Two Poems
BRUCE BOND

Homage to a Painter of Small Things
for Matthew Cornell

Begin, not with home, but with one home
among the tiny many you will paint,
each consumed in silence, its obsessions,
its hunger for the small within the small,
the eye that pins a window to the world.

Begin with a broken cubicle of light,
the green hush that makes a cricket sing,
each brushstroke concealed in the next,
wave on wave, until the last one sinks
beneath the blue crush of all those hours.

And if you must begin, begin again
somewhere in the middle, with a boat
just beneath a radium of porch light,
leaned the way a chill leans against
the glass to press a child to the fire.

Start with a home that is not your home.
No home is. And so they all might be.
All return you to the smallness of one,
the ache a lantern casts across an alley.
So close these walls, so reticent the dark
proximities that tempt a boy to look.  
The painter knows. A pupil threads needle 
after needle, untouched by what it sees, 
let alone what it will not. Night falls so 
slowly it feels like stillness coming down. 

Ask the boy he was if he must invent 
the lives of the strangers to find his place. 
Does he slouch like a microscope, 
the scholar of a solitude that has no end. 
Twilight puts its pressure to the stars. 

Begin here, with the sound of dishes, 
the wind-chime of the sink. Begin with hands 
one never holds, a radio that plays just 
one station, broken since the 1950s. 
Begin with the music of that station, 

with a black sedan out back that runs fine 
and goes nowhere, though it is good to think 
it could, any day now you could pick up, 
leave, begin again. You could, echoes the song 
you cannot hear. Believe me, love, you could.
Narrow Roads of Winter

My mother’s operation was a light snow that turned her hair white, her pallor cold, her hand to the shivering thing in the air that pleaded, stay, no, stay, and I did, the way a child stays waiting for a ride in winter, as night falls like a bridal veil.

And yes it saved her, the long vessel slit from her leg, planted in her chest, to feed the muscle. A body eats itself to survive.

I get that. Winter takes in the blood and wafer of a near forgotten season, and still it is winter. That’s the hard part:

the bone-white ice of hands that held me, the will to walk broken long before her legs gave out, the talk that resolved to one song,

one note, one quiet shroud that fell across the eye at night, where all in time grew still, cruel, insistent, stupefied in snow.