

## Waiting for the Plowman

In the morning: Rousseau's *Confessions*. Breakfast:  
something forgettable and unfulfilling, toast,  
the white of an egg circling a shiny yolk.

By midday, the desert of chalk buries the laurel  
and watching juncos burrow under the feeder  
suffices for motion. Blank under its plastic face

the kitchen dial signals two o'clock with sleek  
anemic hands. Within the hour, sugar held  
in the spoon's mouth is let go into black liquid,

and boots, scuffed and sheltered alert the tangled  
knit scarf to concoct itself. At four, shovel in hand  
I depart to do the job myself. The man

and his truck are nowhere to be found  
even though the blizzard's end is new  
and he promised and there is a lot of it.

Lighter than a pile of proverbial feathers  
but sticky and heaping, the first bundle I take  
begins to build a dune around the driveway

but there is nowhere else to go and no rest  
and nothing to do to lessen the white  
except to bend at the knees and let it fly.

## Literally

She says without irony or modesty  
*I'm literally so irritated*, as if irritation  
could be anything other than literal, forget  
the aching hyperbole of *so* and the blankness  
of those other loosely placed modifiers that fill  
space left empty by the dysfunction of sound,  
the way fireflies pulse unevenly in the summer air.

She literally calls herself Mary C  
on her cellphone when she asked for Saturday  
night off to attend a “family gathering.”  
*I literally was like making fun of him,*  
*and I told him: I was, like, I never would do*  
*that and I like can't even imagine you*  
*trying to handle a girl like me, you literally*  
*have been doing a shitty job lately.* This was before  
she told her brackishly tanned friend, who  
sporting a shiny ankle bracelet and had  
her hair pinned back literally with a binder clip,  
that she had thrown up in the parking lot  
sometime after the office party. You can tell  
this was the type of parking lot where  
white lines had to be repainted and underneath  
some faded ones still gloomed like  
bad eye shadow on a clown. A very sad clown.  
Literally, the clown is sad.

Mary C has dark auburn hair, like soil  
found beneath piles of wet and decomposing  
oak leaves that like the stasis underneath  
the layers of newly dead foliage, storm-tossed  
and musty. *I guess he has, like, a superiority complex,*  
*so like I would pick him up and take him on a date,*  
*so he, like, would feel like he's accomplishing*  
*something.* It's very long hair, like long, literally  
past her shoulders, which isn't that long, not like  
polygamy wife long or whatever, but long enough  
for you to know she has never, in 30 some-odd years,

ever been confused with someone clownish, or even someone with a superiority complex, not with those pouty eyes and tailored eyebrows. Clowns, literally, do not speak with such elegance or authority, like not ever. Clowns are known to stumble and wear cherry wigs and awkward shoes and bow ties, for crying out loud. So funny, though, like literally, so funny. It's true, few of them mind picking up people and chauffeuring them around especially in very small cars. Mary C drives a Nissan Sentra, so you can understand about trying to handle a girl like that. Fireflies, you know, filling a really humid night with sparkles, so irritating, if you, like, aren't paying attention.

## Instead of Poems

Instead of poems, I weed the sidewalk  
and empty crevices of intruders.  
I find it helpful to harvest  
their relentlessness. Maybe dirt,  
maybe blood sacrifices, maybe  
a shovel.

The words I wished would come  
unprompted, stick like pollen  
to my nose. But the heat has broken  
enough for me to breathe.

Despite the scarlet beetle  
that has scoured their stalks  
to skeletal canes, the lilies' perfume  
layers into me like embroidered  
handkerchiefs pocketed once,  
then rediscovered in a pair  
of comfortable pants.

Instead of poems, I savor  
scents sung by saffron tongues  
and listen to the striated pink  
of unbeatable blooms.

## Bad Girls

The boy at the pub had blonding hair  
and a round face  
and we were cruel to him.

If I sat under hypnosis with a police sketch artist,  
I could recall exactly what he looked like, down to the earlobes  
and cheek bones, down to the insignia on the shirt pocket,  
the ironing board and the decision against a tie,  
down to the comb, even the television show he watched  
while he pressed that pale green shirt, reruns and  
laugh tracks, the best anyone has to fill the time  
preparing for a broken heart.

But everybody knows that eye witnesses mistake  
what they see for what their mind conjures  
out of conglomerates and jigsaw memories.

The pub had dark wood paneling and pockets  
of light. Lily and Kate were there, talking  
quickly and coyly, sometimes slipping into Serbian  
through the privacy of a giggle or nod.  
Maybe there were other reasons  
to close the world out. We were often bad.

He never got past hello and we never  
even bothered with ordinary niceties.  
As far as brush-offs go, this might have been one  
of the most perfectly written. Turn of shoulders,  
the huddle, then the pantomime: *you do not matter to us  
because this is where we take our punishment  
and you are not allowed to make us feel worthwhile.*

What did the boy in was that he could not hide  
the authenticity of his hopefulness.  
We know how to preen thin skin  
and screen smiles through bloody teeth.

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**Field Guide to North American Birds**

In my dream, the call  
came from a rose breasted  
grosbeak, but I have seen  
none, only recognize  
sparrows and catbirds  
and hummingbirds

whom I have heard  
chittering in a blur,  
tickled at their luck  
at being born  
with the ability  
to fly backwards.

Discovering  
that hummingbirds sing  
shouldn't have surprised me,  
but it did. While they aim  
toward silence  
and an almost  
sightless blur,  
one could imagine  
their quickness  
as breaking some  
inaudible sound barrier  
that only hummingbirds  
can break. Without looking  
I can tell one  
just passed by.

Between afternoons  
I wander into  
the forest just past  
peach trees and raspberry  
bushes, completely  
oblivious  
to the blueberries  
ripening in a thick grove

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in the center  
of the lawn.

Seeking the nest  
of red-tails  
whom I hear but  
cannot see, I catch  
something  
between a screech  
and a squeal, a plea  
and a declaration:  
*I am not anonymous,  
you know who I am.*

After dreaming  
I hear what can  
only be called  
laughter,

and on the table,  
my breakfast bowl  
is full of ripe,  
misshapen blueberries.  
A song sparrow  
left them, though  
I know she was not  
the one laughing.  
Listen, she said,  
sing.

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