

William Reichard

EARLY LIGHT, RAIN

one

He's brought me a sugar bowl shaped like a cat:
lift the head off, find sweetness inside.

He's brought me a car full of plastic milk crates
loaded with books; we carry them, one at a time,

into our ancient house, the one we just bought,
the one with the leaky basement.

At first light, when I wake to the sound of rain,
I can't fall back to sleep, but sit instead

in my bed, the one that will be ours in four days
and think of Noah, the fear of floods.

I grew up in a house with a huge basement –
four big rooms – all of them leaked.

In summer, hot past endurance, we'd descend
the groaning stairs on our way to the pump room

to gather potatoes from the bin and find snakes
lying on cool cement. Who could blame them?

The alternative was to bake in summer's vicious heat.
Now, I have my own basement, own it with the man

of my mid-life dreams, and autumn is here,
winter on its inevitable way. It feels like some fantasy,

an unavoidable cliché, to find myself at forty,
moving in for the first time with someone I love.

two

I wake at dawn to rain's wild rhythm.
I cannot sleep. I am afraid. The basement leaks.

Rain falls differently in fading dark, sounds bitter

when I'm tired, when I want to sleep. Instead,

I fill my mind with lists I make for our move:
boxes to pack, cleansers and rags,

window shades, tubs of books. I never thought
I'd make this change: moving in with a mate,

opening my eyes every day to see his face.
He doesn't know I own these fears.

three

As early light wakes a gray-red sky,
I picture him there, already moved in,

our cats ensconced in bedroom windows.
I picture the basement flooded, filled with boxes

of things we must keep – yet don't want – wet on cement,
snakes coiled on their tops, seeking dry land.

I picture him sleeping, me lying next to him,
full of wonder at the world at five a.m., the way

the rain wakes it; the way I make lists; have visions
of floods of Biblical proportions. The morning light

is glorious; the rain glowing, slowly illuminated.
And the life I've dreamed for too many years

has awakened, at last, first in darkness, now dawn,
in rain, and I am moving toward it, boxes and cats in hand,

floating toward it like Noah, nearer that mountaintop,
to the ancient little place we will call home.