

1.

After taking out the trash and sliding down the hill, feeling like a Sisyphian princess.

Trash Day

My dad told me to wait until I was married to buy a house.
I didn't listen.

I live with my daughter
Our house is on a busy street
On top of a steep hill
Once we glided down the hill in the snow
On sleds that looked like old trash can tops
And flew all the way into the snowy street
I hope she remembers this

Every Tuesday is trash day.
I drag the can to the curb,
every Monday night
Well, almost.
Sometimes, I skip a week
if we have one lousy bag.

I often think about how my mom told me
To put a pair of old men's shoes by the door
So that people don't know I am the head of household
But I don't think those shoes deserve any credit.
Even for trash.

Sometimes I forget,
and I have to run out before seven a.m.
Tuesday morning.
My trash guys are gracious
Waiting for me if I'm late
Or coming back around.
It's only ever me anyone's ever seen
dragging the can down the hill,
dragging it back after work;
up the hill, jamming it next to the house.
Just a necessary chore.

I think about how once
a stranger told me I was too pretty
to pump my own gas in the rain.
I wonder what he'd think about this one.

2.

These three words

My father told me he loved me today, without saying any words.

Truth is, if I waited to hear the words, I love you, from him to feel love and validation; I would never have survived this life.

I can count on my hand the number of times I've heard him say it.

It's a good thing he taught me how to pay attention.

Because I heard it when he became a small business owner and showed us all how to hustle.

I heard it when he bought a computer and showed us all how to use it.

We were the first family in our hood to have one.

I heard it when his excited voice calmed my anxious voice as I shared the news about my pregnancy over the phone.

I heard it when he offered to support my book business.

I heard it when he protected me from a bad situation.

And even at my age of 34, he still believes that in some way shape or form, he can protect me from bad – and to me that is his love.

3.

Before I broke the bad habit of getting my day started by watching the news in the morning before work.

Sometimes I feel so small
in the grand scheme of things – and
what does that mean?
if I were looking at a painting,
the tiny speck of paint
would be me
in the grand scheme, what do I really mean or matter
Is all I am, matter?
What do I mean, you ask?
I guess it just feels like
my donation of tampons
or ten dollars can do
nothing. it feels like
a drop in a bucket
of seventy million gallons of water
or seventy billion dollars
worth of damage.
Sometimes I feel so small
like a prayer or a poem
is more for me
than for anyone
in need.

4.

After momming too hard and still feeling like it wasn't enough; probably in February.

How Do I Tell You

How do I tell you that sometimes
the world is ugly and cold and mean
when you are so hopeful and happy and ambitious

It hurts when I want to teach you about your culture
and who your ancestors were
and who you are
when I'm still figuring it out

our history is bruised, it's not all sweet
it will make you angry and sad
but it is also sprinkled with joy and hope
resilience
we are warriors, survivors, and our strength sustains us
(but baby, it is okay to break sometimes)
these are things that are difficult for me to tell
and for you to learn from a sculpture or a book

you might have to discover this on your own
like I did

I suppose it is my job is to keep reminding you of your beauty
and strength
and brilliance

Like how those who want us to buy things remind us of our inadequacy
You are plenty
you are perfect
you are enough.

Will you remember this?

Because sometimes my words fall flat
and I don't know if you get it anyway
But poetry lasts forever

5.

After my friend texted me his poem "Extend and Find a Hand" I texted this back:

I walk around looking for eyes that connect, minds that meet, spirits that also wonder...

As we flail we follow as we follow we flail

The wind and the light the earth is fleeting and yet we are here

What I wouldn't give for a mission description, better yet a mission complete but let me stop

I am here

Extending and reaching and grasping and gasping and pushing and pulling with every tiny movement

A job to do

A soul to save

Or so I puff up myself to believe

What if I just am

To just be

And we are

6.

After walking through a Georgia O'Keefe exhibit at the Cincinnati Art Museum

I stand in awe of God's expanse
At the water
Georgia at the mountain
At the window
At the door
No clutter of thought
Only
Admiration
Story
Line, light, love
Nothing is its own

7.

