Grieving

The door opens to light weak as watered sun
She lowers herself as though wounded
into a chair

She has written strange letters accusing
the doctors the hospital  The man in the coffin
was grim-faced  My husband
was gentle
You listen helpless while she chases
her conspiracy tale
The ragged scrap story
whirls round like a dust devil
and slams shut all possible doors
till the room has collapsed
suddenly silent and close as a breathless lung
In her fear she is wearing
the grim face her husband —
No  Never

Her husband was gentle
and vanished impossibly
cleansed of all shadow
like a letter unwriting itself
like a bed sheet unwrinkling

and you are a weak door
she opens and closes again
There is only this wounded light
left to grieve for the body
Reproduction in the Kingdom

Back at the office
every form on my desk has reproduced
slyly, like the secret agents of Xerox,
Persian king of the twentieth century,
who extends his dominion
by the endless multiplication of edicts

Over the copier I lean
like a modern Narcissus
cloning myself in 8 1/2 by 11.
I am two-dimensional
man. At the press of a button
I can cancel
I can cancel
all special features

It's my job to paper over the cracks in the system
to advance the cause of the duplicate universe
which we're asked to inhabit
gratefully
gratefully
in place of the torn original

The Coming of Spring

From Port-of-Spain
to the snow
he has come to be burned
clean with radiation,
rescued by poisons.
The hollows of his eyes
are deep pools of faith.
Chin whiskers
like fine black grass
sprout hopefully.

His words have a soft
island music. My country
he whispers
is a beautiful place
so very beautiful.

They drain his blood
for evidence. Under the microscope,
an aerial photo of islands.
Malignant invasion.
Against the white pillow  
his dark gleaming skull  
is sculpted  
smooth,  
         imperceptibly  
closer to final perfection.  
Into his ears, the Walkman is chanting  
Koran: In the name of Allah  
the compassionate,  
the merciful. . . .

Living with Cancer
The new patient is appalled at the gallows humor before the meeting starts.  
Loose talk about death  
has spooked him, driven him  
to the edge  
of our circle, where he whispers to his wife  
about leaving early  
Newly hired, I'm here to observe the human chemistry, as the group administers a dose  
of distilled experience.  
Cancer is alive in the room, yet the laughing presence  
of 10- and 12-year veterans  
confounds the man's fear.  
When I started work, someone issued me  
a daybook. Religiously, I snip  
a corner off each clean page  
to be always in the present, to feel the edge  
of the cut day against my thumb, and know I am right  
where I belong.  

Tomorrow, we will spread  
out in a bigger building, my office  
one cell in a growing cancer  
clinic. Like the stranger tonight, I'm new  
to this disease, but as a comfort  
an old hand assures me  
we will soon be  
well acquainted.
Chances Are

Remember how I love you
sounded when my voice was all gravel and smoke?
Rougher than a stretch of dirt road in summer. Soon
it was less than a croak, just a dry
whisper like dust settling after
the car's gone by. I told you then
Tenderness is hard.

Before they cut out the voice
box, a pretty girl came by
with a book of comforting
words. It had sketches
of a man and a woman embracing, and it said
if you loved me before
chances are you would love me
again. Words, it seems, are just vibrating air
given pretty shape in a mouth. Perhaps I can learn
to burp I love you into your ear. If not,
I can buy a machine
that vibrates love
and rage and singing
into one robotic monotone of loss

Choose wisely for them.

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