

Cooking for One in Winter

Black asphalt lined with melting snow
two cars, hers in the garage
idle for months now—
a reliable machine, good on winter roads
a reminder of something
you'd rather not think about

closets need going through
crammed with scarves, handknit socks
sensible shoes, sweaters with small holes at the elbows
she refused to throw them away
said they still had some wear left.

Saturdays you tune the radio to her station
lean forward hoping for Leonard Cohen's rasp.
Evenings, Iggy Pop, Bowie sing
as you stir the risotto
tracing circles in the pot

Elegy Written in a Soccer Field

Canada geese, lawn soilers, suburbia disruptors
squawk their way over the neighborhood
under gray clouds.

My heart is bruised—not literally. Obviously, a metaphor.
In my email, a notice from my old school—
another classmate has died. In her senior year photo
every hair's in place, a bouffant helmet,
the photographer
must've instructed her
to tilt her head to the left—

Soon the number of us dead
will be greater than the survivors
of that postwar baby boom.
(A thought to mark this gray morning.)

As a child, I did the math: by 2000, I reckoned
I'd be an old woman. But Y2K was my midlife point,
twenty years ago, with so much living yet to come.
Now the glass is looking emptier.

The geese form a honking V in the sky,
fly westward over the group home for disabled adults,
over Temple Beth David and the preschool
towards the town pond.

Rest well Linda of the teased, peroxided hair,
the ready smile—rest easy, Mary of the sarcastic wit
and the always lit cigarette, rest in peace Jean
with heart broken by the faithless Cuban lover,
rest Anna of the sturdy Czech legs, the acne-pitted skin.

If after death you've all been born again
as we were taught in religion class
why shouldn't it be as exuberant black-necked birds
marking off the miles together flying in formation
on your way to that new life?

Meditations at Newcomb Hollow

for Arthur Gava Medici, 1992-2018

I.

That was the year we learned
the ocean no longer belonged to us.
For years we waded into its waters,
hoisted our children onto our shoulders.
Then the sea began to swarm with fat seals.

When the sharks came for the seals
the sea we set our daily calendars by
whose tides we arranged our beach days around
became a sea of death, of blood cutting through water,
a place for caution, for catastrophizing about
—for catastrophe.

II.

At the head of the dune a surfboard tombstone
is lodged into the sand, adorned with milagros—
rope bracelets, scraps of poetry, dirty flipflops,
photographs, keychains—

Shred on, brother, someone has inscribed
in black marker on a piece of gray driftwood.

III.

Black-clad surfers ply the waves with impunity,
emerge from the water.
Work awaits them, morning duties
though their real work is shredding the green water.
Seals rise up at regular intervals, unaware of danger.

Here is where the brother surfer
was sacrificed to the shark, drawn by the seals
but striking anything, to fulfill its carnivorous destiny.

IV.

Now the accoutrements of human progress arrive:
first aid kits, tourniquets, phone access to Fire/Rescue,
warnings on the Sharktivity app—
post-mortem measures (post-your death, gentle surfer),
new protocols to embrace.

V.

We are so old to—only now—
be losing our innocence.

Rene and Marcella

They never met, of course, your mother and mine.
All the same they might've shared a drink
at the Plaza in New York or the Hopkins Club
in my hometown, Baltimore. Your mother the editor

at ease in Cambridge, making her way
through the Yard at dusk, with her leather handbag
and one of those green drawstring sacs
all the Harvard folks carried. Your mother's

would've been full of manuscripts and The New Yorker.
She'd have worn a smart wool coat nipped in at the waist,
navy, if that was the color that year.
My mother never saw Boston till I was sixteen.

She thought of it as a distant Northern city,
never gave it much thought until Jack Kennedy
won the nomination when she was forty-eight.
She wore schoolteacher clothes, sensible shoes for work.

She favored Eisenhower jackets and full skirts,
smoked Kents and carried a big purse,
never a bookbag. Her pupils' tests and her lesson plans
were stacked on the dining room table, the gradebook

at the bottom of the pile. Her handwriting was perfect.
If they'd met, our mothers might've chatted about
the Chesterfield coats popping up in the stores,
rather mannish, they might've said,

no feminine lines like the Dior New Look
that came in after the War. They might've liked
driving gloves, the small opening at the palm.
They'd compare notes, say raising a daughter
was always a challenge but they had such hopes for us.

They'd lean back in their cushioned chairs, cross their legs,
check their hose for ladders and seeing none,
lift their daiquiri glasses gracefully saying
Here's looking at you, kid.

Early Morning in Kresson

In my mind's eye I see it—the stub of a macadam road
dead-ending into Blue Diamond Coal, its trucks
lined up each morning for the long hauls.

To the left, the junkyard, heaps of metal and rubber, hard by
an Italianate house, rust-brown, coated with years
of cinder ash, faced the junkyard cranes instead
of a lawn. A porch swing, always vacant even on summer
evenings. Only the metal cranes saw.

The folks who lived in the house, white haired, plainly dressed,
bespectacled, came and went together, but mostly stayed home.
My father's tavern sat amongst these places, the last
in a row of houses. In its former life, the bar

housed a bakery—the baker's family
lived upstairs in the cramped rooms, their kitchen
the bakery itself. I used to pretend I could smell
bread baking, the sweet fragrance of airy
white loaves turning golden in the long-gone ovens.

