

We live in the Future

Hooked through the lip,
I lurch,
never still,
never waning but
not singular-directional
I scratch gravel out of the ground.
I do not bleed.
I take the long way to work.
November sun beats the brown grass down
and makes slag where it's more gap than cement.
I watch for blue in the pale of the sky,
wide, brittle,
unaware.
They knocked it down
to build a temple to enterprise.
The signs have been lit,
neon day and night.
The road has bruised marble-black.
I stuff my hands in my pockets.
I don't bleed.

River ghost

When I am young I am taken home
to the house in the North
for ten days at a time-
only long enough to pack one book.
Still I'm never short on material
to paw through, to mark with salt
and flakes of blood as I scratch off mosquito bites.
They will scold me when they find the remnants under my fingernails.
For all I know my grandmother has kept these
atlases and almanacs in a stack
under the great shining window
since she and her husband (whose
photo, on the riverbank with a half dozen strung at his feet,
watches over me as I thumb the pages)
made this house to be a home.
There is a bear whose mass I could fit inside three times, four,
dead on the cover of my magazine
its mouth open.
The hunter's hand rests on its head as though to bless it.
I have just then learned in Sunday school
about what happens when we die
and I wonder for the first time
if trophies get to go to Heaven.
Outside the pickup rumbles and cracks like a rainstorm down the driveway.
They are home from the riverbank.
They will have strings of these bodies, these empty virginal bodies
Bodies that will need butchering,
will need pulled and scraped
from their sparkling coats.
I don't even want to learn how-
not yet-
but soon I will hold the great silver knife
up against the animal's silver hide
and my father's hand will cover mine
much the way his father's hand had covered his
much the way his hands had made this house
to be our home.
Still I'll wonder, without saying,
if the bears
will eat the river ghosts.

Enough

The campfire burns our eyes
the sunbeams dry our lips
the Earth scrapes our feet
the river drags, it seethes,
It drives us on and to the sea where we are cast against the crag.
Laid bare I draw the line
from what is good to what is true
laid bare I draw the curtain
the dark holds my wrists,
The dark should have no mass to speak of perched behind my head.
Absence is the fuel of it
is not defines *is*
the break, once clean is growing
stormed by what I am not,
I hunger in memorial dedication to a time of bursting plenty.

Somebody donated a photo album.

Blurred, still she smiles.
Faded, still she watches.
Crumpled, still she draws me
to climb into the pocket
where still she looks out
at the rushing world.
Loved, she was, known,
by this hobbyist,
his camera and their names
smeared across the cover page,
known by the years between us, undated.
Abandoned, still she sits
on her kitchen counter
and still she laughs away ten cents.
Given up, still she clutches the rail
and still she leans out over the water,
pulling,
slowing.
For eleven dollars, for an hour's work,
I will have her and take her home.
When did she go home last?
take off her shoes,
her bullet bra and nylon stockings,
let her hair down,
in front of nobody?
The seller spreads her flat to peel away her tag
I jolt,
I want her all to myself,
sole voyeur, privy to the whisper,
the eye of the camera
my own.
On my desk, still she is young.
Her life as it was yet unlived
the window opens,
the wind slinks in to see her
I stand between her time
and mine,
still

Statue of Nike - resolve

Justice on the wing does not remove her blindfold
yet her arrow spirals true
casts its slim shadow
in the snow.

Clasped as though in prayer hands pull and clutch,
she will not bend.

They are bowed and bound in cotton
their hearts press the golden scale
and every one outweighs his feathers.

Where, o, where does he possibly go now,
now exile, the art of being away, is foreign to him.

Where his devotion would be is
static rainbow, light fractal, false,
sharp enough he cannot clasp his hands and, unseated,
he is cold.

Justice on the wing does not know what it is like
to turn her cheek when struck or
sever the hand that would thief, were it her own.
As if her hand could stretch to catch him
she will wait.

He will not come.

He has found a world.

He has found what it is to starve,
what it is to faint,
what it is to cheer,

he has found absolute and his hold on what was
at its longest axon
now grows dim.

He will not come for he has found
a well he drinks of,
deeply, so rooted in him he cannot leave the ground.

Here he kneels and is pervaded.

He has found here out of the sands a bowl,
to wash his feet.

We live in the Past

Two by two, climbing, with holes in my boots,
I can't see the way you look,
and I don't knock.
You pretend you aren't surprised.
I believe you, now.
The pen goes down, a primed mousetrap,
steel nib first.
The ink still shines,
the letter unsealed, unsent.
I ask what I want,
wordless,
the right is in your pocket.
You know I know what you take out
and place square on the table before me
to take and walk off.
I can stand up but all I can be is white cotton and silver chain
Mars at midnight red in the mouth,
seeing what you see,
stopping at the top of the stairs
to worry at the hole in my boot.