

Richard Solly

The Blossom and the Coffin

—for Ted

1.

It could be you
wincing at the sun,
pulling the visor down
and tuning the radio.
How often you reached
your stubby thumb
and finger to adjust
the treble, like I do now,
resonating with memory.

The speakers
out at your farmhouse
have their mouths wide open
and full
on your front porch:

Liszt is playing
St. Francis on a piano
in a concert hall,
or is the piano out there
in the pasture
where the music fills
the alfalfa field
and you walk
in rippling purple flowers
and a crescendo
of wind ruffles your long
black hair.
The cows follow you, moo
double bass in the moonlight
as they cross the lucern
into rows of corn.
The stalks are clefs
marking a path for your soul,
for the beasts.

Solly

We are stunned by the piano
that has brought us here,
playing now
in the thirteenth century.
We live everywhere
all at once.

2.
As I drive past
your house, I see us
up on the roof, hammers
hung from our pants' loops
and you, under your blue sky
challenging God
to a theological debate,
believing in music,
not prayer, while we shingle
to Beethoven on the radio
propped against the chimney.

You climb up here,
a Jacob's ladder
in every rung,
but still insist paradise
is held in your hand,
the grooved handle
to your hammer,
or smelled in the bushes
of lilacs, heard when Chagall
plays a violin in his bathtub.

Here, at the peak
of the roof, you only need
to stand, you say,
to touch the sky,
see there is no afterlife.
Joy is a plum tree in the yard,
fuchsia blossoms on earth.

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3.

This pine tree I drive past
every Tuesday morning
could be the tree
you pointed out to me
in Montana
along the Bitterroot River
when our twenty year old bodies
drank from the rivers
of the Rockies.

Ponderosa, you said.

And there, too, you pointed,
calling the crocus a haiku,
the first wildflower
that spring.

I may still have years
to walk that trail
we took into Patti Canyon
before I understand
what that moment is
before your eyes close
and you are done with living.

You know what it is like
to be a child again
swinging on vines, bending
the boughs of a tree,
and at the same time
to be able to let go
of candlelight,
the tender flowers
that blossomed
all through your life.

In one glance, you see
how the blossom
and the coffin
come from the same tree.