

Lists - I

Sunrise will be a minute earlier than yesterday, but who would know it now, at seven, the blue gray white landscape shut down, shut in, glazed, no hills beyond the trees. Fine snow coats alleys, sidewalks, a treacherous layer. Is there a woman with my eyes who watches sunrise in Gaza, Kabul, Cali, Baghdad? A shred of yellow light breaks over the hill, the whole sky's astream with a flickering torrent, blackbirds, a caucus of geese congregating over the cornfields. Days I go through patches of despair about my work, frustration at the snow, ice that keeps me from my walk, unease over my thinning hair, my ill-fitting skin. What an abyss between these or even darker pangs – fear for my husband's heart, grief at my brother's death – and the suffering lives of others: cold, hungry, in pain, not for an hour, a day, weeks, but all the time, frightened always. The Palestinian woman in Nablus whose hungry children are stoning Israeli troops, the widow in Somalia dying of AIDS, the mother of a Sunni family in a Shiite neighborhood of Iraq. The list doesn't end. We want to make the world be what we want of it. Today I miss the herons, cows, fishermen, constant birds, the pincushion island in mist, the mysterious lights downriver: the machinery of morning that sustains me. This catalogue of lack tells me what, justly privileged, I own.

Lists - II

Home. My window. My landscape, the creek's high, a glimmering band but under the rain its color is mud. It rained during the night but doesn't now. The weather changes, the war news, the landscape of dreams. An insect on the glass in front of me is slowly turning, twitching fragile feelers. I come home to a wilted clutch of flowers, to melted snow, to messages and stacks of newspaper. The lists and the undone. I need to clean my house. I need to prune the rose. I need to salve some part of myself that is raw and smarting. My mulch pile is six scoops, six weeks of labor. It's all to do. How can I ignore the war? I think of the pieces the Times ran after nine-eleven: terse sketches of each victim's life. We need a world in which every life is cherished this way: the Palestinian boys throwing stones at tanks that shoot them down, the bride and groom in Afghanistan whose wedding party we bomb "by mistake", an Iraqi child dying for lack of a drug sanctions bar. These tags are not the answer. The light this morning is creamy, pale, a color a world away from winter. I can't name it. It is hopeful and misleading as spring.

Lists - III

The date's a sentence that can be parsed: pattern, symmetry, sequence. Can I parse the sky this morning, its complex syntax of cirrocumulus suggestions? The sunlight's breaking, broken. Light on the hills is thinner than yesterday's illumination. The flooding creek is still out of its banks, but lower. An impulse to measure, mark: the river the rain the times of sunrise sunset. I don't know how to take in the fact that we are at war: overreaching, aggressor, outlaw. In the garden snowdrops and trash, hyacinth heads pushing up like green tops of wooden newels, elaborately carved. Bleeding heart, rhubarb are purple and red punctuation: commas, parentheses, stops. Day is a sharp break from dream, a door shutting. If I had to invent what I dreamt, I'd say mothering and the Antipodes. April's forecast is rain, surges of heat and cold: weather tempered to my own. I know what I'm ignoring, what I don't want to know. I'm appalled, ashamed. Spring doesn't give a damn. Overnight robins arrive, fat and bold and omnipresent. Lilac, dogwood in bud, crocus blooming, the shell-shaped leaves of columbine splay out over moldy oak leaves, dead grass. Under the stalks of last year's sedum, this year's leaves are curled, tight green cabbage roses, potent, oblivious.

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