

Because I love you, I love the world

I love my friend who complains
about his two-faced colleagues, then cheerfully
pats a man he despises on the back
and gives him a hearty “Good to see you.”

The neighbors’ Lab who sees me every day
but always barks at me as if I smell like Satan—
I love this dog with his big square head
and his faithful fury.

I love the young woman with the sad mouth, the nose ring,
and the tattoo, on her forearm, of a bleeding rose
who, at the grocery store, scans my spinach and my ambrosia apples
and, now, my face. She smiles. Maybe she knows
I love her.

I love the music I don’t love,
the sentimental pleas to lovers leaving,
the factory-like sounds of despair and ennui
hammered by young men whose long hair will gradually fall
from them like wild-flower petals or

leaves in autumn, which I love,
although the season smells of everything I’ve lost.
I love what I’ve lost: the children
I taught twenty years ago in Guatemala and their voices—
I hear them now as if from another room—shouting their first
English words: Hello, hello, hello,
goodbye, goodbye, goodbye;

the South Carolina waves I rode as my grandfather, white hair
like a beacon, stood on shore, scanning for sharks;
my father’s hand on my shoulder.
I love the days I didn’t know you,

when you waltzed with butterflies
in your grandmother’s Cape Town garden
and spoke to them in an accent, forty years diluted now,
as sweet and light as a piccolo’s pitch.

I love today, and the light

that pours from the east window onto your hair

as you brush it before your mirror, which I love
because it gives me another of you. You say, “Goodbye, love,”
and you are gone, although not entirely, because your scent
lingers, defying the haste a workday demands.

I love all the days left us,

even the days when, in some minor manner,
I will have failed you and you will tell me so,
even the days—few, I hope—when, in frustration at me,
in exasperation at the world, you will point me toward the door,

which I love because it isn’t the door
through which I will leave you.

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