

# The Way Through

Poems

Judith Kunst

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## Tenth Anniversary: Tin

I need you now  
the way a window needs  
a factory,

a float-glass facility  
fitted out with huge furnaces  
where sand can melt down

to liquid glass  
and where something called  
*cassiterite* can melt down

to liquid tin;  
I need you now  
the way hot glass needs

to pour itself out  
on a shimmering surface,  
a conveyer-belt river

of vitreous tin,  
the one substance  
on the planet that

won't cringe  
when the hot glass hits  
and spreads,

not mixing, not  
adhering, glass spanning out  
to an airy

thinness and cooling there,  
floating, silvered  
to a perfect smoothness.

This is the way I need you now,  
when I get tired  
the way a window must get

tired, holding itself  
in the frame,  
the way it must keep

thinking about that  
factory: so much work  
required to facilitate

such floating!  
And such bright ease of un-  
mingling almost

wholly inspired by what's  
come after: the power  
to see through walls.

I.

## Long before glass,

I lay on a small square of bed in a small square of room  
high in a building set in the triangle of Carmine & Bleeker  
& Sixth. For one hot Manhattan summer I lay beneath  
an open window which framed not sky but bricks, and  
for ninety days I rode a train of moving squares to get to  
a larger, unmoving square to stare at a square screen  
that flickered, flickered.

## That first night

I wandered Greenwich Village, too poor to step into a restaurant or dance club, striking up random chats in the street. Twice, three times, I spoke to a chauffeur who said he was Oprah's favorite. I'd decided that only New Yorkers could be writers, and I thought driving limos might allow me to be both and also eat. I thought, *I'll write in the car while Oprah dances*, and this part of the story always makes my husband laugh.



## Prodigal Body

I walked into the Park and a man called out to me. He said,  
*Would you believe a year ago I weighed three hundred pounds?*  
I shook my head, and he said, *Nobody else will believe me either.*  
His slender body showed at once the whole of his labor and  
none: he was compelled to tell what had already been inscribed  
in flesh. I wanted to say, *I too am a stranger to myself. I too have  
taken to the streets.* But I'd not gained nor lost enough to speak.

## In Idle Time Books on the twenty-second day,

already tiring of the fiction section, I bought my first book  
of poems. I chose the thickest spine, the prettiest title,  
*Leaves of Grass*, and by the time the subway spit me out  
I was in love. Next day though, I was troubled. What kind of hero  
doesn't think he needs to change? He called out *After me, vista!*  
and I thought, *What an ego*. I hadn't learned how  
to read him yet. How to read *us* for *me*. *You* for *vista*.

## The Twenty-Ninth Day

Crossing Broadway at 81st suddenly my ankle turned  
and I fell down in the street. Before I could move or  
discover if I could move I felt hands gripping, lifting,  
depositing me on the median bench between the traffic lights.  
*Oh*, I exclaimed, turning to thank, to be further attended to  
but my helper was gone, swallowed up by the city's  
fervid rushy glittered yawn.

## Reading Joseph Stroud

I wade in and immediately the force of the waves knocks me down  
I wade in again and am again knocked down these waves of your  
poems gobsmacking what I know your fierce curiosity, your curious  
ferocity I wade in knock and blow I wade in break, shine, I look up  
Cavafy Lorca Mandelstam Hawthorne Issa Rumi Stevens Yeats  
Izumi Lu Yu Goya Celan revolving moons in your sky each one pulling  
at the sea of your mind I wade in muscled song I wade in happy tide