

NAOMI SHIHAB NYE



SOMEONE I LOVE

Someone I love so much cut down my primrose patch. It looked like an oval of overgrown weeds to him, in the front yard, beyond the stones of the flowerbeds, near the black mailbox on the post. He did not know that for weeks I had been carefully tending and watering it, as a few primroses floated their pink heads above the green mass, unfurled their delicate bonnets. With dozens of buds waiting to shine, we were on the brink, everything popping open, despite the headlines, all sweet flower beings from under the ground remembering what they were supposed to do.

He mowed it down with the old push lawn mower. I was out of town—he didn't ask his father, who knew how precious it was to me—his father was in the back while this was happening and didn't see—there wasn't a second thought—why would we have such a tall patch in the yard—what does my

mother do when she comes out here with the old shovel and the bucket and the mysterious sacks of rose food and mulch, poking around in the earth, trimming, the clippers in her pocket, bending to the wild tangle of jasmine on the fence, the Dutchman's-pipe, the happy oregano, the funny cacti crowding together in complicated profusion like a family, the miniature chiles—what does she do, why is this here?

He just cut it down. It wasn't easy.

He must have pushed really hard to get it to go.

When I stood outside in my nightie the next dreamy-sweet morning at dawn after returning home on the midnight plane, watering my bluebonnets snapdragons butterfly bush lantana, wanting to feel tied to the earth again, as I always do when I get home, rooted in soil and stone and old caliche and bamboo and trees, a hundred years of memory in their trunks and bushes we didn't plant, and the healthy esperanza never losing her hope, and the banana palms poking out their fine and gracious greenery, when I suddenly saw what was gone, what wasn't there, not there, impossible, I was so shocked I let the hose run all over my bare feet. The cold stun of fury filled me, sorrow rising and pouring into questions: who could do this, why, why, how could anyone? I thought of the time my daddy came home to find every head cut off his giant sunflowers right after they had opened their faces to the sky, and only the empty stalks remaining, heads slashed to the ground, his disbelieving sorrow as he went to his room and lay down on the bed and closed his eyes, and I thought, I will not mention this, I am too sad to mention it, this is the pain of people everywhere, this is the pain this year deserves.

But at breakfast I went a little strange like the lady down the street who shows up at people's doors with a snarling dog and a hammer in her pocket, I went wild and furious and he swore they just looked like weeds to him, why hadn't I warned him, why did I only tell Dad?

I pointed them out to you weeks ago, I said.

He said, I don't remember flower things like that.

And it was the season of blooming and understanding. It was the season of pulling weeds in other corners, hiding from headlines, wondering what it would do if the whole house had been erased or just the books and paintings or what about the whole reckless garden or (then it gets unthinkable but we make ourselves think it now and then to stay human) the child's arms or legs, what would I do? If I did not love him, who would I become?

JOE MACKALL



WORDS OF MY YOUTH

I.

I stand at the edge of my suburban driveway on Fairlawn Drive, sunned and safe. My friend Mick and I play Wiffle ball. Each swing of the bat sends the ball flying into the mystery grip of physics and aerodynamic wonder. The ball appears headed straight up before some hidden hand of wind and speed and serrated plastic jerks it over to the lawn of the widow next door. Mrs. Worth's boxer drools the day away, watching from the backyard in its own state of ignorant awe. We take turns "smacking the shit" out of the plastic ball. I don't notice, not right away, an older kid—a man really—walking down the other side of the street, his eyes straight ahead. Not from around here. As the kid-man gets closer, I focus more intently on the game, as if this focus will protect me from what's about to happen. I chase the ball as if catching it matters more than anything, more than