

## to the fig tree on 9th and christian

Tumbling through the  
city in my  
mind without once  
looking up  
the racket in  
the lugwork probably  
rehearsing some  
stupid thing I  
said or did  
some crime or  
other the city they  
say is a lonely  
place until yes  
the sound of sweeping  
and a woman  
yes with a  
broom beneath  
which you are now  
too the canopy  
of a fig its  
arms pulling the  
September sun to it  
and she  
has a hose too  
and so works hard

rinsing and scrubbing  
the walk  
lest some poor sod  
slip on the  
silk of a fig  
and break his hip  
and not probably  
reach over to gobble up  
the perpetrator  
the light catches  
the veins in her hands  
when I ask about  
the tree they  
flutter in the air and  
she says take  
as much as  
you can  
help me  
so I load my  
pockets and mouth  
and she points  
to the step-ladder against  
the wall to  
mean more but  
I was without a

sack so my meager  
plunder would have to  
suffice and an old woman  
whom gravity  
was pulling into  
the earth loosed one  
from a low slung  
branch and its eye  
wept like hers  
which she dabbed  
with a kerchief as she  
cleaved the fig with  
what remained of her  
teeth and soon there were  
eight or nine  
people gathered beneath  
the tree looking into  
it like a  
constellation pointing  
*do you see it*  
and I am tall and so  
good for these things  
and a bald man even  
told me so  
when I grabbed three

or four for  
him reaching into the  
giddy throngs of  
yellow-jackets sugar  
stoned which he only  
pointed to smiling and  
rubbing his stomach  
I mean he was really rubbing his stomach  
like there was a baby  
in there  
it was hot his  
head shone while he  
offered recipes to the  
group using words which  
I couldn't understand and besides  
I was a little  
tipsy on the dance  
of the velvety heart rolling  
in my mouth  
pulling me down and  
down into the  
oldest countries of my  
body where I ate my first fig  
from the hand of a man who escaped his country  
by swimming through the night

and maybe  
never said more than  
five words to me  
at once but gave me  
figs and a man on his way  
to work hops twice  
to reach at last his  
fig which he smiles at and calls  
baby, *c'mere baby*,  
he says and blows a kiss  
to the tree which everyone knows  
cannot grow this far north  
being Mediterranean  
and favoring the rocky, sunbaked soils  
of Jordan and Sicily  
but no one told the fig tree  
or the immigrants  
there is a way  
the fig tree grows  
in groves it wants,  
it seems, to hold us,  
yes I am anthropomorphizing  
goddammit I have twice  
in the last thirty seconds  
rubbed my sweaty

forearm into someone else's  
sweaty shoulder  
gleeful eating out of each other's hands  
on Christian St.  
in Philadelphia a city like most  
which has murdered its own  
people  
this is true  
we are feeding each other  
from a tree  
at the corner of Christian and 9th  
strangers maybe  
never again.

## ode to buttoning and unbuttoning my shirt

No one knew or at least  
I didn't know  
they knew  
what the thin disks  
threaded here  
on my shirt  
might give me  
in terms of joy  
this is not something to be taken lightly  
the gift  
of buttoning one's shirt  
slowly  
top to bottom  
or bottom  
to top or sometimes  
the buttons  
will be on the other  
side and  
I am a woman  
that morning  
slipping the glass  
through its slot  
I tread  
differently that day  
or some of it

anyway  
my conversations  
are different  
and the car bomb slicing the air  
and the people in it  
for a quarter mile  
and the honeybee's  
legs furred with pollen  
mean another  
thing to me  
than on the other days  
which too have  
been drizzled in this  
simplest of joys  
in this world  
of spaceships and subatomic  
this and that  
two maybe three  
times a day  
some days  
I have the distinct pleasure  
of slowly untethering  
the one side  
from the other  
which is like unbuckling



a stack of vertebrae  
with delicacy  
for I must only use  
the tips  
of my fingers  
with which I will  
one day close  
my mother's eyes  
this is as delicate  
as we can be  
in this life  
practicing  
like this  
giving the raft of our hands  
to the clumsy spider  
and blowing soft until she  
lifts her damp heft and  
crawls off  
we practice like this  
pushing the seed into the earth  
like this first  
in the morning  
then at night  
we practice  
sliding the bones home.

## ode to the flute

A man sings  
by opening his  
mouth a man  
sings by opening  
his lungs by  
turning himself into air  
a flute can  
be made of a man  
nothing is explained  
a flute lays  
on its side  
and prays a wind  
might enter it  
and make of it  
at least  
a small final song