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Terminal Velocity

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TERMINAL VELOCITY

I.

Before impact you are carrying a bag
of spices and a blue mixing bowl.
The bowl will be broken.
Two awful moons cross
the narrow horizon. Warnings freeze
and fall short. A scream leaps over
your teeth. Useless,
it dies on the asphalt, digging its claws
into the windshield. Your legs panic first.
They expect their nightmare:
trapped again in plaster,
the marrow howling in its slender room,
planning escapes with drills and sharp saws
that all fail. Their fear climbs
your spine like a ladder
and shivers in the brain. Your last thoughts
are these bones. *Lord, not my legs,
not this time.*

II.

Human atoms have no defense against
two tons of accelerating steel:
a body's weight lets go.
Its flight is not perfect
like a ball or as far as a child can throw.
An old woman makes the same sound falling
down the basement steps.
Only a suicide
from the thirteenth floor plans an expert arc
and the final anesthetic sidewalk.
Even a dull knife wounds
more cleanly than chrome.
The seam that joins your arm and shoulder
tears. Tendons pull away and their muscles
follow them. One bone breaks
in half weeping. And another.
Somewhere near the wrist the blood comes untied.
They have driven on. Pieces of blue
crockery settle over
you like flax blossoms
in a morning field. Soft oregano, sage,
and curry blow like dust.

III.

Before the ambulance and the crowd gathers,
between injury and the time pain is unlocked
in your sleeve, you have the world
to yourself. No one visits
the lumberyard at midnight. You watch
the planets return to their orbits and hear
a telephone ringing next door.
You look into the hand lying at your side
to find yourself. It is a red mirror,
and you are pleased. You touch
it with your tongue. Iodine
and salt fill your mouth with welcome.
Porchlights come on: there's been an accident.
A victim loses his name.
You take this story
and crawl inside your body and pull it up
over you and wait. Next month your arm will talk
in its sleep, whispering,
headlights, headlights.