

Judy Kronenfeld – Three Poems

Strange

Another loved one sentenced
to death by cancer—the door
to morning rooms and long, lazy
awakenings watching dust dance
in shafts of sun, slammed
in her face. And though
we'll all be shut out of the light later,
or sooner, it's always so strange
when we first hear. As if this world
were our eternal birthright,
the sweet trivial decisions—
sourdough or wheat,
decaf or tea—ours to make
forever.

When my turn comes,
through violence of illness,
or in the labyrinth of sleep,
and I'm a shade—if shades can miss—
I think I'd miss these morning moments
ordinary as grass the most:
how we emerged from the shadowed
forests of the night
into the sunny meadow
of the gifted day—
bread becoming golden
in the toaster, sending out
rivulets of fragrance, you
reading something funny
to me from the paper.

Coming Soon

Coming Soon: *Crypts, Niches & Graves*
the cemetery sign shouts as I drive past
on my way home from the hospital
where I've seen the cardio-thoracic surgeon,
alone, because they said they wouldn't let you in
as Covid surges. And did that sign actually add
an exclamation point? What step-right-up seller's
chutzpah! Or is the point implicit
in the all too literal "coming soon"? My brain

is noodling *nodule* (= *lesion*? = *tumor*?),
the “incidental finding” on a CT
previously addressing something minor.

Is it too soon to spill my limbo
of raw fear to family and friends
and risk having to swallow everything back—
ashamed and never again to be believed?
Or is the wolf not “coming soon,”
but frothing at the door, as the surgeon,
inclined to diagnose with scalpel,
seemed to imply, though unwilling
to give odds—malign or benign?

I want the lyre, or glittering bough
for a trial-run underground, return trip
guaranteed. Having brushed against
the shades, mere wisps
wafting through the vast, icy, unlit
corridors, perhaps I’d emerge more acclimated
to being dust.

I need a primer on the lonely hospital bed,
and how to endure sentience there,
a lesson in the blank stare
of the clock, it’s perpetually stuttering
hands. I need a guide to a body remote
as an outpost taken over by strangers,
a model of a soul without
the mute animal comfort
of touch.

I need these still when I’m at our door
with this foreign thing in my chest,
though seeing my uneasy face,
you open your warm human arms.

Green

An old woman tries on
green glint earrings at a mall,
stream-green fluorite, frog-green jade,
malachite, like green shade. And green thoughts
flicker of her afternoons with a girlhood pal
who led her through dusty doors

of shops in Greenwich Village—
gleaming within like split geodes
with artful baubles for their ears and wrists—
and whose lithe black-tights-clad legs
and leaps in modern dance she wished
were hers, back in their wannabe Beatnik
salad days, and whose clandestine adventures
with boys, hinted in whispers
on those Village jaunts, were a primer
of glamour to come.

The many years of their
separate lives have drifted
down like dry brown leaves.
The old woman's letter,
written two decades ago,
trying to spark the flint
of their friendship, fell
into silence.

But inside memory's cracked rock—
as she puts the earrings back—
as if seen moments ago, and unchanged:
her friend's starkly white
face, framed in raven hair,
and her startling, pale green,
crystalline, chrysoprase eyes.

Judy Kronenfeld has published two chapbooks and four full-length collections of poetry including *Bird Flying through the Banquet* (FutureCycle, 2017), and *Shimmer* (WordTech, 2012). Her fifth collection, tentatively titled *Groaning and Singing*, will be published by FutureCycle in early 2022. Her poems have appeared in *Cimarron Review*, *New Ohio Review*, *One* (Jacar Press), *Rattle*, *Valparaiso Poetry Review*, and other journals, and in over two dozen anthologies. She is Lecturer Emerita, Department of Creative Writing, UC Riverside, and an Associate Editor of *Poemeleon*.