I went along with my father there before dawn,
the half-light bathing the block in a sepia glow.
I sat at a small table in the back bar reading comics—
my father rolled kegs of beer up from the dank cellar.
On the sidewalk I stood peering down
as he slid the keg into a handtruck,
up a plywood ramp and into the tavern.

Light crept in through the glass bricks in the storefront.
I leaned around the corner of the darkwood bar,
watched him roll the keg from handcart to its station,
waited for the hiss when he tapped the silver barrel.

I inhaled the faint yeasty smell, which oddly, offended—
and pleased me. Sounds of traffic began to flow in
from the bar's back door, still propped open.

I was sent to pick up the paper from the doorstep, laid it
on my father's worktable near the jukebox.
It wouldn't be switched on till lunchtime. Hank
Williams' and Jerry Lee's wails would issue from it—
but by then I would be back home—quiet streets,
Small green lawns— lolling on an old quilt spread in shade.

I Learned That Marilyn Had Died

Not Monroe but Marilyn the English teacher
who befriended me the first day of my first job
who invited me to her thirtieth birthday—

Marilyn the inveterate New Yorker
from West Virginia who lived
in a tiny studio on the
Upper East Side when
nobody could afford to live there.

Marilyn who taught me how to sew pantsuits
when it was radical to wear them to school.
Marilyn who had pale skin and black hair
a long face, a cutting word,
who wouldn't let her students say, *This is boring*,
but made them say instead, *This did not reach me*.

Marilyn died who slept with my ex after our breakup—
he can't remember this because
he never remembers anything he did before
the new millennium.

I lost touch with Marilyn after she met a man
on the train coming back from Lake George.
She called to tell me she was engaged,
warned me not to get involved with a younger man.

She liked dogs, a special breed, I don't recall which one.
She never married, became one of those beloved teachers
everyone remembers forever—

She told me her father used to leave her and her kid brother
locked in the car on his way home, he stopped at a bar,
He'd be in there for hours drinking—
I'd never heard of a Jewish alcoholic
or Jews in West Virginia.
She said they weren't observant,
never went to temple, there was no bat mitzvah.

She loved the theater, the students, the Upper East Side,
expensive scotch, fine restaurants in midtown, and the beach.
She loved Gatsby, Hamlet, Sylvia Plath, Melville,
Anne Sexton, John Donne.

She had the saddest face even when she smiled,

black lashes against white skin.
Her dark wit made me wonder
what was so funny about what
was so sad. I wish I knew
what became of her before
her short ticket was punched.

My Mother on My Cousin's Wedding Day

Children weren't invited.
That wasn't fair. I was thirteen,
had never seen a wedding, except on television.
She opened a flat box of stockings,
pulled them on gently, fastened them to her girdle.
I watched her pull the beige lace dress over her head,
shake it down her slender frame, gently push
her arms through the sleeves.
I zipped the dress closed.

I climbed onto her bed, mesmerized by the lace sheath.
Paid full price too, she murmured. Coral high heeled pumps,
matching handbag, sparkling costume jewelry.
She leaned towards the mirror to put on her lipstick,
coral, like the shoes. From a department store box she
Withdrew an ivory hat, broad brimmed in the front,
covered with tulle.

My father waited downstairs in his favorite chair
trying not to sweat in the August heat.
I followed them out the front door, sat
on the porch steps, the concrete hot on my thighs.
The green and white fins of our Chevy disappeared
down the street. She was forty-five. I knew
she'd be the prettiest, best dressed lady there.

She wore the lace dress again, over and over,
and the coral shoes. But the hat
stayed in back of the closet for years
till one day the square box went to Goodwill
because nobody wore hats anymore.

The Summer People in Winter

Near Uncle Tim's bridge stands
a dwarf tree with twisted branches
tiny white blossoms about to fall—
white sand, shells of horseshoe crabs, not as many

as in years past. Matted salt hay, soft underfoot.
Across the marsh, the old cannery-turned-
yoga studio by the fish shack, empty parking lot,
freshly paved with crushed oyster shells,

bleached, pristine, waiting for the summer people.
In winter they stay in their houses, reading the paper.
Some sit at the piano, plunk out a few tunes.
They write letters to the editor, eschewing email,

preferring paper, envelope, self-adhesive stamps.
They walk their letters to the mailbox,
wait for the metal clank as the missives disappear
into the blue container— pickup, 4 PM.

The summer people in winter wear
their good coats to the opera, don
special sports gear for the hockey games.
They go to work early, they're the last to leave the office.

They stand for O Say Can You See and O Canada.
They lug their groceries in reusable bags.
They watch the calendar, dreaming of the marsh,
the kettle ponds' clear water, the warm waves

late August afternoons on the bay beach,
shell-cluttered sand near the rock jetty
a fat orange sun slow dancing down to the horizon.

Walking at Day's End

Explain to me how the sea
Puts parentheses around the years
Since my father held my waist,
We jumped the waves,
And he sang off key to me.
So much time has stacked up
But I walk along at low tide,
The water here dotted with bits of red seaweed,
Feel only the water and the sand,
walk over shells of small crabs, or parts of their legs,
till the water laps up again and I see only
foam at the water's edges.

Show me why the sea is so like
old words on the page.
Why I can read and reread a poem
its meaning constant
text embedded deep in my neurons
though life whirls me
From single to married
childless to primagravida
to mother of two
to mother of two grown, off in the world.