

JUDITHA DOWD

Dressing for the Funeral

of my ex shouldn't take an hour
but it does

this jacket I thought to wear
too small with a sweater underneath

and the pants so tight I can't pull up the zipper

It's raining
so maybe something bright
is right for someone

who didn't believe in funerals
or weddings or any ceremonial occasion

unless he was behind a camera
viewing it

*

How to cook and eat an artichoke
he showed me that

funny now
but no one else I knew
knew how back then

and the way to cut a pineapple
without wasting half

and snails and eels
and his mother's oxtail soup

*

Driving to New York my husband says *This must be strange for you*

*

Let the last time I saw him—
small and harmless

in a hospital bed and wanting
only two things: home

and a cigarette
neither of which I could give—

be the exchange of good will
that wipes the slate clean

Let the last time I saw him—
small and harmless in a hospital bed

and wanting a cigarette—
be what he couldn't receive

Let the last time be

*

I want to think it was mercy
kept me quiet with our daughters

who struggled to imagine
what he'd have wanted for this day

and are here now somehow
doing it

*

Does forgiveness forget
or forgetfulness forgive

does it matter
if the outcome is the same—

memory making its way
down a long corridor

to his face at a darkened window
watching

as moonlight dances with me
barefoot on the fallen snow

*

If you're waiting for me
to say I loved him

for a long time I didn't
then
I did in a mostly remembered way

not unlike the cicada husk I kept in cotton wool
to recall its churr and who I was
when last I heard it

Now the thought of absence
more than absence itself
is love's fossil

as anything may become a simulacrum
if you will it to

*

he was always fond of you
glad you kept in touch

actually no we didn't
not really

you're probably right about that
thank you

good of you to come all this way

kind of you to mention
thank you

he was