

BETWEEN THE BELL STRUCK  
AND THE SILENCE

*poems by*

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*To my husband Rob, my rock;  
and to Cecilia, Drew, and Chris  
for your love and support*

*and in memory of Patrick Lane, 1939-2019  
and Ronald Hatch, 1939-2021*

*“How a room, a bed and windows  
become stations on a long journey”*

*I.*

## Dust to dust

Open your hands over all you once knew. Write it in your holy book.

Morning, my horses chased each other through the field: the palomino,  
the roan, the bay, cantering in the snow.

And the white-faced owl on a low branch, watching.  
At the edge of the field, sun lighting the tips of the firs.  
And the ravens fell silent,

and the owl, wings spread wide on a low branch,  
resembled the soul of one just now leaving the earth.

And the owl floated low across the horses' backs, pushing wind  
through its wings, and rose into the air.

The ravens resumed their clatter, and the chickadees  
emerged from their hiding places.

A forest of towering firs: one brought down by a gust of wind  
could take the house. And trunks so wide you could stretch out your arms  
and fail to reach half-way around.

And all nearby: fir, palomino, roan and bay, had heard the owl  
displace the air. And the owl stretched out its formidable claws

and secured another branch, high in the stand of firs beyond the road,  
great firs that had remained a hundred years or more.

Often I lay awake as the owls called each to each across the dark.  
And with one cry, another answered, and drew closer.

Yet among the trees a murmur arose beneath the earth —  
through roots unknown to the human ear  
which would sound to us as a polished stillness,

and as the snow melted that spring, and the light lengthened,  
nothing appeared out of the ordinary.

Yet on a day that sun-warmed the turning earth, came the sound  
of chainsaws beyond the road. The land to be cleared for houses.

Days on end, the *buzz* and *crack*, the firs felled one by one.  
The quake as the great firs crashed to the ground.  
And the owls rose and flew.

I'd never spotted their nests, so high in the thick of the forest.  
And no official was sent to look.

Five, six, seven fled as one, resembling the souls of those  
just now leaving the earth.

Write it in your holy book. Open your hands over all you once knew.

## “In this dark where the dead have come for blessing”

I am tired of patience. I have waited so long.  
The fifth horse buried, and snow  
rising, invisible, into the spring air.  
Mud over the grave sinks further each day.  
I've had it with death. Mice  
leave their tunnels exposed to sun  
now that the snow has died, now  
that the earth has broken.  
At night I look out at the moon  
tangled in the bramble of trees and wonder  
where you are. That night after your death  
you sat in the chair in a corner  
of my room and filled my head with words  
and you did not ask for blessing.  
There is no going back. Wind  
has blown the snow away and all  
who are no longer tethered to this ground.

## Passage

For the suitcase opened and emptied  
For the clothing unpacked  
For lines written on scraps of paper and left on a desk  
For the robin who carried a twig again and again to build its nest  
For the three years not speaking before death arrived  
For the decades and those you left behind  
For the apple tree you climbed with shears in hand  
For the cherry and plum blossoms you nurtured and blessed  
For the piano you never heard me play  
For the owl who watched from a branch of the cedar  
For the pin-pricked light in the darkened room  
    like the smallest of blossoms  
For the album that was never made, photographs lost  
    and those not taken  
For the dates no one noted, no week, no month, no year  
For your name called before dawn, beckoned and called,  
    which only you could hear

## A gathering of brief moments on earth

1.

The bells fell silent; only wind  
rang in the empty towers.  
The ferry's horn blared into the cloud  
that brooded on the water.

2.

Some of us dreamed it before it arrived.  
Waxing and waning, the moon  
marked the time, the dead in the dream  
summoned not by name, but by number.

3.

And the days collapsed  
into a dull order  
in which some remained alive,  
and others embarked  
on the perilous journey.

4.

Yet those of us who remained, lived  
into a ruin — sirens roared for the sick,  
the dying, who wandered out of their bodies  
into the realms of stars.

5.

Month after month carried an undertow  
of grief. Much shattered that could not  
be put back together.

6.

Solitary in our solitary rooms, we spoke little,  
lit signal fires and peered out to sea.



7.

From visible to invisible, the dream  
awoke as dreams do, while branches slept  
and nudged each other into green.

8.

And the delicate membranes  
burst, and leaves unfolded as if  
it were a normal spring.

9.

The cherry tree blossomed, and the apple.  
And roses bloomed. By the second year  
we laid stones to mark the path of the sun.

10.

And the bees remembered their labours,  
and birds knit their nests, strand  
by strand, and the horses found the grass,  
a greening so tart it stung our eyes.

11.

And many who passed over in those days  
were forgotten, who did not forget us:  
their spirits entered our rooms  
and watched us as we slept.

12.

The living could not fathom  
that the dead spoke in language  
which rose in air as minute  
bursts of light.

13.

And daylight shortened, as it will,  
and spiders overnight stitched their fractal  
nets and gathered the dew.

14.

And in an unkempt corner the sun broke into colours.

15.

Hours we stood watching a fire  
flare on the mountain, smoke  
rising as the spirits of our dead  
rose toward the moon's open mouth.

16.

On the path leading to the field, there  
in a furrow you nearly step on a snail  
lugging its house toward the underbrush.

17.

You pick up the snail and set it  
in a patch of green, because the house  
is infinitely delicate,  
and there are years yet unfathomed  
to be lived.