

Red tulips

The eye with which I see god,

said Meister Eckhart,

is the eye with which god sees me.

Look a certain way and you will come true. Whether you like it or not.

But today I want to disappear. I'd like god to turn away. And everyone else. It feels like

there's nowhere I can practise being myself

unremarked. Like the red tulips beside the white door

near midnight,

the new moon suffused in overcast,

When I walked down here last night and no one wanted me

and I wanted no one for a full fifteen minutes.

But today the sky has organised all the order the world knows into a tender blue epiphany,

the colour of abandonment and the eyes of the actor who died the day before,

the one I always wished I looked like.

Someone else's life is always so much easier to imagine—hell, it's easier to conduct—

Than one's own. Two o'clock troubles the spring-green

grass the way the children,

rehearsing innocence in yellow trucks, break

my concentration on myself. Shadows run like ink across the fallen canvas

of the afternoon. Raven caws; magpie stalks the shopfloor with disdain; midflight, bluewren

greases the squeaking pistons of herself.

Happiness congeals in my garden, and I am exiled in it. How could anyone not want

Exactly what I have? But again today, my heart,
this dumb and faithful animal,
isn't in the same place I am. Find her and follow
her nose into the snowgums or down, perhaps, to the river; or abandon her at the roadside:
I don't know which. Or carry her home
where even those slatterns the poplars are making an effort and there are white blossoms
on the pears we savaged in the winter. If only it were their mercy I wanted.

Sometimes I worry I'll leave my best work
unsaid in my notebooks
and my real life unlived
in your heart. Or my head. One's body is congealed soul—as much of you as they'd let in
this time. Sometimes the world, sometimes a woman, feels like most of the rest of it.
But god's not letting on. She's not even looking. Sometimes
it's as much as I can do to find where I left my car. Let alone myself.

I stumble on a memory in my notebook:
two weeks back I sat reading
Matthiessen's Zen journals in the café;
a homeless bloke, crazed with grief or drugs, slid in opposite and prophesied, *If you ask for it
it comes*. And left me with my book.
Do not talk too much; listen, another teacher tells me there.
If only one knew what to ask for in silence and how to wait for it with one's whole life.

But then what would the words be for?
One feels helpless
my friend writes—and maybe *this is*
what the words are for—at *the hands of forces bigger than our will*. One feels heartache,
stumbling after the good one can hardly discern.
Fearful one will crush it. *Be generous with yourself*, my friend tells me, but I find it harder
to receive all that I'm given than to give myself away. Like the weather, I am in so many minds

At once. Words, it seems, are for prophecy,
for my family has left me
alone and I have lost myself for an hour
listening for a poem, waiting for the afternoon to shuffle past my door. Three o'clock
is on the grasses now, and it's coming from the west.
Mudlarks cavil. A single-engine Cessna carries God away. Blowflies plump with hope
gatecrash the windows of the shed. And fall through.
woodsmoke on their tail,
the taste of lewd prayers on my tongue.