We are not our own
Even bone, once its own, returns to earth
No mountain, no river
No window, no door
We are witnesses of creation
Watching
Making sense of that which is bigger
More than matter
As spirit we are each others'
We are not our own
Gather scenes with your eyes, your heart
Fold them like notes – these are yours
Clovers of paved roads I put in my pocket
Save for later

Memory

8.

After crying in front of my daughter for only the second time in her life. This was after George Floyd was murdered in 2020, we were driving around trying to pick up groceries probably and What's Going On came on the radio.

Silent tears

From holding in the pain

Holding hiding so much inside

There are worlds of color

And life within

Hold the bags

Under my eyes

They are heavy

And as long as I

carry, I will waste away from

the weight

9.

After realizing I can only drink one kind of almond milk, and being single for far too long

A Two-Parter about Almond Milk

Part 1.

My Mom tells me not to complain about being alone since I've ended things with this last guy.

I told her, if you're shopping for almond milk because you've discovered you're lactose intolerant then you can't get dairy milk.

You can be sad about not having milk but that doesn't mean you choose dairy.

You'll get sick.

You can still be sad though and just go on to the next store.

Or wait until your store has it in stock....

Part 2.

I tried to really get into non-dairy milks

But they didn't hold temperature the same

They were always too sweet or too thick or too grey

Nothing could equally replace the silky, semi-watery goodness that accompanied my Saturday morning crunchfest

Until I found the meticulously flavored organic store brand

I wasn't really even looking

I just happened to be investigating my next option to taste test when a grocery-store stranger pointed it out to me.

I decided to give it a try

10.

After a robin got stuck in my house during pandemic lockdown when the people working on my basement left a window open. I remembered him at a workshop with Ross Gay when he challenged us to write ten lines using three song titles.

Going nowhere he sang to me:
“How does it feel being stuck”

It came out in
doo-un, doo-un, doo-oohs (a la Minnie Ripperton)

I decided I would plan his escape
knowing that freedom is the sweetest thing

this robin though
was unbothered

I stressed. Found sheets
“You’ve got to be free”

I said to him
Or maybe he said it to me

11.

After seeing that big box in my garage with my old address on it. I know what's inside and have known for years. It is a dollhouse I never put together.

Mother-in-Love

I remember the day I met her
She bought us a dollhouse for the baby
but we never got it together

Uptown at the skylight diner
Three happy kids, pancakes for me. Somebody got biscuit gravy
I still remember the day I met her

We'd know each other forever
She knew her son was mine.
Family, yes, but we never got it together

I still remember the day I met her
There was a twinkle in my eye
She knew for this one, things would be better

We held the hug like hope.
Never again strangers
but he and I never got it together

I still love her deep. Him, no longer.
From miles off she supports her granddaughter
She bought us a dollhouse for the baby
I'll always remember the day I met her
Family yes, but we never got it together

12.

After meeting someone who would change and challenge me; after meeting a friend who nursed the artist in me back to life.

Khahlia's Poem

In response to: "She is a friend of my mind. She gather me, man. The pieces I am, she gather them and give them back to me in all the right order. It's good, you know, when you got a woman who is a friend of your mind."

The best of friends will fight you for yourself.

They will gently peel you like a banana

Until they get to the sweet stuff. The good stuff.

What you were made for. The gift you have for the world.

The best of friends they celebrate

they challenge

they comfort

The best of friends will fight you for yourself

They will belly crawl through the twisted vines of self-deprecation that have grown over years.

Only to face you and require answers to your excuses

But, giving you space to forgive yourself.

The best of friends are the ones who have healed and

can help you, heal yourself.

13.

HAIKUS ABOUT JOY

Say ah-men

To yourself as you

Become light

Sunshine's kiss

is felt in my soul,

On my cells

Somebody is home

Smiling at your arrival

Good vibes await you

