

Julie Finch

The alcoholic

Her outlook wasn't cheery
She saw Moments as pistols
Fully loaded and cocked
Hair trigger ready to wipe out
Everything that had gone before
("I don't trust Joy; I keep expecting it
to throw me from the car.")
Days were war
The quiet ones were the worst
Dark furies gathering in the Godforsaken lull
She'd read it in a short story once
How did it go?
"Life is the time during which terrible things
Can happen."
Wouldn't you know
She died in her sleep,
During peace time.

Coffee girl

If you have to endure great tragedy to be a great poet
I'll work at Starbucks instead.
I'll serve lattes to the truly brave,
The ones who come in just after dawn with their laptops and scribblings,
Who keep their heads down and write while I clean.
I'll grind beans while they turn tears into emeralds;
I'll make steam for cappuccino and restock the syrup
As they dutifully trace the arc of their sadness
From whence it came to the awaiting page.
I'll hand out coupons, I'll change the cd in the cd machine.
Greatness isn't something you can bargain for, not like an extra shot of espresso
Or a free slice of the lemon pound cake, I know
But for my money I'll take my life with its coffee dusted chinos and freshly
Starched black polo shirt, and I'll gladly refill your cup any time you ask
I'll even buy your book when at last you're a success
But I do not want the shadows if the shadows are part of the deal
Minor shadows, maybe
But big shadows, no thanks
I'll stay within the ranks of my class, the working class
I'll scrub the toilets till they shine
I'll refill the half and half, the sugars, the cocoa, the stirrers
I'll perform any task that doesn't require the vast bravery of the ones who come
In at dawn and seem so bereft
And that is bravery---
Accepting the terms, whatever the cost
I'm a Sumatra scented chicken, and I know it

But if you have to endure great tragedy to be a great poet
I don't want it
I worry too much about the ones I love
I want them safe,
Safer than words.