loved so much
More than I could bear often
Did I live all my life already,
Used it all up in 26 years?
They tell me I've lived many lives
Canoe guide, french teacher, historian, linguist, climber, sex educator, medic.
Ice castle builder, foot model, mover.
Friend, lover, sister, daughter, mentor.

I have been so lucky and so full

But so sad! How can it be?
I whisper to the uncaring infinity
How much I've suffered
To suffer again, anew
I've been raped and betrayed
Imprisoned by my own mind,
Beaten down by my depression
Thrashed senseless and stupefied by anxiety
I've lost years of memory
And wanted to die for years
I had only just figured out living.

I crave a way to put these pieces together
But the universe is not made out of such puzzles
No comfort to be found in it being my fault
Or because I had it so good
Or because I had it so bad.
And the ocean will continue to crash ashore
The birds will fly north in spring
The earth will warm
The people will suffer
The stars will shine
And the sun will rise

Perhaps the miracle in her indifference
Is the beauty we find in it.

10/13/2021

October

In which all of my poems are suddenly about cancer
And I see the forest with new eyes.

It's fall and spooky and misting rain
The sky always gray and the wind always gusting
But I suppose maybe it would feel appropriate in any season
If it were summer the warm golden light would have a strange quality
Sticky and slow, toxic almost
And the berries would remind me of their short lives
But a few weeks of fat little red strawberries
Eaten, holey, unclean.
If it were winter I would hear the wolves starving
The trees freezing
The bitter wind taking my breath away.
If it were spring I would weep
To the wildflowers
To the swollen streams
Life so abundant
So temporary
So uncaring and ruthless.

It is October.
It is all perception
I've always loved mushrooms
Life from decay
But suddenly I ache for the trees.

Aug 13, 2022

Be careful –
I carry a rainbow cuttlefish with me
A reminder of better days
I carry with me a house where we all used to laugh
and painted a whole aquarium.
When I left I took mine with me
Covered in plastic to keep it safe
But of course, it's lifeless now
Without friends to swim with.

Be careful –
My walls are covered in pictures
– I thought it would help –
But I can barely look at them
I look so happy, then
Me on rocks, me with friends,
Me hiking and sledding
Grinning, alive
I can't help but feel sad when I look at them
So I don't
But I carry those with me too.

Be careful –
I carry a whole journal with me
And never write in it
as if I'm afraid to find out that I'm sad!
I carry with me
Two ukuleles that I never play
A handful of expectations I try to ignore
Extra stuff and a bizarre fear of scarcity
I carry with me a privilege I examine guiltily –
(It lives in the same too-small bag
With my traumas and grief,
And I never did know how to make them fit together)
I carry with me
A fear of commitment, a bit smaller than
my fear of abandonment
Every heartfelt letter I've ever been written
A smattering of overalls of different textures
A big ego and a bottle of self-loathing
And a contradiction or two, like anyone.
I carry with me a stuffed polar bear

that's nearly my age
A shelf full of field guides
A hunger to know everything
And a trivet made of hospital socks.

Oct 15, 2022

Oh, trust me I know
More than most how our bodies are meat
Having watched the inside of mine
White tendons flickering in and out of view
as I wiggle my fingers
Yellow fat, red blood,
Curiously garish colors for nature
As if I expected to be soft lavender
and peach on the inside,
Flowers and fruit
Fragrant and sweet.

It is October again
A month I associate now with my own mortality
As if I'm a single leaf on the red maple outside
Still holding on but with finite days
– Not numbered, as we don't get a countdown
And if we did would you look?

An early snow put a chill in me that I cannot shake
I am not ready for sleep.

12/1/22

Today at a stoplight I saw a young woman screaming
Her car smashed in the intersection
Another car pulled over, driver crying
This young woman in her yellow crocs and gray sweatpants
She talked on the phone, she paced
She yelled at the other driver in the parked car, gesticulating wildly
Knocking at the window
Rage dripped from her voice
And panic from her hands
And finally she got in her car and drove it away
Innards dripping from the front of it
The car screeching along with her.

And I, uselessly onlooking –
I felt embarrassed for her
Look away! So as not to witness this uncomfortable public pain
– What am I, a Puritan? –
I couldn't help but think
I'm dying and I've never thrown my tantrum
Should I be doing that?
I could try to let loose but that is not in me,
I'd be acting.
For some reason I sit here in the calm despair of it all
I've always felt like imploding instead of exploding
Prone to crumpling in on the vacuum within
The aching emptiness in my chest
Yes, my heart and mind
But also the way my body
Is a yawning desperation
I've only ever wanted to be full of love
I picture myself growing fat with it
Acceptance, respect, laughter, desire
All lining my belly and my thighs
Until one day I'm not hungry anymore.

12/9/22

“How are you doing?”

They ask, knowing full well it's a ridiculous question.

