

How I Dream

I dream the way
a tiny green tree frog
with silky-wet fingers
climbs a moist window
in the rainy dark,

a window that reflects
both light and shadow,
joy and sorrow –

an eye without a lid
that looks back at me
when I step closer to see myself,
or all that matters of myself:

a pastel ghost,
and then my brave, true flesh,
roll after roll of hills behind me,
and forests before me,
where everything I do matters,

but leaves no mark
beyond the slim, damp, frog-print
written on fire-forged glass –

glass so clear
it could be water, air,
or life's breath.

Lonely

Sometimes I surround myself
with the opposite of emptiness,
with everything I'm lonely for –
water, fish, seaweed and sky.
I'm not lonely when I swim
in the arms of something greater.

I first became lonely in my crib,
when I cried and no one came.
When I grew older, the winter sun
said goodbye too early,
and my parents walked their sad,
separate paths to sleep.

Married, and a mother,
filled with wonder and love,
I tended others,
but sometimes I was still lonely.
Lonely as a sore throat.
Lonely as a child singing in the dark.

Loneliness is born in the past,
lives in the present,
and stalks the future.
Loneliness is what can never be,
though what can never be
is often yearned for.

To the Old Man I Live With

You look at me, and rejoice,
though my hair is gray,
my shoulders have shrunk,
and my chin wattles hang like a bloodhound's.
And I look at you, and feel my heart leap.

Our love no longer climbs mountains.
It travels the warm equator,
and sleeps in a rocking hammock.
We no longer try to save the planet,
and there are no academy awards.

We wake, our fingers meet and mesh.
We say, "Good morning,"
and "How did you sleep?"
We read the paper, eat, and go to work
like any other bear or bird in search of berries.

And every evening
the neighborhood dogs come round
to gobble the biscuits we keep for them,
some with tricks, some drooling,
some just wanting their daily scratch and hug.

Ants

I first learned life wasn't fair
when I discovered ant hills along our driveway,
millions of sand grains shaped into miniature brown volcanos.
Some ants trudged uphill in long meandering lines,
carrying beetle legs, breadcrumbs, and fat nuggets of corn,
while others streamed out of their holes to seek more.
One ant lay crippled.
Another lugged a dead brother home.
Another stood on the tip of a blade of grass,
antennae trembling with news of the universe.
When I dropped a gigantic bread crumb on their mound,
two ants danced around it
until a phalanx of ants arrived to carry it away.
I knew I could kill any one of them,
or the whole tribe, with one foot.
But I didn't.
And I never showed their cities to the boys next door.
I didn't realize I'd someday feel as tiny as those ants.
But the more I watch TV,
or spend time in hospitals and rest homes,
the more ant-like I become.
I, too, have sensitive feelers,
and carry loads bigger than my body.
I, too, try to drag the sick and the dead
back where they belong, to homes they helped to build.
I don't know why I do it,
beyond not wanting them to live, or die, alone.

Mothering

Mothering was born
in the salty womb that shaped us
when the first wave met land,
crashing from the past into the future –

and a membrane grew a heart and two swallowing eyes,
and vessels carried first blood,
and our hands tended, touched, cradled, and rocked,
just as we were rocked in that ancient water –

so that those who come from us, all surprised,
can circle, sigh, cry, and create more of us,
the most natural motion in the world:
to reach beyond ourselves, and protect that reaching out.

We mothers are the first circle
within the circle of the earth,
within the solar system, within the Milky Way,
within the universe –

which is a long and round and endless road.