

The Kiss

-- inspired by Rodin's *The Kiss*

In all honesty it was disappointing.
The wooded scenery was quintessential
and the moment was hurried and ripe for passion.
But his lips—heaven's promise—turned out to guard the gates of hell,
as the odor of that evenings' s Baklava still festered on his breath. And
handsome men can be so brutish when it comes to the softer things. He had
no idea what to do with his hands; One he placed limply on my thigh, the other
continued to clutch the book he'd been reading. His muscles—chiseled marble--
proved inflexible, and I found myself positioned at the most awkward of angles,
draped about him like a blanket, all the while a crook developing in my neck
and rock digging into my hipbone. Not wanting to interrupt his ardor, I lay there
for what seemed like eternity, the nerve in my neck pulsing and pulsing.
Soon, the only thing I felt was time slipping away
and myself turning into stone.

Synesthesia

How romantic, the man who mistook his wife for a hat.
Propped on his brain for years past and years to come,
he saw in both worn figures the same cherished shelter,
and reached it even when erasing fissure in vision had begun,
via synesthetic bridge of metaphor, grand and strong,
for we may be blind, deaf, and mute, but never dumb.
How beautiful, the gray hedges of our fertile minds, pruned
unlike, so that what's a number to another is song to one.
Has Oliver himself not found love in the matter of carbon bonds?
And seen it to be by entropy born and by entropy undone?

Boxes

Emptying the upstairs, all her things go in boxes: textbooks, old Polaroids of complexions less aware, more forgiving, postcards from abroad, a bottle of champagne, salvaged for the right occasion, letters she and they had read together, dresses they borrowed, dresses she didn't. Folded up and taped air-tight and no room to negotiate, with these, they pack her up too: liar, thief. It takes three pairs of shell-shocked hands to lift the last one out the door, heave it down the stairs, pausing, just for a second to wonder, *Is it too heavy?* Before they scour the room, look under the bed, open every drawer, and make sure there's nothing more to come back for.

Snakes of Eden

I should have realized that time we went to the Smithsonian
and stood in the Spanish/Italian wing, transfixed
by one of those paintings about the Fall:

Notice the iridescence of the heavens
reflected in the still of Eve's back.
Notice how in this age, all is one.
You point to the serpent with a human head and say,
"That's terrifying."
And I wish everything could be that obvious.

This is how we spent our summer—
not in the refined space of museum alcoves
but in the balmy dusk of Eden,
sprawled out in repose.

Biking under the canopy of June
and hidden from the rays of the Real World,
we looped infinity signs with our tires.

Yet our snakes were known, and numerous.
Already abased, they roamed the ground
like a familiar plot twist.

When you kiss me goodnight in the driveway,
one lies coiled beneath the engine of your car.
"I was here before you and I'll be here after,"
it hisses as it slithers into the distance.
The moment hangs, framed by the tail of its going.

By the pool in the afternoon,
I spot another tanning its scales in the sun.
Its black eyes snatch me
as its body lurks between us.

Often, even when you're not there,
they crawl into my bed and wrap themselves around me,
keeping me cool at night.

So frequent were their visits, you would think I invited them in.
But it's strange—the way we didn't acknowledge it—
because I know you saw them too.
I think they kept you clever conversation,
though their whispered ideas

you withheld.

It isn't a perfect metaphor.

But it's how I felt, those days,
as acutely as a sharp and venomous bite
in the place that hurts the most.

Sandcastles in the Tide

On a Friday afternoon or a vacations beginning,
the men and women of the city who can afford it
rise from their desks, leave their offices, and head
home, amidst the heavy smog of the city.

In a New York minute, they pack up their bags
and their families, shuttle into their cars and
make their way east. They press through
the sticky nasal of the Expressway, past

the middle finger flailing Belt, and onto Sunrise,
where at last the light ascending in incomprehensible
spectrums from the water that flanks this skinny,
long island, finds them, and buoys them,

rendering their watches timeless. The first night back,
I cry, struck by a sky so vast you can see its
ceiling bubble over at the horizon, but close,
like you're the only one who can see it.

In the morning, flooded by light, I hang my toes
in the surf and let its awesome ebbing
rock me to insanity against the shrieking chatter
of seagulls, golf handicaps, and divorce—

With it revoked memberships and who's getting back in,
because we all know that no, money can't buy
love, though the bankers own heaven, and their kids
boogie board in the lap of God every August, get

tossed on the sandbar of His chuckling thighs
off a boardwalk and beach, always the right amount
of empty, no cellphones allowed, and timeless.
Timeless like the ectomorph frames in pencil-cut dress

that flock it, ever-present, though each one will fade.
Thank Him for Joan's Granddaughter, with the tattoos, who
went to Art School, and for whom the dress never quite fit.
Once upon a meteor shower, we finish a bottle of

stolen red, my father's, and thrash through the ocean,
waking sea walnuts with our knees until the water ignites,
and we are mimicking the sky. Then, after hapless hug
to the ground, we look up at that roundness that puts

the Old World to shame and wonder what the stars see
when they look at his each other. 40 years ago,
my uncle smokes his first joint in this cabana,
ashes it in a seashell, giggles as the pastel clowns

outside, then scrapes pre-teen skin and bone over
back wall, bikes to the tennis house and sees the sign
standing in somber command, "Whites Only." He thinks,
This is 1974, what is that still doing here. Now, 2014, it

or some identical descendent stares back, timeless.
Timeless as the summer's end, which always comes,
here in this town, with a sandcastle contest. The
children sculpt mermaids with seaweed hair and

stony eyes, turtles bigger than trucks, and rockets
that defy gravity. They trade corals and conchs
at the sidelines and impose tariffs on their competition.
They delegate tasks to the nannies and the littler ones.

Once judged, the winners are photographed under
the regaling light of the day, for the paper, so that
they are immortalized, even when that night at
high tide, He roars, and knocks those creations down.