

DEARLY

It's an old word, fading now.
Dearly did I wish.
Dearly did I long for.
I loved him dearly.

I make my way along the sidewalk
mindfully, because of my wrecked knees
about which I give less of a shit
than you may imagine
since there are other things, more important—
wait for it; you'll see

bearing half a coffee
in a paper cup with—
dearly do I regret it—
a plastic lid—
trying to remember what words once meant.

Dearly.
How was it used?
Dearly beloved.
Dearly beloved, we are gathered.
Dearly beloved, we are gathered here
in this forgotten photo album
I came across recently.

Fading now,
the sepias, the black and whites, the colour prints,
everyone so much younger.
The Polaroids.
What is a Polaroid? asks the newborn,
Newborn a decade ago.

How to explain?
You took the picture and then it came out the top.
The top of what?
It's that baffled look I see a lot.
So hard to describe
the smallest details of how—
all these dearly gathered together—
of how we used to live.
We wrapped up garbage

in newspaper tied with string.
What is newspaper?
You see what I mean.

String though, we still have string.
It links things together.
A string of pearls.
That's what they would say.
How to keep track of the days?
Each one shining, each one alone,
each one then gone.
I've kept some of them in a drawer on paper,
those days, fading now.
Beads can be used for counting.
As in rosaries.
But I don't like stones around my neck.

Along this street there are many flowers,
fading now because it is August
and dusty, and heading into fall.
Soon the chrysanthemums will bloom,
flowers of the dead, in France.
Don't think this is morbid.
It's just reality.

So hard to describe the smallest details of flowers.
This is a stamen, nothing to do with men.
This is a pistil, nothing to do with guns.
It's the smallest details that foil translators
and myself too, trying to describe.
See what I mean.
You can wander away. you can get lost.
Words can do that.

Dearly beloved, gathered here together
in this closed drawer,
fading now, I miss you.
I miss the missing, those who left earlier
I miss even those who are still here.
I miss you all dearly.
Dearly do I sorrow for you.

Sorrow: that's another word
you don't hear much any more.

I sorrow dearly.

Betrayal

When you stumble across your lover and your friend
naked in or on your bed
there are things that might be said.

Goodbye is not one of them.
You'll never close that clumsily opened door,
they'll be stuck in that room forever.

But did they have to be so naked?
So minus grace?
Floundering around as if in a spring puddle?

The legs too spindly, the waists too thick,
the flubbers here and there,
the tufts of hair . . .

yes, it was a betrayal,
but not of you.
Only of some idea you'd had

of them, soft-lit and mystic,
with snowfall sifting down
and a mauve December sunset—

not this gauche flash,
this flesh akimbo,
caught in the glare of your stare.

OH CHILDREN

Oh children, will you grow up in a world without birds?
Will there be crickets, where you are?
Will there be asters?
Clams, at a minimum.
Maybe not clams.

We know there will be waves.
Not much life needed for those.
A breeze, a storm, a cyclone.
Ripples, as well. Stones.
Stones are consoling.

There will be sunsets, as long as there is dust.
There will be dust.

Oh children, will you grow up in a world without songs?
Without pines, without mosses?

Will you spend your life in a cave,
a sealed cave with an oxygen line,
until there's a power failure?
Will your eyes blank out like the eggwhite eyes
of sunless fish?
In there, what will you wish for?

Oh children, will you grow up in a world without ice?
Without mice, without lichens?

Oh children, will you grow up?

Emptiness

If there were no emptiness, there would be no life.
Think about it.
All those electrons, particles, and whatnot
crammed in next to each other like junk in an attic,
like trash in a compactor
smashed together in a flat block
so there's nothing but plasma:
no you no me.

Therefore I praise vacancy.
Vacant lots with their blowing plastics and teasels,
vacant houses, their furze of dust,
vacant stares, blue as the sky through windows.
Motels with the word *Vacancy*
flashing outside, a neon arrow pointing,

pointing at the path to be taken
to the bored front desk, to the key-shaped key
on the dangling brown leather key holder,

the key that opens the vacant room
with its scored linoleum floor a blear-eyed yellow
its flowery couch and wilted cushions
its swaybacked bed, smelling of bleach and mildew
its stuttering radio
its ashtray that was here
seventy years ago.

That room has been static for me so long:
an emptiness a void a silence
containing an unheard story
ready for me to unlock.

Let there be plot.