

Do you know why we call them veins,
the rivers that wheel beneath
the earth, returning—do they return,
people suddenly beyond arm's
or prayer's length, who leave
sidereal handprints in the tide's blind haul,
who leave their looks
of longing on our faces, their lives
like the white streaks of stars
on hourlong exposures.

The body of darkness begins its long walk
across the water, its palms held out,
as a snow owl disappears
into the full half of the moon.
How many wings between you & this moon,
how many seas
between you & the other side of your life?
No answers, only moonlight
& the words for alchemy we know as *prism, daffodil bulb, longing,*
only a night like a lost scroll
spread across the dark water
& lit by a pale lantern,
a night where you're only the umbra of a letter
you've spent your life crossing out.

How often you've mistaken *want* for *need*.
Gone out with a cup of coffee
& returned with a quarter cup of rainwater.
Tasted the orange your beloved handed you before dawn
instead of her mouth,
rounded by longing,
a moment that weighs less than rain
or prayer, but the world falls away beside it.

There's a stillness inside us that the rain breaks,
a stillness broken not into noise,
but into thousands of stillnesses,
as taillights azalea the street outside in long streaks.

Though none of us deserve it,
grace says we'll each have our day,

finally redeemed when we give up
all that we have & a little more.
How else could St. Gaspare walk untouched
through the rain
(his body transfigured when it was laid down in its longing,
lighter than the catalpa blossoms)?

We lay down our prayers
as the dragonfly lays down the mile of sun
on its wings
when it alights on the water
& joins the rest of the radiance on earth—
our prayers for the missing,
who each speak the same tongue.
We lay them down as the rain passes through
their bodies & freezes, falling as the year's last snow.

Look: something from the sky
feathering down, in which to leave an earthly trace of us,
footprint, handprint, wingspan.

The world is one of three petals thrown from heaven—
we know the other two
by their brilliance,
sun & moon, by their role in each creation story.

Nowhere near what the Buddhists call Big Mind,
maybe, but a little mind of the last light:

look through the shoes hung by their laces on a telephone wire
& see a V of wild geese crossing a river
on the other side of the world,
river birches silhouetted on its banks—
until the river's untied, like a translucent obi knot,
& hung down the door of a dam.
Maybe it'll be like stepping through this cataract at the end,
when you walk away from your body,
when the wind empties your hands,
& you step through
to find a catalpa tree in bloom,
each a white knot of water tied by grace.

