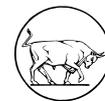


Sara Berkeley

THE LAST COLD DAY



Gallery Books

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for Dad

Early Morning Call

I'm too tired tonight for the stories
of the dying, their needs
crowd me,
exhaust me. I know their needs
far exceed mine, or anyone's
in my life, but I am also
mother, daughter, wife.

Pull close
the people I have with me now,
wrap around a comforter
against the chill of night.

Patients
die right after I go off shift,
they die before dawn
and on the weekends,
times I can't be there
or do more.

Drive by the hospital,
drive by the graves.
This morning I dressed
for the last time
a man whose two young daughters
had made for him
a shirt that said: *World's Best Dad*,
and signed it on the back.

Alone in the room with him
I slipped it over his head
and pulled it down.
I felt that he was there,
that wherever he was
he saw.

Rain or Shine

Late September,
thunder low in the night's throat,
four-fifths moon, restless trees,
first geese heading south.

The land's good bones are laid out
in patterns I have grown to love;
they tell me stories that become a part
of my story. The hills and hollows
are painted greens of rain or shine;
they turn my sadness.

Hot night. Under my single
sheet I stretch my body out.
Awake beneath the fan
I touch on each of my dying folk.
This one closer, this one not so close.
I promise into the dark
that I will try to keep them comfortable
so they won't die in pain.
That's all any of them really ask
in the end — someone to listen hard,
someone along with them
on the last stretch of road
until the stones run out
and the wind takes their breath.

Covid Migration

*When I'm dead and gone my immortal home
will hold me in its bosom safe and cold.*

— Jolie Holland, 'Goodbye California'

Outside my door
the garden is too proud to beg for rain.
Seared California, burning with desire,
ash cloaked, feverish.
My phone says it's 1:44 but I don't know where.
I'm unmoored, unsure when any time begins
or ends, it's just now, and still now,
darkness released over the land.
What is that word for strengthened by fire?

We pack the car
in the dark. Four days' drive
as the swallow flies.
Basin and range. Sage and mormon tea.
Wyoming,
so much harsher than I thought it would be,
billboards for fireworks, Jesus, and guns,
and on the blue freeway signs
state after state's small towns
all bound by the same chains:
Subway, Arby's, Casey's General Store.
What kind of fear is at work here?

Each night
the same motel,
same carpet,
same ice machine.

We cross the Hudson
on the Newburgh-Beacon Bridge.

Sunday evening lays across the summer farms
and along the Taconic State Parkway.
Out of the ashes of our old life
rise these barn stars, the fields with horses,
and long green lawns drunk with rain;
a sudden right turn onto a dirt driveway
up a hill to our new home
that we have never seen.

In the caves at Lascaux
Magdalenian hunters with manganese
sketched a great black cow
escorted by horses on the apsidiole.
Horse 59 had seven spear wounds.
Horse 60 advanced, sniffing the ground.

We have torn ourselves out of our lives,
given up our ghosts and come
three thousand miles.
This place is gentle. Welcome
is what you make of it.
Tempered. That's the word.