

Once It Stops

Once It Stops

poems

Florence Fogelin

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for RJF

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*For in what does time differ from eternity
but that we measure it?*

—Anne Carson

I

Once It Stops

Once it stops snowing
I breathe the color of nothing;
a porous sponge mops the spilled skymilk.

In drifts of small
and shrouds of soft,
doubting the existence of guardrails,

I intuit my way home
to a farmhouse, white embossed on white,
that hangs by a thread of wood smoke.

The Death of Capitalism

Without a care for what it costs
is how she puts it

and that I *must be told*
– as if truth is the salt that sweetens.

When you say goodnight, her laugh
is meant for me.

Winter's spent, still it transacts with spring:
mud season, time to blame the weather.

Balancing words, you say you want me
to spend my life with you –

Midas's treasured daughter, solid as a pot,
dreaming of the house and all it holds in flames:

too many books, too many things.
I smell her cigarettes on your skin.

Rising to toss a log on the fire
you groan at the burden of coins in your pocket.

that laugh again . . . nehneheh neh . . .
Janis Joplin sings Me and Bobby McGee

Like mourners on a straight-backed bench,
we face the fire as it burns and settles, watch

an ash of paper, freed of words,
lift, pause, and with a shudder vanish.

Here at the Beginning

*What is is now, was, and always will be,
world without end, world without beginning.*

—Parmenides

We come as pilgrims to a place vacant but for stones.
Here, from the start, we listen
 to wind currying the pines
 to birds saying nothing new
hoping to hear an arrhythmic heartbeat:
stone masons chipping at perplexity.

Strangers in Elea, a birthplace of philosophy,
we seek the old, the new – the difference –
following a path, finding steps.
Beneath our feet, stones showing scant signs of work
but placed skillfully on end and meant to last
remain obdurate.

On this slope of hard light and shadow
we squint into the day's hot dazzle
and scribble in the dirt,
at one with Xenophanes, Parmenides, Zeno,
alive to the paradox: teacher and student.

Voyage to the New World

1

Among the winged, expatriated seeds
blown free in early summer air –
a windswept surge of basic needs,
life's fair share of sun and rain –
should one who travels far and feeds
on perfect light and soil complain –
or boast – about her past and its despair?
Life seemingly begun in flight,
consider herself an interesting epiphyte?
Among fallen acorns risking drought
and rivals, the emigrant will gladly leave
behind her childhood and the family plot,
feeling not the slightest urge to grieve.

2

I knew early on I'd leave the South,
lost my accent right away.
Even close friends don't know where I'm from.
Content to be an alien,
I claim as home any place I choose to be.
Never having belonged,
I love not belonging. I admit it's arrogance
to be defined by travel-thirst.
My mother let me be the first to go;
she didn't get to live anywhere else
but the town she was born in.

3

Among the cadences and pulse of village life,
Tuscany puts me in my place,
humbles me with language, the lack of it,
and liberates strangeness from itself.
Relaxing in a landscape with its own vocabulary,
I step into a past/present/future,
reading under an ancient arbor of newborn leaves,
comforted that my Italian dictionary
has no one word that quite means
home.

Anticipation

I know the devil's tempting me.
Smiling at October, he's braced high
in a scaffold of branches like a stage designer
handing to his assistant, with a wink at me,
errant twigs that interfere with his intent
to make a crabapple tree flower, fruit, fatten, hold
until I lighten things a bit, come next August.
Perhaps I'm a challenge to him: a bender of boughs,
one who picks knowingly toward the tip
to prevent the limb's leaping beyond my highest reach.

He knows what he's doing; his hands are slow.
These things take time, no two the same.
He gives me the eye,
limes the limbs with songs and whistles
and lets me ripen my personal choices –
like Eve, perhaps, or Richard's Lady Anne,
nobody's fool, knowing how it will end,
ensorcelled by the chance to play a part,
to take what's offered.

Leverone Field House

Out in the dark a floodlit waltz of snowfall
takes the breath of men who know its weight,
who shovel walks and tend the indoor track,
now inside leaning on their brooms, a barricade
against a cooling rush of loveliness.

The girls are limbering up, lithe as cats on tiptoe,
college girls swinging their soft hair
brushed to a sheen as lustrous as their sweat.

They watch the girls'
steps and starts, testing and relaxing
into bursts of speed,
firm-fleshed in stain-tight lycra bodysuits,
miracle fibers developed for moon- and space-walks.

Pastel paddles, they stir 'round and around
in this bowl set out in snow.

The men talk of hunting deer, circling the prey
and fishing through an eyelet in the ice:
the catch that rises out of summer,
spiraling up to an aching, ungloved hand.

Stretching out of the turn, footsteps
beating like a bird's heart, throats exposed,
breasting imagined tape, shoulders trailing victory,
free of terror.