

Four Poems
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The Telling

Down from such heights and up from depths beyond
measure the old ice slowly now quicker
than the stones can hold it knows its path like
the one note of a bird flown beyond us
in ages since we've forgotten the wind
holds us in its heavy sleeves so sorry
now at the pace of our elders' tongues
down the valley it is going the clocks
have stopped it is happy to be finished
almost there singing the song no one heard
the last time either when the rains began.

Six Hours
for Stanley Plumly

1.

His hands are folded and gathered on his chest.
Each arm is a wing in stillness tucked close.

He has laced his fingers loosely over
and under like the strings of good shoes.

2.

Someone has come to check his breathing; tap
the tubes; add a few numbers to the chart.

We might see his father's hands in these hands.
He might hold them for us—pages in a book.

3.

What book? We'd swear he moved. Now someone
has opened a blind and the sun comes wild

with sudden bright splashes over the room,
the side table with its small cup of pills.

4.

He blinks one eye to the warmth. He's resting
with his head on two pillows. Did he smile?

In a poem he calls hands requisite—
for reading, for holding, holding nothing. . .

5.

He looks as though he's holding back breath
from a wound. Or, if he were standing, touching
his heart to see if his pulse were secure.
His hands are still, soft to touch, when we touch,

6.

and dappled with the canker of field crabs
in a yard, in Ohio, in the sun.

The boy in him might pick one and throw it
to scatter those blue jays back into clouds.

One September

1.

Cicadas have filled the century elm. Filled
 the upper-story down through the shadow depths,
 the two hundred thousand leaves, alternate on a branch. Saw-
 toothed, ovate, small as a child's sweet palm.
 A great shadow covers the busy corner. Whirr of
 the song cycle, even now, above the traffic, the breeze—

2.

We touch the hand of the child asleep.
 Has her fever broken? Is she still? We say the most
 ancient words, even to her sleeping ears. Is she cold?
 Will she remember us? Or not touch at all
 for fear of rousing her. Some of our songs without words—
 Luck is a tree branching to the roof outside

3.

the window overhead, a voice among shadows
 over the busy corner. Over parents now
 in SUVs and hatchbacks, bumper-tight at the curb,
 a few bikes propped near the tree, standing around
 in our social distances, come to pick up the young from school.
 Some of our songs on transparent, small wings—

4.

We know the age of the tree, *ulmus parvifolia*,
 from arborists come to draw specimen samples
 from its core, to grind down—take its temp,
 said one—for its DNA. Why did this one live, this one, among
 the tens of millions broken by disease? By sac fungi.
 Vascular wilt. Lacebark, its other name, our mottled elm—

5.

The young teachers, their handheld megaphones,
 in sundresses, school-color masks, are calling the children
 by name for their parents, one by one, the whirr
 and click of doors. Come just in time.
 The sound lifts and breathes, like a certain music of the sea,
 if the sea were still here, as it will be, again, in another age—

6.

When did they arrive? The cicadas, I mean.
 Cicadas above us all inside the green shadow. Here's
 one, seven or eight, running to her waiting father.
 I can't see their faces. But when he tries to set her down
 in his bike's back seat, she sings out, muffled, *no no!*
 She wants—she flaps her arms—to run along behind, and fly,
 soon now—.

Love Poem, Inland

It doesn't take much	only a little
the cottonwood seeds	in fluffs like white foam
on the green waters	seeming to sail back
to slender branch-tips	that only seconds
before let them go	on the waving breeze
when have you felt so	moved as they are moved
and to whom to what	as the waters rise—