

## We assemble in the dark

by Matt Harle

We assemble in the dark  
in this cold parking lot

We watch our breath hanging in the air  
with conflicted gratitude

*jumbled,*

We struggle to find words  
*now,*

amidst anxiety, sadness, the unknown

We inventory and arrange  
so that our tools will not obscure your reality

We light the candle and set the intention

We wheel you into a room  
whose sterile efficiency deepens the loss  
*cross.*

*And in this river*

*I am once again a child,  
of two or three,*

*at the beach with my family,  
suspended uneasily between sea and shore.*

*Hands and water and voices are*

*then as*

*and I feel the confusion  
even as the river softens its edges.*

*Laughing, gesturing,  
confident of their child's safety,  
the voices and hands can't seem to sense  
the fear, coiled in the moment.*

*But with each ebb,*

*I feel the water inching me over a threshold  
I don't want to*

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We ask for forgiveness, *Is that what before was?*  
from you and from each other, *Alone, struggling to stay upright*  
for our fallibility, *as the waves rearrange the sand under my feet?*  
for our distraction, and *Voices and hands of loved ones*  
*missing the point with the best of intentions,*  
We call you by your name *making alone*  
*lonelier.*  
We remove the bag, *Water, too, seemed to want something from me*  
the clothes, *that I wasn't ready to*  
*give,*  
the vestiges of that other world *pulling me from what I thought I knew,*  
*what I thought I needed.*  
We cover you out of respect *Or maybe that's backwards:*  
for a modesty you can no longer express *maybe I needed water to be what it was not.*  
*Maybe the water of water flowed away*  
We invoke compassion and call for mercy *even as I poured it into my glass.*

We summon strength, all in the service of love. *But in this river,*  
*sound swallowed and strange,*  
We feel your vulnerability, *I let go.*  
your fragility, *Hungry lungs once brought the world rushing*

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*back.*

the mirror of our own

*But now, lungs still, the water holds me.*

We see the indignities of death, yet

*Now, the hands and voices hold me.*

*They flow over me, but I am held.*

We call you beautiful, and know it to be true

*I am held because I am also water.*

*As are the voices.*

*As are the hands.*

We feel tenderness in our fingertips,

*“A fountain for gardens, a well of living waters,”*

and in that touch, feel the flesh of our children,

*defined no longer by the glass,*

of our lovers, of our parents, of ourselves.

*but by the flow.*

So as we pour the water, *tehorah hee*

*And the flow tells me I am beautiful.*

And bear witness to your purity, *tahor hu*

*And the flow tells me I am pure.*

As we dress you and wrap you and tie the knots

*The flow honors what I was, and then,*

And raise you up to lay you down,

*with compassion,*

swaddled like the baby you once were

*eases me towards what I will be:*

We open our eyes and see you whole

*no longer the frightened child,*

And in that seeing, we are transformed.

*but the waves lapping the shore.*

Later, standing again in the cold,

our goodbyes hanging in the air,

## **We assemble in the dark**

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we hold this gift close,

knowing that one day it will be ours to give.