

Julie Ascarrunz

Grief-glass

For my father, born June 1937, died December 2015

Some want to Hero away,
hold the hissing head
of pain at arm's length, or,
crumple with it, chest-cradled, as all
its snake-hairs bleed,
out-of-breath.
He shuffled all day, hunched,
head down, eyes closed, defiant.
Confronting walls and hallways
his continue—always the desire to do.

*

Grief-glass fills the room, grows,
pushes back. Emptiness,
a plane of reverberation

which hums below hearing like the rumble
of buildings crashing far away - block
after block.

Each pane becomes. A shard
of warbled imperfections
tinted slightly ice like light. By breath
fogged, bound in lead.

*

Try to look through.

The window reflects,
absorbs you, glistens
like snow on his hillside
grave near dusk,

the sheened, black flatten of the river just below.

I press my cheek against a space
big as my hand,
circle of pearl, run
my thumb over the raise of solder scar, it connects

a tiny diamond section
to one slightly aqua
blue. I place my gaze
there.

We are azured, all, by death.

*

These panes were not
stained in wanton pigment.

Like violets whose smell we can't remember,

they are little throbs of rain, aches,
nuances of blue that almost disappear.

Out on the other side, people pass in silver holding bags,
leashes, handles of umbrellas, paper cups with thicknesses of cream.

*

Thirteen, I think.

I stood to go to the piano,
so scared that all I'd memorized was lost,
Don't step in the fried chicken, he said.

From then on, just before some big event he'd whisper, *Watch*.
Watch out for it.

As he walked me down the aisle, the path of
what I thought my life would be,
I stepped over that drumstick

and he grinned.

*

Outside the howl blows twice-removed in silence. In here,

stillness,

yet the sleet strikes,

rattles, everlasting.

This hullabaloo dismembers meaning through the scratch and tap of glass.

*

Crevasse unending.

Snow frozen, water-glazed. Gray

sky balanced above.

*

No two plates, or days, or figures in the glass
are patterned. All is accidental.

One piece stops – a catch in gulps of air. One flows, frosted, till I'm lost
like stepping off a sidewalk
into storm-piled snow shoved up inside my pant leg, down in my boots, thrust,
cutting at my collar bone, my neck, my wrists.

Nobody saw. Then,

I'm looking up at grief, this monolith of brittle instances,
a patina of cobwebs, pocked with holes and dog-nosed.

I lose myself in screech-shapes.

*

The flat glass a foil for waving.

My stop in space through which I never saw him go.

(All I had, a fallow gesture, and no way to reach.)

*

I'm climbing up the ladder to the roof, step by step.

Surely there are arms behind me in this early sequence.

I am three, or two. What I'm sure of, once up top he grabs me underneath my arms and swings my feet out so I'll sit astride a vent or stovepipe, watching fireworks. But he didn't tell me.

I don't understand. My spine, my hips and shoulders know only I'm being thrown. Frozen into reflex, an anticipated fall.

I can't walk this ice.

*

How long can I stand here at this window, watching? Surely
it is better that I shield my eyes, return to my routines.

But there is no longer everyday.

And this window is not flat, or static.

This puzzle's levels turn and click without even

a central pin, unspinning plainsong from jazz, juniper from gin.

*

There's the funhouse bloat and curl of it. We think we are upright,
ermine-clad but we're warped by loss, its random
and continuous unhinging, pegs undriven, loosening all stays,
or blowing up, or stretched like taffymen and boneless.

*

Before his words abandoned him—
he picked me up from somewhere I had gone.

I don't want this to happen, he said, the future hanging just in front of us,
a snow-filled pane.

*

A mallard hen waits in the parking lot next to the body of her drake.

Later, I drive home from work, she stands to the side in the grass, alone.

Mom says she remembers only moments of my father's day-long struggle into death
Hour after hour she held him to calm his thrashing, not knowing she'd forget.

*

You must look into grief alone.

As light tiptoes to you from behind, slips
along your neck, under your chin—

your eye looks back at you,
afraid.

Try to twist the focus deeper past the pupil,
you might glimpse inside and see this unhitched
metaphor for pain.

Move in too close, pieces of color sharpen
into glass shards standing, looking inward, pointed. You slip,

your surfaces are scraped, welling
with sting, calling forth a greater slap. Yet —

*

yet, the hailstones scribe other stories,
dented tightness in the throat,
grief's glacier-ancient scouring is no momentary rub.

Open the aperture.

In the cul-de-sac across the street, an old
man, shovel on his shoulder, steps carefully across the ice. I cannot

see his face, squint as I may. He follows the sidewalk cleared
by someone in that house, the blue one, then he stops next door

where snow drifts swell. He balances half the height of snow
across the scoop and throws it, in momentum almost throws himself.

He shuffles some, regaining balance. Wipes his nose. What am I

*

waiting for? I watch—
that is not him.
He will not be.
There is no virtual queue
I crook my neck to
hold my phone to stay in,
listening
as the robot voice
reminds me I am still
number four of
four after an hour
The cats, the taxis all turned
down, as through a
sleeve of cellophane
or on a monitor
whose brightness button
has been nudged, contrast
broken, sound of bottles shattering
far away. My sigh,
full of holes.

A single goose flies. I don't know if he honks or if I made it up.

*

fuck the shine

of grammars scripts and subtitles

implying trust implying someone knows they hump

what is unmoored in us

smudge them out

*

Iceland, nine a.m. it's pewter-skied,
five degrees before the absolute of dark.
Yes, I know you know already how this works:
trying to duck the sideways
sleet blown at your throat,

trying to act like this is normal,
balanced on volcanic edge,
the entrails of the wind
unleashed to spatter *pluie gelée*

and there's no tarp to shelter you
from this, no roof, no brush or tree.
All wavers. *Pray*
they say. But all of this is prayer
and altar: this stumble-slip,
falling on my knees,
now stuck at
asphalt scrape and curb end,
blue-necked bottle broken.

Beckon, edges.
Glint where the frame pulls away.

*

Searching for an instant of reveal in the march of bodies, flare of eyes.

Another day. The chant of traffic cut by sirens. Underneath, the keen no one can hear –
a sound transparent, like the gap of glass.

It divides you from all but itself as understandings peel
to pith, to how we're primed, the gesso, flat.

Window, draw us from ourselves to linger, looking, broken outward,
in. Splintered by the hope someone there will look back through and see.

So concave, this horizon with the figure in the foreground gone.

*

Blow, bellows. I am fractured, molten,
cold. Surprise me in this rupture, rend, itinerant flow. I don't

know. I don't know the grass dance for a grave left open,
soul uncovered through the night. We slip and limp our way,

leaving behind the bits of leaf, of thorn, puffing the air
with ritual.

Oh, wraith.

*

Many-paneled grief,
your litany of yets
and second guesses,
orchestrated
ostenati,
passages repeated,
puppet knees,
exaggerated steps,
crumpled core,
bent waist,
hair loosened,
touching earth,
waved spasms,
as in Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring*
more
augmenting more.

*

My father, he would tell me, *Get up. Go to work.*

Etched ex-voto under us, a moment when each

is sainted in the only thing that's left to do – that kind of going on.