

Mimi Khalvati
Sundays

for Tom

i.

Together, we have made sour cherry rice,
rolled minced lamb into meatballs and listened
to the radio while eating, him to stall
hallucinations and me to respect his silence,

the time he takes to eat. We've strolled slowly
in the park together, our favourite park,
lapsing into pauses with the falling light –
tennis in the distance – as we slowly climbed

the hill. I've left my shoes at the door, him
reminding me, to scrub off the dogshit later
and now he's at the piano in the nowhere hour
before TV. These are the things that make him

well – company, old and easy, recipes
old but new to him. His playing brings
the night in. Turns the streetlamps on, makes
the kitchen clock tick. Softly a chord falls

and out of the ground grow snowdrops, fat and waxy
with green hearts, upside down, stamped beneath
white aprons, poking their heads through railings.
Between his fingers things grow, little demons,

fountains, crocuses. Spring is announced and enters,
one long green glove unfingering the other,
icicles melt and rivers run, bluetits
hop and trill. Everything talks to everything.

ii.

Oh it poured with rain today. My gutter,
blocked and inaccessible to anyone bar
the man with the longest ladder in London,
waterfalled down the window alarmingly.

No, the waterfall is here, under his fingers,
steady wrists, the years of training paying off
in instinctual music; and the fat raindrops, spraying
up like diamanté; and the tailing off

of rain, all the languages of rain, rivers,
gutters, waterfalls, the treble runs
of rain and the bass's percussive beat;
all the liquidity of youth, youth gone

to rack and ruin. How little he ate today
and how much there was to eat – stuffed pepper,
salmon, apple and blackberry tart, coffee.
He can't even swallow his own saliva,

holding it in his mouth minutes at a time,
without hearing them, the voices, seeing
babies streaming towards his mouth, limbs
trigger words command him: that, there, take, eat.

iii.

He ate all of it. All of the rice
and all of the *khoreshté bademjan*
– the aubergine dish – I carefully filled
his plate with, not overfilled. He liked it.

He was always sweet about my cooking.
We ate while watching *West Side Story*.
How easy it was to sorrow for Maria
and Tony. Easy to cry and grieve.

Now he's at the piano, today
so tentative, but gaining in assurance
like someone 'learning to live with disability'.
Is he? Or is that someone me?

all of us, all of us who love him.
Joey rings. He's free tomorrow,
Tom's saying – he hasn't decided yet
whether to stay with me a while,

I hope he will. And suddenly
there's sunshine, brightness and a bounce
and his fingers are dancing. Voices
might bedevil him but voices also

save him – Moss's, Joey's, Sara's –
or let him down without meaning to,
without knowing, after they've finished
a call, the music stops again

as suddenly as it started. But now
he's into it – and what's that tune?
coming and going. Tom, what's that tune?
'All the Things You Are' he tells me.