

*Jean*

Forest risen in your kitchen,

“who is close to me?”

pine flesh,  
tea on my breath  
tea on your breath.

I bent to your table, you have ‘Bells in Winter’ by Milosz  
“do I know him, am I supposed to  
know him?”

*Think*, there must be muscular grace  
where you are, insistently singing your name,  
what you gave, still...

yes...

falling, after the breath  
beyond what I know.

“Come here, by the stove,  
make the silver-tipped tea you brought”  
(J.V.)

This hour,  
you take with you our years that now undress,  
silk cloth you stitched to  
my skin.

Thaw, unruly fog that  
leaves remarks on my face –

turns me away from  
the way a meadow waves.

Let me tell you our tale in verse,  
book of howling songs we penned,

you beside me...

Am I wise in your transit?

Memory-blessing upon your vow to silence dread,  
for when I turn out my light:

“eighth floor window without bars  
subway tracks in front of the M train  
the slick knife”

how the street darkens, night becomes bright,  
wind above my roof, the moon beneath quickened words  
in my mouth...

On Jean's death: I listen  
to Yo Yo Ma's insistent cello

Rachel skitters up your holy  
mountain, heaves me  
against the tree-line of heavy  
pines, drags me in and back,  
never quite within my sight

brushes my blistering mind across your lips.

I envy you,  
rough salt on my lashes  
spills over with prayer  
that is not mine,

streaks my eyes  
with divine praise for

this hefty bow dancing  
in the master's fingers.

*On the Death of Jean Valentine,  
Listening to Bach's Cello Suite I in G Major*

A bending knee sways from east to the west side of my mind  
and your many shadows arrange themselves around me;

crook of your arm, the pale elbow leaning against my water pitcher,  
my patience, your moon.

This loamy earth opens its gullies and lakes for you,  
measures your soul from the center of the world out

past my azaleas, pink and white,  
blended in a May planting years ago.

Morning rises, is a sole cello, weeps for Bach  
from a blank score I found beneath my pillow,  
so many fingertips are singed . . .

*songs songs songs songs*

flutter about your quieted hands,  
nod with the sky, roll through the ripples of grace.

“oh-Oh” from the wild trumpeting swans in hushed water,  
rush of air sailing past before my rippling eyes

traces the bumps of my spine. Time  
to tie up the distance my boat travels on this lake.

I cannot name the shade of white on your doorstep  
because inside this room my whiplash howls.

