

# Swedish Death Cleaning

I remember when I was always the youngest  
at the party—or close to the youngest—  
as I've always liked people a bit older than myself

they seemed wiser and more serious  
I was always serious—even as a kid—  
maybe because I was so often close to death (asthma)

I liked reading better than playing outside  
and that reading led me to the big questions early—  
what will happen after we die

was there really nothingness  
before we were born  
and of course what is our purpose—

those questions seem small to me now  
that I am always the oldest one at the party  
or almost the oldest—and I find myself thinking *wow*

*you are so fill-in-the-blank for your age*  
the young seem even older and more serious  
than my younger self

I vacillate from cluelessness to wisdom  
sometimes what I utter sounds trite  
though I've pondered it long and hard in my brain

some of my friends are dying which reminds me  
of when I was young  
we lost so many to AIDS

a few years ago a DJ said to me *don't worry*  
*you are going to make it into the triple digits*  
he was young and I was dancing with the young

I'd made a joke about my stiff hips  
but I felt a strange survivor's guilt  
living so far into my 50s

then immediately thought of all the diseases  
I might get soon  
all the prescriptions I might have to fill

I kept dancing trying to block out my age  
and maybe that is the problem with parties—  
festive ones and political parties too—

we are expected to follow a script or try  
to outsmart each other but what is the point  
don't get me wrong I believe in change—

transformation even—but it's not going to happen  
at a party or in a voting booth at this point  
maybe it will happen at rallies

though an American revolution sounds a lot  
like a Nike revolution  
all of our language tainted by market research

I almost went into advertising when I was young  
but I knew I wanted to use my gifts for truth—  
not manipulation—which sounds

so lofty and snobby now though I still believe it  
I might have been a rich prick like Don Draper  
or a sad-sack like Peggy

my midlife crisis might have been more dramatic  
if I'd hated my job—I've never hated poetry  
when I was young or now that I'm old—

I hope you feel complete after reading this poem  
that any need you have is taken care of by a good cry  
there is something called a “death cleaning” in Sweden

that explains getting rid of all your crap as you age—  
Margareta Magnusson wrote a whole book about it—  
so your loved ones don't have to simultaneously deal

with your clutter and your funeral arrangements  
you don't have to wait to turn your back  
on consumerism—you can start young

and just not accumulate a bunch of junk in the first place  
it all goes so fast—even the slow, awful days  
are gone in a blink—honestly all you need

is one little treasure—maybe a sand dollar  
or Milagros or a family picture—and something  
snazzy (used OK) to wear to your next party