

Terry Ann Thaxton

Getting it Right

You say, *Look, there are people, friends walking beside you*, but all I see are caskets, each one a heavy silhouette, beyond recognition. I want to lie down, drink wine, listen to my dog breathe. You are a television set falling from a five story building. You beg for me to get it right, to sing for you, but I am not that woman any more, not the woman you married at the under the gazebo among friends, a violin, drums, jasmine sprouting up the sides of the house. I carry my dog on my back to the park behind our house.

You drive away from our house each day because the air inside this house is filled with handprints, leaking cans, sparkles of blood, unlit candles, disapproval. This is where I'll die. It's where my arms died, my wrists, my innocence, my face, my iron pot. I've not yet held an infant across my lap. I put your pills inside plastic containers: M-T-W-T-F-S-S. I insanely dish them out to you. All I've ever wanted: a feathered hand. Here I am cutting onions on the board in our tiny kitchen where friends we do not have ever visit or talk. Friends who cannot touch my hand, to say, "Leave; get out."

We are like cracks in a dried marsh bottom with no rain in sight. Sometimes I want you to kill me, not be the man in my bed. I want to applaud when my dog jumps through the window. I want to follow him. Or sip tea again in the asylum's veranda. I want to bury myself. Instead I leave my face at the door.

Map of My Room

There's no mirror in this room
to melt the air,

so I watch the wind
float past the window

or stare at the black postcards that keep
landing on the wall. This room

was once an anchored boat,
and I was shaken by the words

pinned against my chest.
Now I wait to be

struck by the wing of a sandhill crane
coming from the mouth of the sky,

Waiting like this blinds me.

I cannot see the house where dirty
laundry weeps on the floor.

The cranes stand knee-deep in water,
or is it my mind,

and I cannot think of what it is beneath
us that hums and taps its own fingers

as if water were a drum or a sleeve
anxious to be tucked into its own life.

Dead Owl

No one understands the sinkhole problem.
I gawk. I keep stones in my ears,
though sometimes I breathe pebbles into tree branches.

I do not know if we should leave it here or take it home,
stuff it, and admire it.

Unless you're dying to preach to me
or swing from the top of the tree house,
don't bother coming to rescue me.

I thought all that was left was ash and bone fragments
and a stranger's black pajamas in the ditch.

The sun burns everything, and my right hand
has slapped a boy's cheek. I sit near
the cloud of discontentment.

I just wanted to hear myself ask the question
about the neighborhood of weak houses.

Each day clings to my jeans.
Each day I have to stomp out my boots on the road.

I laugh because I know I'll die someday, too.

The sun takes away the shadows of your eyes.
My head is only present because I recognize the highway.

Each day is an unmarked grave filled with muck and insects.
Sometimes I think I've been away my entire life.

Escape

If you find yourself in the swamp, clap
your hands or wave your feather in the dark and turn

your face toward the tiny cup along the rim, and imagine
rain reaching down like a swing that rescues children

on hot afternoons, careful to not stop boasting about
your walk on the trail where you wanted to crack open a window

as if a toad wanted in, as if it was groaning like a stranger
who swaggers into your head and hides in your sweater

or who wants to fill your mouth with lace because there is
no doubt that you can handle the past the same way you

pour soup or the way a rabbit might gaze at the garden and ignore
the cabbage, and if rain injects the day or your desk harbors

secrets that listen only to the fingers dressing themselves
in afterthought, because it's just as easy to juggle the badges

you imagine to be worn by moths, by then you'll want to
persuade the cemetery to go under, to sniff the dead frogs

that fell from yesterday's rains or to rush past the field and spread
open the flag, being careful not to vanish when they close the gate.