

# Requests for Toy Piano

By Tony Hoagland

Play the one about the family of the ducks  
where the ducks go down to the river  
and one of them thinks the water will be cold  
but then they jump in anyway  
and like it and splash around.

No, I must play the one  
about the nervous man from Palestine in row 14  
with a brown bag in his lap  
in which a gun is hidden in a sandwich.

Play the one about the handsome man and woman  
standing on the steps of her apartment  
and how the darkness and her perfume and the beating of their hearts  
conjoin to make them feel  
like leaping from the edge of chance—

No, I should play the one about  
the hard rectangle of the credit card  
hidden in the man's back pocket  
and how the woman spent an hour  
plucking out her brows, and how her perfume  
was made from the destruction of a hundred flowers.

Then play the one about the flower industry  
in which the migrant workers curse their own infected hands  
from tossing sheaves of roses and carnations  
into the back of the refrigerated trucks.

No, I must play the one about the single yellow daffodil  
standing on my kitchen table  
whose cut stem draws the water upwards  
so the plant is flushed with the conviction

that the water has been sent  
to find and raise it up  
from somewhere so deep inside the earth  
not even flowers can remember.

Source: *Poetry* (December 2005)