

## APPROACHING THE SOLSTICE, HARD DARK OF DECEMBER

The cardio-tech roots around  
    my rib cage,  
my arm pit, under my breast—  
    she even has a drop  
section on the table so she  
    can press her wand  
on me from underneath.  
    My husband is threatening  
to leave again. My chest is  
    crushing itself.

I debrief with Ness  
    in her parked car  
outside the Friday night meeting.  
    She says it's always  
hard after marriage counseling  
    when the husband wins.  
She is smoking a Spirit cigarette  
    out the driver's side  
window. I sit in a cloud  
    on my side.

I sent my boyfriend away.  
    I told him he was  
underdressed.  
    Nessy says I wasn't  
wrong, that flimsy  
    leather jacket. He's not my  
boyfriend. He is the person  
    I avoid being in dark  
parking lots with. He is  
    the person in whose arms  
I have found myself before  
    I could think.

Like heading for the trot  
    poles, in two strides, at  
a fast trot, at an angle—in order  
    to reverse direction and  
canter to the right—  
    and hitting the hard  
ground on my bad hip,  
    violently.  
The second, white, pole  
    shining in the late sun.

I didn't register. The leap  
    he took. I was up,  
in the post, at a slant,  
    and then "Shit!"—  
on the ground.

Ness does me  
a golden favor by pointing  
    out that Jason  
has roses embroidered  
    on the back of his jeans  
below the belt;  
    she makes a face. She  
tells me right after she's  
    driven me to my  
car, before I get out.  
    So I won't spend  
the night dreaming  
    about him.

My husband  
    does not understand  
that not being able to go to the barn  
    and ride the two beasts,  
the older one who got cranked up  
    and spooked at the white pole—  
the time had changed, there was  
    a breeze, the sun was low—  
and the feather-light young  
    one who last raced a year ago—  
has crushed my spirit.  
    That reviving my imagined  
love affair (injury and surgery are  
    a language my boyfriend  
can understand), and blowing  
    up at my husband  
after crashing out  
    of the heavy opiates they  
gave me in the ER, and acting bad  
    everywhere,  
and sitting in a parked car  
    inhaling second-hand smoke  
from Nessy's cigarette—  
    are my oxygen.  
My light.

## MAP OF BROKEN GLASS

*Map of Broken Glass* (Atlantis)  
Robert Smithson  
Dia Art Foundation  
Beacon, NY

Not only did they cut the huge graceful sideways  
spreading maple, home of my personal bird, the robin,  
    and limb by limb with their woodchipper  
leave just the abraded red stump—thinking that  
    they had cleaned the evidence—they left a huge octopus  
smear on the street, an organic bloody stain, from  
the struggle and thrashing  
    of limbs against  
    saw and chipper.  
It never dawned on me that  
    the workers were there  
    to perform this murder, until they  
drove with their spoils away.

It couldn't have come on a worse day. Already, I was  
    pawing through fields and carpets of  
cut glass. Already I'd rear-ended  
someone—why was I so close  
to that little blue car—why did I back up, drive  
    off, even though the blue car crossed a lane of traffic  
    to go into Starbucks, doubtless shocked I left the  
scene, went to the CVS  
drive-up where I sat guilt-free, eating my kale and  
    portabella egg bites, staring at the  
    driver who'd pulled up sideways,  
as in *Dragnet*, behind me—because wasn't  
    life itself already enough?

I felt like I was sitting  
    in the middle of the Map of Broken Glass  
I'd once seen at Dia long  
    ago and still had the postcard of. I hadn't  
thought of it in years, though I should have,  
    as I saw this piece on a trip to Dia  
in Beacon with my husband, for whom . . .

My mother adored the Steuben cut glass bowl from  
    Carolyn Schultz that I eventually  
    was given, along with the vase, that  
I received when my mother died. My mother and I drove past

the mental institution on Something Avenue  
in the bleak gray of Philadelphia winter,  
shards of glass jutting from  
the top of the wall.

After my husband told me he was leaving  
I shouldn't have been amazed  
when my dead mother started  
speaking out.

After all, when alive, she'd methodically  
cut Kurt's face out of every picture in our family  
album after he moved to  
Boston to live with his Maria—for quite a while  
I puzzled over the fact that the photos  
in that album were all so jaggedly  
shaped.

Once, I later discovered, she  
cut her wedding dress

into pieces and laid them out neatly  
in a pile in the attic—  
after a fight with my father, I presume. I grew  
up thinking all wedding dresses  
were deconstructed thus.

The first thing she broke was a glass dinner plate  
she had given me.  
It's a kind of  
tempered glass and nearly  
impossible to break, hence the explosion and the  
thousands of pieces in the stovetop burner indents,  
all over the granite countertop, the floor.  
I'd put a hot spatula on the plate, which I'd done literally thousands  
of times before,  
between flipping pancakes.  
And then boom.

A glass bottle of blueberry juice. Boom.  
The ceramic bread "basket" she'd loved –  
Boom.

