

Returning Home

I sit at the steering wheel, my hands
at three o'clock, nine o'clock—
the revised teaching of the DMV.
I switch on the headlights,
steel myself to start the day.
My brain is foggy—not enough coffee.

As my fingers jiggle the key
in a practiced sequence, I realize
my marked-up textbook lies
among the clutter on the table.
Turning the key counter-clockwise,
I tease it from the ignition,
then swing my legs out of the car.
One day, I think, arthritis
will make this heaving of hips hard.

I find the book at once, or after half an hour,
perhaps not at all, then return to the wheel
but recall that I have not packed a meal.
On a third trip, I remember my phone
that is nestled on the bed. Back inside I go
with anger, dread. Odd that life
happens in these tiresome returns
to rescue what is left behind.
Some days I forget my purse
with its wallet, comb, lip balm;
other days, I leave pens, loose chalk,
apples or oranges for a late snack,
a much-used bookbag or backpack.
Again and again, the same path I track.

By now I am cursing, ruing the hour
I had to wake. Anxious, rushed,
I feel my blood pressure soar.
I sweat, face flushed.

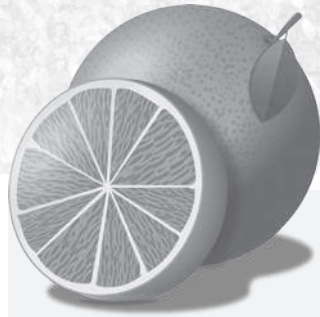
The day of a final exam, I make it to school
before learning I wear bedroom shoes.
I race to the house, no time to lose.

Then, too, like a child, I often yearn,
though now blocks down the street,
for some loved object to soothe me:
a dog-eared book, a colorful tea tin,
the early lines of a poem.
I turn around, return home.
Re-entering the house calms
my nerves; permits me to bid
goodbye to blankets, pillow;
witness morning sunlight
in the kitchen window.

History is this way: a habit, a pattern.
Again and again, we return
to what is familiar, what can be borne,
thinking to correct some error
but forgetting the error before.

—Rachel Jennings

Poems for the Month of May 2021



Grapefruit

Glittering teeth
of a serrated spoon
scrape the membrane
between peel and fruit,
then scoop deep,
juice and seeds flying,
to lift flesh into the bowl.
A finger nudges
the plump shape
onto a white china plate.

—Rachel Jennings

*BIO: Rachel Jennings is a San Antonio educator and poet. Currently, she is working on a chapbook, *Cancer Hat*, which explores through poetry the inner journey of cancer patients.*

White Bread

Three days before my colonoscopy,
on doctor's orders, I buy white bread,
a block of cheddar, a jug of skim milk.
I almost weep with joy.

For thirty years, I have abstained
from white bread, fearful of diabetes,
cancer, a stroke, or heart disease.

Now, for two days preceding a clear
liquid diet,
I eat white bread to my heart's desire—
no guilt, remorse, or shame required.

As a child, I loved fresh white bread.
I loved pulling apart the fluffy fibers
like pink wisps of cotton candy
or squishing the bread in my fingers,
which to me was magic or alchemy,
returning the blob to gooey dough.

I loved bread sprinkled with sugar,
bread and honey with a glass of milk,
or bread with margarine and jelly,
which called to mind
that favorite book,
Bread and Jam for Frances,
or the marmalade sandwich
in *Paddington Bear*.

I loved toast, too—

French toast,
cinnamon toast,
cheese toast,
even toast dunked
in my mother's coffee.

As communion steward at age twelve,
I cut Kern's bread slices into cubes
stacked pyramid-style on a paten,
then poured Welch's grape juice
into clear glass chalcules
that fit into holes in a silver tray
like the drive-in cardboard kind
for milkshakes—
all prepared for congregants kneeling
at the altar rail on Sunday.

Now, at fifty-five,
I prepare with white bread
and (white) grape juice
for that other sacrament,
a rite of passage, the colonoscopy,
which will cleanse my soul,
or at least my colon,
washing my high-carb, low-fiber,
white flour sins away.

—Rachel Jennings

