

Four Poems

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Man in Red Shoes

There's a man in red shoes across the street
Right now. Moments ago a bird
Hopped from one leaf to another, flew
Zigzag to a different branch still

Within sight. The man in red shoes is there
No longer: all I did was look away
To record what I saw, and he was gone.
No record other than this

Of that moment, of the stray white fluff
Drifting on a current barely lifting
A cluster of late summer leaves
Belying the illusion that the air was still.

It wasn't still. And he's gone, not resting
Anymore against the low stone wall
Dividing the road from the park.
When he looked at my window

A few storeys up, I didn't call out
Or give a sign of acknowledgment,
Although it seemed our eyes had met
Before he turned away. The bird

That visited the bough, the floating
Tuft of a seed, and he who stood
Inside those shoes, left
Without leaving a mark,

Transporting themselves
Where they needed to be.

Bull's-Eye

What was going on that day?
 Mind or was it body pulling the bow
 Taut, the way she taught me to

A moment ago, who couldn't believe
 Her eyes and thought she knew
 I didn't believe it possible to hit

The target (how does anyone
 Know what can be so), who
 With a nod of encouragement

Made it clear without a word
 She didn't think I ever
 Would—let alone

The center, the very heart,
 Standing there as if I alone
 Were the target, its eye

Becoming the center of my being
 In the whirl of time it took
 That arrow to leave the bow, to reach

What I became for an instant (oh
 Yes, oh no), certain then
 Of how to arrive again

At the absolute core, knowing,
 As I loaded another arrow,
 Lifting the bow, it would be impossible

To say what I imagined (before
 Letting the string go) to make it so.

Wooden Spoon

It is good to cook with a wooden spoon.
Heat doesn't travel from the pot
To the handle and burn one's hand,
The utensil doesn't transfer hot or cold

To or from what it is stirring.
Oh to be like that—not adding
Or subtracting anything.

But once I was: watching, outside
Always, away from others, not mixing
In their business, not involving
My body or self in theirs.

Those were the days
I wished to live an ordinary life,
With emotions extreme and mundane.

However temperate I appeared,
Inside was a storm and a sea.
However much I wished to be a part of,
To partake in, a wall prevented entry.

Oh to be a wooden spoon,
Stirring, stirring.
One day the world broke through

And I broke through
To the world. Then the trouble
Started, and something else happened
(Why *then*, I don't know, only that it did):

My desire matched another's,
Impossible match
Flaring momentarily, a force

That couldn't be reckoned with,
 Ignored or properly fed. Much drama
 Ensued, though nothing criminal,
 Nothing that would get into the paper.

All at once I was a boiling liquid
 Lapping at a frozen pond, no longer
 A petrified sapling beyond burning.

Perhaps this was ordinary, too,
 Only seeming extraordinary,
 Out of proportion, due to a lack of
 Perspective (the previously reported

Position of neutrality). It was as if
 Instead of growing little by little,
 Like any other infant creature,

A fully formed being
 Tried to hatch from its shell,
 Making the birth more violent, more
 Difficult than usual. The sound

Of that hard shell cracking, sharp
 Shards shattering—I hear it still,
 Feel the pressure, the push and pull.

It is good to be a wooden spoon
 And not be broken.
 A wooden spoon stirring,
 Stirring, changes everything.

Orb

An orb of light afloat on my father's hair,
On a black wave, gentle, thick as night,
Death sound asleep in its lair,

Waiting, waiting another year.
One day, when I was older,
He told me how the glimmer

Of something he couldn't see
Enthralled my sight as he held me
In the air, above his shoulder—

Was it fear, or was it wonder?
He carried me in his arms to a mirror,
Looking until he saw what could be

The source of my newborn delight:
A waterdrop clinging to his hair
After his morning shower,

One bright orb gleaming there.
O globe of light
On a wave of my father's hair,

A wave on a wave on a wave
No longer here.