After he left, my husband came over for some business-  
something. He stood in the kitchen  
and the trout in the oven caught fire, its shiny  
eye and noble head, and the smoke  
alarm started screaming and wouldn't stop.

My watch alarm blared through the whole last

marriage counseling appointment in which  
he suddenly revealed that he had been  
lying for the better part of two and a half  
years.

And like the tiny maple seeds that fell when I was planting  
and hitchhiked in on basil leaves  
and ripe tomatoes two months later, my mother hitchhiked

into the settlement conference. She clung  
to my neck on a string of pearls  
she had given me. At the preliminary hearing,  
her Italian lira had attended on a gold chain  
(though I almost never wore that thing, especially not  
in summer).

I hadn't seen her in years, when I came out of a meditation,  
and she stood, or sat rather, in a contemporary  
floral print blouse or shirtwaist, ramrod straight  
as usual  
off a ways but looking  
at me.

And then a moment later, I was in  
my childhood bedroom with the flowered ceiling from fifty years ago. I can't remember  
ever having  
returned in that way. With the china horses grazing and drowsing in the  
bookshelf.

How did glass get to be the field of my desire? How did  
my vagina, now  
a shark's mouth,  
the rocky pointed opening as in an amethyst crystal  
to the world's center  
roiling entrance to the other world?

Naturopath Deb gives me  
ignatia amara homeopathic remedy for  
extreme grief. Because every time she  
has talked with me,  
I am on repeat. Each new man  
brings the same terror.

She keeps using the word  
"reset." I wonder if it is like micro-dosing  
LSD. Kaleidoscopic. She says it contains a particular poison  
in miniscule amounts,  
something that would make  
me cry, but only for brief moments,

squalls in a  
fast-moving sky.

## I LIE SUPINE

So this is what we did yesterday during our 26 hour power outage to keep Sully, our African Spurred Tortoise as warm as we could. He was packed in a cage with straw and candles provided heat. Tortoises normally have an area of 90\* temps but with no heat on the temps had rapidly declined. Fortunately he emerged from the cage this morning on his own power as the temps slowly rise [sic] in his room. Power outages seriously affect how we can take care of all our turtles and Sully. AND at 160 lbs and stubborn as all get out, he's not the easiest thing to move around! Kudos to Denise for getting him in that cage!!

Wildcat Creek Wildlife Center, Face Book post, 3/17/21

on a heated massage table Paula is running a motorized suction cup across my face  
pulling out each lip one section at a time but that does not stop

me from talking in detail about the vaccine shot debacle  
my dizziness and *brain fog* my flare getting off my RA drugs after

my illness getting back on in seven days my complete subsequent screw-up of  
the interview afterwards in Indy where I could not stop talking

about the geese I'd seen on the road on my way in and the birds in my back yard  
chatting and making nests and finally remembering to ask Paula

about the animals at the Wildlife Refuge shelter where she volunteers  
and then I learn Sully the African Spurred Tortoise who weighs

160 pounds was in trouble they had to think of a way to keep the temperature in  
his cage at fifty degrees or above overnight with no heat

I have already told her how the situation of the vaccination somehow got me out  
of denial and I realized that my husband would not be there for me

would never be there for me that his attention is on the other woman that I  
mother of his children wife of thirty-four years

who followed him to this Godforsaken place so that he could have the  
exciting job am not front of mind back of mind in his mind how

did Sully tropical tortoise end up in Indiana I ask her and she says  
he was found just walking down the road someone had

probably gotten him when he was little and cute from an exotic pet shop and had  
not bothered to check how big he would get and just turned him

out when grown up to certain death which is how the refuge got him  
someone brought him in I say it's like his abandonment

just cancels out the 34-year life together everything kind he ever did for me that  
the whole center of my life is a blank and Paula says no wonder

you are angry you're going to feel this for a long time and she has already finished  
with my face and standing behind where I am lying on the table puts

her hands on my shoulders like she always does and waits waits till she feels me  
exhale sigh I'm not sure receive her grace Paula who nurses

dozens and dozens of bunnies in the spring who have lost their mothers hooking them up  
to bottles and is hardly allowed to touch them so that when they are older

she can turn them back knowing what to do in this verdant glorious world.



## WEEPING CHERRY

They actually have a kind of oiled  
raincoat, coated in wax  
or something. Really disgusting.  
I could have used it  
yesterday in the rain.  
“Fear of lubrication,”  
something I always chanted at my  
husband. The scant  
clump of toothpaste on his  
brush, he never  
ate butter. Since he left  
I’ve made butter  
the lynchpin of my diet. Everybody’s  
after me. The Noom  
people. (Why is my weight  
not going down?) The  
nutritionist my doctor wants  
me to see *weekly*. My husband  
ate those awful grains too—the ones  
I’m going to be made  
to eat. Kasha, which I referred  
to as dirt. Millet. What  
the fuck *are* those? Don’t forget  
the dry and dusty  
quinoa.

