

I have witnessed hate  
in the faces of racism  
in the mouths of fear  
in the hands of phobia  
I have watched people  
turn whole lives  
into symbols  
into threats  
turn people into  
something less than human  
And I stand here a stranger to it  
fifty years of life  
and hate has never made a home in me  
I have known anger  
I have known hurt  
I have known despair  
I have known grief  
but never that hardening

never that hunger  
to make another soul smaller  
so I could feel safe  
Maybe that is why  
it feels so unreal  
how easy some can trade  
another person's humanity  
for belonging  
for certainty  
for fear dressed up as truth  
I do not understand hate  
but I have seen what it does  
how it flattens a life  
how it closes the eye  
how it turns a person  
into a wall  
Still  
something in me refuses  
I will not call that weakness  
I will not call that blindness  
if hate is learned  
then maybe this is something else

something unbroken  
something that still sees  
And I do see  
I see the wound beneath it  
the fear beneath it  
the pain looking for a target  
I know what it is  
to turn against myself  
I know what it is  
to try to change  
in order to survive myself  
I know what it is  
to carry what feels unbearable  
I did not fully hate myself  
but there were parts of myself  
I could not accept  
and I turned that discomfort  
into action  
and attempted transformation  
I met what was hard in me  
and by going through it  
I learned how to recognize pain

more truthfully

What I once fought in myself  
became part of what taught me  
how to recognize pain in others  
without meeting it only  
with fear or anger

What I once turned inward  
I have seen others turn outward  
I have seen my soul's reflection  
in other people's lives  
I have witnessed hate  
turn fear into armor  
I have witnessed hate  
turn pain into a target  
I have witnessed hate  
turn a wounded self  
into a weapon  
I have witnessed hate  
turn fragile certainty  
into cruelty dressed as truth  
But seeing is not surrender  
understanding is not becoming

compassion is not blindness  
and I refuse the harm  
I have seen hate  
all around me  
and still  
it has never made a home in me