

## Mantra During Traffic

A fence of humans blocks 395.

*no one I love is dead*

The cops won't make them move.

*I am allowed to trust the police*

Their signs almost graze my windshield.

*I am safe. My family is safe.*

They have no legal right to be here.

*my life is protected by the law*

Their chants threaten to drown my radio.

*nothing of mine is threatened*

I don't block traffic to make a point

*I've never had to block anything to be seen*

I am two hours late for work

*I will arrive home safely tonight*

My day is ruined

*my life is no one else's definition of ruined*

The cars are backed up past the stadium

*and yet this line is not a funeral procession*

What a day, what a day terrible, terrible day.

*and still, this line is not a funeral procession*

*and still, my life is no one's definition of ruined*

*and still, I will arrive home safely tonight*

*and still, no I love is dead*

*and still, I have never had to block anything to be seen*

*and still, nothing of mine is threatened*

*and still, my life is protected by law*

*and still, I am safe; no one I love is dead*

*and still, my family is safe*

*and still, I am allowed to trust the police*

*and no one I love is dead*

*and no one I love is dead*

and the protesters will move

and the traffic will move.

*and still, no one I love is dead*

*no one.*

## Funeral for the Convenience Store

The mourners coiled  
around Penn Ave  
wearing name brand suits  
and the kind of posture  
you only get when nobody's  
ever broke your back.

The store lie out, embalmed  
in caution tape,  
its broken window  
a black eye staring blankly.  
Somebody's mother disrupted  
the wake with sobs  
for a different tragedy;  
she was escorted back  
to where she belonged,  
back to where the guards  
provoke more than protect.

The mayor spent hours before  
painting compassion  
onto her cheeks.  
She stood, a street mural  
of deliberate concern  
and careful intentions.  
The crowd had waited  
for days to know  
where she stood

on the murder  
of buildings, the senseless  
gutting of commerce.

When she began  
with an invocation  
of some dead man  
from a week ago,  
the sullen mass  
reminded her why  
they were there.

*We, the weeping,* they chanted  
from innocent throats, *have come  
to cry for shelves and curfews,  
things that do not grow back  
when broken.* The mayor scoured  
the dead man's name from her lips,  
tasted the re-election  
on her own breath.

The stock clerks and cashiers  
who'd once gleaned  
minimum pay over night shifts  
hung their heads alongside  
the architects and owners,  
forced into the stark reality  
of a life with no progeny,  
nothing to show for their years  
of nurturing, the labor of business

undone before their eyes.

**Their dirge** rang

down North Avenue,

over the indigent,

into the ears

of the truly bereft,

*If only they sang,*

*If only this glass could heal*

*like a ruptured spine*

*or clubbed skull,*

*if only we were deaf*

*to the animal howls*

*of those who never appreciated*

*the gifts around them*

*enough to take care,*

*if only we could grieve in peace.*

There Are No More Words Than This

Freddie Gray is still in the ground

still is the ground

Freddie is still

Freddie still

Freddie in the ground

the ground is gray

Freddie is in the gray ground

Freddie

Freddie is in the gray ground still

still is Freddie Gray

still is the ground

the ground is in Freddie Gray

Freddie Gray

Freddie Gray is ground

there are no more words than this

no more words

words are no more

Freddie is no more

there are no more words than

Freddie Gray is still in the ground

there is more ground

there is no more Freddie

there are no more words than

this ground

this gray

this still

there is no more

than this

no more