I rode the macadam  
trail next to 231 North straight uphill  
in the driving rain. During  
a break a precious few plumped-up  
red-winged blackbirds  
at the top of their tiny trees,  
resuming their dating site  
preening—at least three mates per  
season.

The rain got so bad I started  
reviewing the History of  
Boyfriends. Let’s just say,  
in hindsight, the whole  
thing looked rather tawdry.  
But I was fond of them all.  
Each with an incredible  
grief I could not touch.

What I needed was raccoon grease,  
or vernix. When the raccoons  
came, of course I didn't recognize  
it. It had been days since  
Felicia's feral cat Horace Silver had  
vacated the premises;  
still there was smeary  
scat by the shower,  
and back behind the furnace.  
And over by the bookshelf,  
defined black turds. There was  
the other mystery I'd  
been contemplating for days:  
I almost called Felicia  
to ask if Horace  
was toilet trained. God knows  
what black grainy thing in the depths  
of the toilet. The muddy,  
indeterminate paw prints  
on the seat. And in  
the water bowl I set out for  
my cats, more black grit.  
The cat chow wiped clean  
from the bowls—but my  
cats are pigs. And the big plastic-coated  
chow bag wide open  
on its side like somebody  
had been in there. Plus  
vicious rips in the smaller paper  
chow bags. I thought  
Whose teeth are those?  
"Raccoons," Felicia said.  
She gave me the number  
for Wildlife Something.

When "Critter Control"  
came over, eventually,  
after much photographing of the roof  
and prowling around the  
basement, Floyd, the "technician,"  
with my help, homed in on  
the giant stove pipe hole in the chimney  
right above the water softener.  
He still tried to make it sound  
like I was imagining—  
until he found the striped hair  
at the lip—and the cute

tell-tale paw prints on the washing  
machine. He was also  
called Little Floyd. From a whole line  
of Floyds. I had to talk  
with him after to smooth over his  
oversight. A story  
which my husband would have enjoyed  
while making his renowned  
shrimp tempura, his baby blue Bad-to-the-Bone  
Nick's Seafood tee-shirt still  
somehow spotless. Floyd/Little Floyd  
told me that they slide up and down  
the chimney on their greasy  
pelts, love to splash around  
in water.

The fact that he took  
his lubricant, what of it  
there was—his magic—over  
to that other woman—velvety and  
fifteen years younger  
than me, so that they  
could shine and  
slide together.

Churning up the 231 hill  
on my red bike in my soaked  
lavender windbreaker—neither  
warm nor waterproof—they  
discontinued those.  
My visor cap under my helmet,  
ha ha. Glasses sluiced  
with rainwater. Lucy, my daughter,  
told me she once  
had a bio teacher  
who felt so depleted  
doing field research in the  
Alaskan tundra she  
ate a whole stick of butter.

I'm flunking Noom of course.  
There are so many little  
subtle ways to cheat.  
Who knew, for example, that  
our pal Mediterrean-diet-  
olive oil contained so many calories?  
How am I supposed  
to be able to guesstimate

the number  
of tablespoons I'm eating? The Noom  
people are so generous. They "trust"  
my self-report. And vegan butter—  
forget it!—it's like  
softer, lighter lard, but  
isn't the whole  
point that it's cholesterol-free?

I thought of that woman this  
winter. My bones getting  
sharper and sharper.

After I'd completed my review  
of men over by  
Walmart and was finally  
on the last leg  
on Robertson—wait,  
Sycamore?—I saw,  
by a house, in my favorite  
neighborhood, which  
seems to be east Asian—Indian—  
I've decided, because  
I've seen so many people  
in beautiful silk saris  
carrying food that smells  
good to me. Curry, masala,  
cashews . . . the blossoming trees  
and birds talking  
to me. Huge sprays of  
white blossoms.  
By a little house, a one-story  
house, greenish I think,  
on the right, the most glorious  
weeping cherry. Pink fluffy petals  
in an otherworldly cascade. Hovering  
in bunches in midair, caught  
suspended in their falling.

When Eleanor, my older daughter,  
was being born, on her trail of snail slime, the vernix,  
my husband's pupils were  
dilated. He looked like a dog  
caught in someone's headlights  
on a country road at night. I'll never forget  
his face as he sat on the rim of the  
tub, with me on the toilet  
after the hours of horrendous

labor, of transition, during  
    which my blood pressure  
soared—I might have passed out for a bit—the nurse  
    Sarah urging me not to rest then,  
to push. He would have  
    done it himself if  
he could.

My husband was magic. With  
his grains and his Waldorf salads. With  
    his cheese soufflé that  
never fell. I can only tell you that  
    now because when I got  
home shivering, put my red bike in the garage,  
    wiped it off with a rag,  
brought in several pieces of wood for  
    the stove, there  
was a note, a text I got so  
    absorbed in I turned around  
after reading it and saw both Horace  
    Silver and Fats Domino,  
the other tortoise, standing in my open  
    sliding door as if to come  
in. From my long unseen lover  
    who said my life  
was beautiful and that I should  
    tell you about  
the tree.