

Smudges

You look right at me
like a window washer looks
at glass, not through it.

And for this reason
I fear your stares, my shame
of fingerprints, other lovers
pressed into my panes, smeared
dirt and oil from skin.

No matter how much
you wipe them, these smudges
remain and spread thin.

But the marks identify
me. They define me
like my father does
or my first best friend in youth
and perhaps you too.

I look right at you,
like a person looking at
their eye reflected in a mirror.

And in this way,
I see myself from the eyes
of other people
and realize the shame I felt
was a reflection on you.

Touch

Yesterday, when I brushed her knee, my wife
asked if my hands were getting smoother, saying
that when we first met, they were rough, grainy.
She wondered aloud if, during our years together,
she just got used to them, or if they actually grew softer.

I curled my fingers to feel my palms, ridges
against ridges, finding that they had smoothed out.
And I remembered my grandfather's hands;
how his skin was thinned by age, polished by work.
They were calm waters with smooth river rocks hiding beneath
the surface, something you would only know if you felt
their tension and pressure against your own hands.
And my palms, thick, meaty with vigor
of youth, craved the work to bring that calm.
But instead, I kept driving and replied, "I'm not sure."

Luck

My mother said it once. That when you twist
an apple stem inside its core, then count
the turns with letters 'til the stem comes out,
that letter starts your true love's name. I wished
for letters pulled for every girl I kissed
or hoped to kiss. At times, I dreamed about
Miss A or E, and never had a doubt
that she would pop up somewhere in the list.

I learned to tell when stems would break before
the snap of chance, and gentle, pluck the name
away, a way to twist the arms of fate.
But the day you and I first met, I tore
a stem with just three twirls. Your name, the same.
But then, I wasn't thinking as I ate.

Security

The lizard stowaway was hidden in the plant your mother sent home with us as a housewarming gift. We didn't know about him until we brought the plant into our new home.

He clung to the dirt, hidden beneath the succulent leaves, blended with the natural palette. When you spotted him, I told you to put it outside, that it would cope.

But you made up a little box with twigs and soil instead, and I locked the front door once you finished.

You pointed your desk lamp at him through cellophane, poked with air holes. He laid out and his ribs expanded, contracted a little less with each labored breath.

We went to bed, I listened to the strange noises of a new home.

The next day, we put his box in the trash, and we mixed his body with the fallen leaves in the back yard.