

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)