

Carnivores

*I would be good for
eating*, I said as we ate
barbeque on the deck. The cooking
smoke thick in my hair,
as mosquitoes too close to the fire
singed to ash.

I imagined my tri-tip
fried over fennel. The fingernail
you'd use to work my
white gristle from
your teeth, pearlescent
as silver skin strung

between ribs. *Don't be silly*
you said, holding
my wrist to lick
my sauce-salty palm, then
smiling, turning away
to suck on a buttery bone.

The House Fire, a Year after Moving in

In my dreams, still, I remember the smoke alarms,
wailing into the night like a far off arcade.
There in the gray room of sleep I feel embers
where my storybook slippers should lie.
I heard once about hot-coal walkers. Thrill-
seekers who toe the line between
this world and the next.

But I was not made for fire. A chair, aflame
at the end of the hall agreed. It's white vinyl melting
into a face, aghast.

Together, we'd assembled it our first month in the house.
You knelt on a towel and I, on the dog's bed,
sorting screws, which allowed a joke in those days.
The L of the Allen wrench an unfinished question mark.

In my waking moments, I cannot feel
the wall of heat. Only your hand cupped
around mine as you pass me a small clink of nails.
These are sharp.
Be careful.

Chicago

This is not a poem for the 115th street Harold's
and the men with low-slung JNCOs. Chicken in hand—strips,
sandwiches, legs. White flight. Their Chicago

is older than mine. Nor is this a poem for the crooners

that caress microphone stands like spines. The aurora-glow
and melting jazz of the Green Mill where Capone wall-eyed
both doors for the fuzz. Who respond only to the violent

calls on the weekend, now. No. This is a poem for the red womb

of the California Clipper. The icy Pago Pagos with black
cherries in the last booth back. The gang who is really
a salsa band that lives on our street. The secret Puerto Rican *associo*

with one red balloon on the door, where I broke my wrist
dancing with the middle-aged Boricuas on Valentines day.
Their tiny pot bellies swaying in front of the yellowing jukebox.

The city of big shoulders, but no husker. Hog butcher

tattoos. The burn of a thousand right angles against the fizzing
sodium lamps. A subway that can't bear to be underground. A subway
that dreams. Thunders overhead and makes

my heart *thalak thalak thalak*.

Aurora Borealis in Tennessee

Like an egg I left in the pan too long,
my memory of you
scorched on one side.
Only certain parts are still soft,
can be bled open.

I see your lipstick, terrorist maroon,
on a bagel in Nashville.
Drunk and topless,
hand washing a silk shirt
in the ceramic blue of my bathroom.

I've filed you under
Things Only For The Mind
next to tube tops in Tehran,
a clean subway,
the Aurora Borealis in Tennessee.

Escobar's Hacienda Napoles

When it was still something of this world,
there were fields of Cadillacs, Mercedes
all maroon. As if they had once been Gringo Red
but since baked to a color more appropriate
for the fourth parallel north of the equator.

Napoles was his woman,
the jewel resting on Colombia's breastbone
between Bogotá and Medellín.
El Patron's other *mujeres* were a skein, squawking
and fluttering from doorway to doorway

in the hot, vastness of the house. They sweated.
Cut slug-fat lines of gum-curling *cocaina*
with the iridescent B sides of CDs. Each
mound its own legend, the slight smell
and electric white of new chalk.

The best blow tastes like nails just painted.
He knew firsthand, sucked the small, glossy squares
of their fingertips between sips of Aguardiente
at the breakfast table. The *pirujas* didn't stay for free, *cabrón*.
Everyone knew that.

Opulence is fifteen hippopotami with purpling skin
in Colombia's bone-crumbling campo;
Escobar had 300.

African ocelots lazed in windowsill wells
like overgrown housecats. The bullring,
a private airstrip—the land's bad Brazilian wax—
the decadences bore each other. Each not to be outdone
by the last.

Don Pablo raised cast-iron dinosaurs
out of the ground one October.
Moses with money. In 1993, the federal debt
in Colombia was seventeen billion U.S. dollars. Pablo Escobar
could've created a surplus and still been worth eight.

Though, he wouldn't have, friend.
And yet—

to have this history told in secondhand words

makes it fiction, not fact, for the living.
Stories aren't too good to be true,
they're too good to be walking.

And just so, the cars' blast-out skeletons
with their heat-chewed rocker panels
become testament. A graveyard of iron prehistorics
that remain frozen among the breathing.
Five hippos thrive, even now;
they have children of their own.

His are still alive. They sang, not read, at his mass
because F minor is the saddest key.

Today, the muse is his own mausoleum. His empire
a *museo*. If you arrive,
you will be handed a perforated,
purple admissions ticket in the empty doorway.

Keep This Coupon

It will say in Webster's English, as you thumb
its small stiffness in your pocket.