I'm flying to California

It's late, and it becomes the surreal, liminal space
(as travel does)

where anything could happen

I imagine an accident – the airplane
shakes itself apart

Our doom brings us together and I am holding hands
with the man next to me

seeing each other for the first time

And I say, “You wanna know something funny?”

“I'm already dying of cancer!” And I laugh

And it calms him, for a moment his eyes smile

And then we're sucked out, torn apart,

Shredded bodies strewn across Montana

kinda funny, I insist.

In the light from the wings I can see the rain

That is clearly falling sideways

And not regular falling either – hurtling violently
in straight white streaks alongside my window

This sums up how I am doing, I think

The rain is falling sideways, incomprehensibly

The world turned upside down

and there is nothing I can do

but watch it fall.

12/21/22

Today we walked around the lake of death
Our mouths thick with it
Our eyes wet with it
Tongues stuffy and cottony with words like *pain* and *time* and *what if*
Crows harassed a redtail and the lake froze, audibly.

We walked down the street of death
Into the house of death.
We had friends over
Hugs of death
Cocktails of death
Christmas carols of death
Laughter of death, love of death.
Tomorrow we'll walk around the lake of death again
It'll never stop being the lake of death, I think
To those left behind, it'll always be the lake we walked back when Ikse was alive
And this house will be the house we lived in with Ikse.
I can't take it back
I'm so sorry to leave you with a house of death and a lake of death
The music I loved will be songs of death
And the paintings I gave you will be art of death.

We all want you to remember me alive
But to remember me alive will be to miss me
Remembering me will be knowing that I am dead
And you'll never be free of it,
Not as long as you live
It is fucked up to have to hurt you this way.

1/8/2023

I went walking on the lake today
It seemed solid until it wasn't
All of a sudden it was slush
Water slipped crept seeped into my boots
My heart sank into the lake
I thought I would drown
But the rest of me walked home, somehow.

Is it like that? you might ask
Yes and no
It is like the ground disappeared beneath me
And I am falling
Still falling, for months, maybe years
Until impact
There's less to be afraid of down here
Because all the worst things are already happening
A certainty of pain and death –
Can't worry about that one.

Still, I fear suffering
And for this I know that I will go
By myself, in the trees, I will choose to die
After hearing for many years
The death call of my own heart
and turning away, choosing to live
I thought I would never end it myself
I chose life.

I still choose life
There's not much these days that could be worse
Would it be worse if I wanted to die?
I think so.

The crying in the room across the hall is for me
It's always for me
Me, me, me
it's about me
Until it isn't
No meaning to be found in that.

Making sense of anything is a job for poets

What rhymes with malignant peripheral nerve sheath tumor?
Indignant girl hors d'oeuvre wreath boomer?
Turns out the universe is random chaos
No meaning to be found in that.

1/12/2023

Honey

The first person I fell in love with once showed me how to check my oil
He told me that car oil should be the color of honey
He leaned against the hood
Hips facing me, eyes burning
More seduction than car lesson
Even the dirty oil he showed me on his fingers was a wet promise
And the word honey rested on his lips
As if we could taste it.

Now I know that oil never really looks like honey
It always looks black even after you change it
Now I know that love is real
So is lust
And people grow apart, sometimes.

It's funny to think of those days
Everything was bodies
Sex and sports
The two powerful medicines to feel good
Sweat as antidepressant

We fuck and eat and tell lies and truths
We lick our friends' ears
We play at hunting
We drive too fast and learn to check our oil
And then we die
End of story

And if you don't want the story to end there then we are soil
We are so much carbon
We will grow flowers and blueberries
The worms will drink us in greedily
But the ashes are not me, anymore
End of story.

1/17/2023

I've always hated euphemisms for death
"Passed away"
What the fuck does that mean?
Or "passed over"
It's funny how little words can change the whole meaning
From passed over to passed out
Passed up to passed away to passed gas
I don't think death or dead or dying should be bad words
People get real squirmy when you say them
Or deny it outright, when you put it like that.
I heard a new one today
It was "expire"
"When you expire" this lady said, trying to be polite
Which really did make me laugh
Picturing orange mold growing on me
Like something forgotten in the back of the fridge
Odorous fecund and slimy.

"Deceased" is better
Doesn't beat around the bush
But it sure doesn't beat the dead horse
The way saying "my dead friend" does
"My dead friend used to love this song"
Is what I want you to say
And people will cringe and wonder whether to ask you about it
And you'll say "it's fine"
(It's not fine)

And they'll say "how did they go?"
"Go where," my ghost will ask snarkily in the background
"They're in a better place now"
"Dearly departed"
"Resting in peace"
"They're with God now."

If you have to euphemize, might I suggest the crass
There's a variety of colorful options
English is wonderful like that
"Kicked the bucket"
"Croaked"
"Pushing up daisies"
"Bit the dust"

“Taking a dirt nap”

All have a delightfully irreverent feel
As if robbing death of its hush-hush sacredness

Tell it like it is
We're just wet bodies
Until we're dry bones.