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## Convertible Night, Flurry of Stones

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# The Radiologist

*after Franz Kafka*

He calls again to confirm what's already been confirmed.

*You do not have to leave the room.*

Still, he's hungry for conversation—as if you'd become his friend

*Remain standing in your place and listen.*

over the stiff shot of bad news. You have to listen to him

*Do not even listen, simply wait.*

fearful he'll add centimeters to the tumor, just to be safe.

*Do not even wait.*

But tonight he wants you to know more: you're practically

*Be quiet, still and solitary.*

neighbors. And did I know, he continues, that the house

*The world will freely offer itself to you*

with the 35 acres, just off the town's most desirable street,

*To be unmasked.*

was his. Isn't it a coincidence that his daughter, too,

*It has no choice.*

is a writer. Only she's with a bigger, New York City house.

*It will roll in ecstasy at your feet.*

Maybe I'd like to buy a signed copy of her book someday.

*You do not have to leave the room.*

Everything's blessed and enlarged in his family's life:

*Remain standing in your place and listen.*

his daughter's gratitude for wildflowers, the easy country

*Do not even listen, simply wait.*

she grew up in, his immeasurable love for her.

*Do not even wait.*

And all I want to ask again is *just how big* and if he's completely certain.  
*Be quiet, still and solitary.*

But he's through talking and hangs up.  
*The world will freely offer itself to you*

If it wasn't for my love of God, his mud-soft meadows,  
*To be unmasked.*

I'd drive my green Ford through the doctor's brambles and dead ends,  
*It has no choice.*

I'd find his blossoming daughter  
*It will roll in ecstasy at your feet.*

and take her life.

# Losing My Hair

It fills my hand  
like a small animal,  
species unknown.

I could name it,  
close my eyes, rub it gently  
against my face

tangled in my fingers,  
soft as silk from a cornfield.

*Look, look*—I call to my husband  
carrying it down the stairs.

Not that I wasn't warned by doctors  
that one day I'd find it  
on my pillows,  
in the drain,  
on my plate,  
in my food.

That morning it started to snow,  
nothing that'd cover the ground well enough—

black splintered branches,  
strewn all over the yard,

neither wind nor trees.

\*\*\*

I couldn't bear to wrap it in toilet paper,  
throw it out.

I carried some strands to the woods,  
spread them on the ground

for the birds to lift  
into their nests.

I placed some more strands  
in an empty hornet's nest,

its gray center welcoming  
my hand.

The hornets were gone,  
but the birds might come back.

I wrapped the last few strands with some horsehair I'd kept.  
A few thick pieces of a black mane

I'd pulled riding once, out of fear.

\*\*\*

Donna, the hairstylist, turns on  
the electric clippers,  
says *Hon, do me a favor*  
*and close your eyes.*

She's tall, heavy,  
and sweet as sugar,  
hair a teased peroxide  
blond beehive.

Over the phone she'd said  
not to worry about anything,

they had wigs—  
they would play with me.

\*\*\*

The first wig makes me look  
like an airline ticketing agent.

The second one drives a school bus.  
The third one, curling around my mouth,

wants sex. That one couldn't be worn  
near an open oven door.

The dark one, like my mother's hair,  
loves the rain,

travels well in a small box.  
Donna says *Try this human hair,*

*it fits like a silk glove.*  
But it's short, thick, Oriental hair,

a gold medallist, figure skater's hair.  
Donna says the reason my complexion looks so sallow

is because of all the chemo.  
I leave the yellow of her fitting room.

Sweeping the floor  
around my chair, Donna says

*After the eyelashes and eyebrows go,  
your eyes will need more bang.*

## Nude Descending

Be broken in bright light,  
a drain in your back, your body  
releasing its deepest red,  
a cardinal opening a wing  
within. Halved, one side soft,  
the other, a scar running  
like a railroad track up to your underarm  
where your life was spared, that open  
field of broken glass and bad boys  
who'd slit anyone's skin just for the thrill,  
just as the doctor appeared, asked you  
to count backwards. Be shattered  
walking the hospital corridor, slowly,  
as each nurse changes her face, name,  
smiles and pretends to know you.  
Be just at the top of God knows what list,  
turn toward a mirror and see all fire,  
know your name spills like coal.  
Be broken in your car, watch  
the light snowfall gather  
on the car's hood, disappear;  
dream of eating only air.  
Stand at the top of the stairs,  
in light falling from the high window.  
Be fractured, discharged, come down  
lightly as the first snowfall  
white points, torches in your hands.

## Good Cells

Make them as true as Father  
pointing to heaven knowing  
he's left no one behind,  
tenacious as my mother  
looking out a window at a lone  
resident tree. Hand her a paintbrush.  
Let her drag its bristled hair  
across a white page.  
Let them carry my husband's  
snow-dampened wood,  
be the passing flickering flashlight.  
Let them be my son  
and my daughter, the scent of white soap.  
Let them be my working dog, Laika,  
the flurry of stones as we walked.  
Let them sound for my sister  
Monday's church bells,  
a piano's felt-covered hammers,  
her husband's throat, nine years cancer-free.  
Let them carry light suitcases  
to my nephew and niece  
in industrious cities,  
where they may  
applaud fruit ripening on a table  
without its tree.