

NOTES FROM THE UNDERSTORY (LAYER 21,
DIRECTION ONE)

I'm a person watching her hand rest on the windowsill.
I'm a person who sees her hand sewing the window-glass
to what's outside—the pale, thin, dying grass in the yard.
A person who uses the brightest green thread and the
narrowest needle.

The needle is sharp; the glass is hairline-fractured but not
yet cracked. The grass—yellowed, sparse—is as sickly as
the eyes of the addict who lives across the street.

Where is his car? Where are the blue flowers his hands
once were? They matched his eyes, when I met him.

Touch intervenes unexpectedly, says Henri Bergson. At
my window I feel what I can't see reaching into my
consciousness from hours turning soon into years.

The ash-filled wind flows in when I go out my front
door. The sun is an eye straining to open, but smoke from
fire, a few miles away, holds it shut. Down the coast, a
forest of trees burn, only 12% contained. For a moment, the
eye seems open behind the wash of tears overflowing its
rim.

It's night, a neighbor, farther down the Arlington, has
shot off a firecracker—no flash, only a long, booming
sound that draws me into it, and down. I have no narrative
to describe how to climb out.

The narrative I know has a thread-thin story line. As a
child I tied its one end to daylight, the other end to

nightfall, and thought myself safe. As the years pass, gravity pulls it harder and harder. I feel it weakening.

To see this takes lying down in my backyard, takes allowing that this is not-entirely comfortable, takes feeling every prickly weed, every blade of grass, every pebble and stone. Henri Bergson stresses that we ignore most of what we know.

NOTES FROM THE UNDERSTORY (LAYER 21,
DIRECTION TWO)

There are six objects on my nightstand: a waterglass; a stack of four books I am reading; a stuffed animal—a crow, whose wings are stitched to move freely. I wanted to give it to the next-door neighbor's daughter, but they were evicted and moved away before I could. The crow's wings remain in conversation with the child.

I rub its head, body, tail, and two wings whenever I have trouble sleeping. I'm watching the stitching come slowly undone, watching the eyes of the girl averted, watching the bruise on my face where the stone of the father's stare left its mark. Henri Bergson would say that tactile sensations, from touch or failed touch, permeate us.

I keep three unopened poppy-seed packets taped to the kitchen cabinet's door that I open every morning when I reach for my coffee mug. Each packet has a different poppy-field sketched on it that I walk into, and let myself get lost in, while my coffee brews. I don't take them down from the cabinet, despite a sense of loss growing in them, wild thistle and weeds overtaking their orange petal-cups. Some objects have discordant inner volatilities that draw me to them, as if I'm intoxicated by their secretions of unease.

Henri Bergson describes a patient who felt a pair of sharp scissors rubbing against his ears as he slept. They rubbed gently, at first. What the patient described was

something that neither he nor Henri Bergson classified as a dream.