

GIVING UP CHOCOLATE

*I want the world. I want the whole world.
I want to lock it all up in my pocket.
It's my bar of chocolate. Give it to me now.*

-Veruca Salt, Willie Wonka and the Chocolate Factory

It still calls to me on holidays,
dressed to kill in red tin foil, promising

to coat the bitter, to put to sleep
the sadnesses that wake again. And again.

I miss the endorphinic pulse like falling
in love, its murmuring: *Forget all*

*that's ended, what's been taken away,
what you may never have. Forget those*

*who leave that you wanted to stay.
Here's unending sweetness, the reward*

for all you didn't, but would have, done.
In exile, I've relearned feeling, as one

newly paralyzed concentrates on places
not gone numb. I miss that something

always on the tongue, the same secret
word repeatedly intoned. Like a prayer.

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MAZE

The corn is certain. A field of emphasis.
Each path could be the right one. Here, it's safe
to be lost. The sun shines. I hold a bag of pink
cotton candy. Far off are voices, pumpkins,
hay rides. What if it were not a game?
I go deeper, turn toward instead of away,
find an empty circle of broken stalks, a snake
skeleton in a jumble—bleached spine, whiteout
necklace of bone—a question I would say yes
to before my name is called. These rows are like
a blizzard, sandstorm, torrential rain, blotting out
and blinding. The relief of the blank world;
too full to be filled. It's enough, the sun cracking
over this dead dimension of fractured lines
misleading the way back. The deceptive
order. I'm not empty, not buried. But not alive.

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THE CREAM PITCHER

I've been waking earlier
to not lose too much of the day

to other people. I sit in the quiet
dark of the kitchen and add cream

to my black tea. Before, steeped
to near bitterness and thick

with sugar, now with just
a generous pour from a small blue

pitcher that nestles in my palm,
a roundness that narrows

and crests to a scalloped spout.
A bird lifting its head to call

the day from an aura of indigo.
I don't have to know its other lives.

It has the silence of what is made
by hand to last and passed on.

I want to be kind to this person
I am now, who needs the pitcher.

Give her mornings. Give her cream.
It's not beginning again. But it is.

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THE BIRDS COME BACK

I hear them bickering
as they did before I cut down
the monster mulberry.

Fat brown wrens have found
the new bamboo fence. Perched
in a row, they break off pieces,

pass them to the next bird
in the brigade, and the last flies
to its nest in someone else's tree.

More than a year has gone by
without them. The yard forsaken,
a silence I took personally.

At most a flyover as they confirmed
the absence of a place to land.
I stand in tears at the kitchen door,

their bubbles and churrs a recovered
language I don't need to understand
to know I am forgiven.

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