

Three Poems

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Birthday at the Book Mill, Montague, Massachusetts

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The drizzly evening light's
just bright enough to see

summer's pages yellowing at the edges
of field and forest. We stop reading to eat

udon noodles, red cabbage shreds, scallion rings pale and green
as memory. Time today

is a kind of breath, filling our lungs
the way books fill

the low-ceilinged rooms
of the decades-dead mill. The old women

we will be
skir like crickets in the grass, afraid

to die, but singing
August's psalm. Rock can't reverse

the river's rush, but here and there,
its whitening hair

blackens in granite's palm.

Sickness and Health

You wish you could cure me. We float together
on the boat of your bed, on a postage-stamp sea
frozen into wood—your charming, warped floor—
that shakes and heaves while you sleep,
arm wrapped around my waist
as though you could anchor me, as though love, as children think,
were simply holding on, as though insomnia were simply wrong
when it whispers
that we're drifting apart, moving on.
Car horn. Hours till dawn.
Our bodies will be here when it comes,
our small white futures, glowing communion wafers,
touching symbols that aren't ours
of the crumbling body—this we share—
of God. I need to say this now
when your arm around my waist
is the only answer you can make
to the heaving sea of boards
which, you'd whisper, if you were awake,
neither shake, nor heave, nor carry me away
because beyond our love
there is no sea. I wish it were true.
That the sea were wood, the wood still tree. That your wish
could cure me.

You Can't Be Afraid of the Pain That Is Coming

The you you can't be
Afraid of is coming
The pain of the you

You can't be
The you that's afraid
The afraid that is you

The can't be that is the pain
Of the you
That is coming

The pain that is you
The can't be that is
The you you can't be

Afraid of is coming