

On Living - Four Selected Poems
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(Submission for the Jerome Robbins Memorial Award – Poetry)

I Know New York

I know how it will be tonight. I know
The city will not sleep— it never does—
But it will breathe, and someone will sit down
On the stoop and cry the best kind of tears.
Someone will collect discarded bottles
And trade them for his next meal. And he will
Smile when he finds a dollar and thank God.
Someone will get her first applause and bow
And she will phone her parents to tell them
All about it, but she'll get the machine.

I know this city. I know how the train
Will squeal to a stop. Someone will stumble
Onto it, and through his haze he will see
The most beautiful girl before he falls.

They Told Me

they told me in fifth grade
that I am an animal. we all are.
so I should stop apologizing
for eating and drinking and loving.

if I'd believed them in fifth grade
maybe I could shred my consciousness
stomp my humanity with dirty boots
and love untethered

maybe I could ask you to dance at the party
trust that you're no goddess. you also want
maybe I could join you in the pool in the dark
because every animal has scars

but alas—
I never believed them.

Anxiety

I don't know why my
stomach still jitters,
tongue botches meanings,
knees rattle and quake.

I took the white pills.
The orange bottle
I hid away so
nobody would know.

But of course they know.
I don't smile like them.
When they invite me
over I say no.

I don't know why I
still shrug off their kind
hands from my shoulder.
They're trying their best.

I sat in the chair,
stared at the old man,
told his balding head
my story but still

I jitter and quake,
decline their invites,
swallow the white pills,
hope they'll start to work.

If I've Learned Anything

If I've learned anything it's that

Sometimes people die
and your suit still isn't dry cleaned
So you wear it to the funeral and hope nobody notices the stain

Sometimes people die
and it's not enough to make the man next to you in the pews put his phone down
So you watch him tap away while the family members cry into their sleeves

Sometimes people die of cancer
and the guy in the car stuck behind the procession puffs impatiently on his cigarette
while he waits for the inconvenience to pass

Sometimes people die too young
and you still cross the street at a red light on your way back from the funeral
Because you can't bear to think that
You might be next