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The Quickness of Things

How suddenly the heart recoils
from what it’s fed on for 14 years:
embraces stiffen, heads avert,
and for what? One day the taste of something
just sickens – the scrambled eggs will not stay
down, and the rest of your life you avoid
anything to do with chickens. Or say
the spacious ash-blue boring sky
of August turns black! blotted out
by endless avenues of geese that lengthen
out of nowhere, where the geese
have been slowly gathering.
And even in a particularly sticky
season of heat, it can take less
than a second for air to come clean,
sweet among smatters of rain.
Of course it’s been coming all along,
that’s what gets you, and this time
you’re standing in an overly familiar
crowded room when this distinctly new face
appears, Cheshire-style; no warning
this will be the core of your known
universe from now on, on into marriage
and so on until you one day discover
how few seconds it takes your now
husband, who knows you didn’t really mean
what you just said, to say what
makes you wince or sob for years
until you leave him abruptly for no one
after washing the dishes, even then
wondering whether he meant it, whether
maybe you should have meant
what provoked it. There’s no telling
how proudly you can carry sorrow
for months, months, not stooping
to spill a drop,
and one night it’s too late
for the news, a movie comes on –
maudlin beyond belief, with formulaic
mournful speeches, rueful gazes,
boats that are missed or, worse,
taken, handkerchiefs waving
too late to be seen – and there,
now you’re crying, you idiot, you fool.
How quickly then your heart recalls
what it forgot.

How soon after
someone is shaking you by the shoulder:
*Wake up, wake up, you’re in love with me!*
And sure enough it’s true;
for a year or two This is it,
coffee and smiles all day Sunday,
this is the life; this is
the morning you’re calmly getting out
of your paid-for Pontiac and there’s
the corner of a note wedged in the crease
of the seat, the anonymous note
you’ve been sitting on blithely
for who knows how long. You reach down
and hope it’s not for you.
(It’s for you.)

So here come
the bad dreams, though you know
from experience that surely,
one day soon, the bad dreams, too,
will go. They go. For years
they’re gone. How quickly then the gods
are heard to laugh, somewhere
very close to your face,
as they plant the impossible obstacle,
poise the last straw, fling
only the richest kind of mud –
like the peeled-off red sweatshirt,
tossed wildly into your arms
by a child going by on his bike
for one more race downhill,
which becomes the last
warm thing of his you'll touch.