

Ode To Waking Up

the day breaks
a grin like porcelain
hot, with a wind
like laughter blowing

through your long hair—
apple blossoms, recklessly
strewn, little poems
little prayers, I whisper

in the morning, afraid
to disturb the glassy
waters of a new day,
to step like a stone, to skip

class, play, wanton
like a child, to braid
dandelion sentences
into a story shaped

like a crown, light
as a kiss on your head
thrown back, perpetual
awe to still be spinning

days like seed pods
falling, gay pollinators
a thousand little stories
tripping up your heels

digging in the soft earth
finding more and more—
hope, days, light,
every creature of love
again uncovered

A Carol

the roof there sags a little and the wind tears through
its bones and in the marsh across the parking lot
frogs are climbing into the roads on new legs
to seek out spring, heedless of their imminent death

I don't think I believe in beauty anymore
I think I believe only in imperfection
in hard work and in women, the ancient
tradition of knowing joy is a moving body

a hundred years ago, cows shook in their stalls
under this roof, feeling the winter on their
ankles and the same frogs were making the
same journeys, yet unimpeded by machines

inside, for a quarter century, her two hands
have passed the same plates back and forth
growing hard and rough, tending and fixing
everything they touch with equal authority and skill

she lifts things like a man, jokes mean
and quick and nasty, is the only one
who pays attention to the leaking roof
or the sounds of spring life in the marsh

one hundred years ago, I hope there were women
with men's hands, jobs, and strength, and I hope
someone loved them as reverently as I do
was moved by their hardy roughness, their ability

in the loft above the gables, the old farm cat sleeps
she fills his food bowl, pints of beer, the dish racks
she laughs, yells above the din, and feels her bones
begin to creak in agreement with the old wood

I, distracted from my work, am happy just to watch her
to watch snow fall for one hundred years
for one hundred years to escort frogs across
roads in the spring, to watch the rain so well

I become it, so long as I may keep watching
unbeautiful women with soft smiles
and hard hands move surely, stoutly, and boldly
like time, right through it

Care Full

don't blink. don't even breathe. wrap your knuckles tighter
around the iron railings till they glow bone white in
the two am sky is everywhere, cold and thin
your shoulderbones rattle and echo in the dark, since when
were your bones so loud, the space between them
so cavernous this sky, a cave emptying upwards
who would notice if you leapt off this roof
is a dance floor and a trap, are you watching whose hands you're
touching the floor only barely, you're drunk, you're 21 and thin
reedy music is slipping up from the streets half full of half
dressed girls stumbling hand in hand with long-toothed
grinning men, if only your aim was better you could knock
that smile off his wet lascivious mouth with your lighter
cuts the darkness, illuminates your faces in strange
relief is a liquid, it seeps out of you like citrus
margarita mix, fruit wine, rainwater, you are all
tipping sideways, each other off, your hats—
chivalrous because you do not have to be
women all the time, or men ever, just contradictory
rooftop cave-dwellers, cold and fierce and wild
flinty laughter punches from your throat, nothing is easi
er than wanting to jump, nothing is hard
er than learning to fall upwards

Ad Astra

I used to want to be an astronomer
I used to find religion in the stars
I used to tip my head back and beg

but it's cloudy most of the time now
and winter climbs through the year like a beast
out of an unlocked cage

a lioness hath whelped in the streets

and spring hath cowered and prayed
and the stars hath shivered in their sockets
murmuring incantations too far away to hear

under blankets of heavy cloud, I sleep
dreaming about the telescope I left in its box
till the cardboard rotted and I gave it away—

the fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars

but in our cards, down on the table, all our
diamonds glittering in weak kitchen light
through winter nights as deep as old wounds

and new friends, so bright and many-armed
they reach down through my years to the child
inside, hold her hand, even as it's mine

fret till your proud heart break

they teach us both to tip back, look up, forge
new fists and thrust them stoutly into time
and every lion's wintered maw and further

into pockets of night full of erstwhile stars
and pull them sleeping, back into the sky
threatening hell if they do not blaze again

cowards die

a warning.
a forecast.
a new sort of astronomy.

Bad Blood

your monthly bleeding stopped again
right when your red knuckles

cracked open into the wash bin and
stained the great white nightshirt

the farmer was so fond of, his eyes
never paler than in that shirt

narrowed when he saw the pink stain and
he flicked a great bear claw at you

a warning, to be sure, you wrapped
your knuckle in the first baby's

old swaddling cloth and your
stomach dropped to think

you would be needing it again so quickly
in the hot sun your bonnet

slips down your shoulders, rests
against the rifle slung

loosely and comfortably along your
back whenever you go

outside, you feel more comfortable
to have it there, even when

the farmer is within eyesight
especially, maybe

if it is very cold and the wind
makes it hard to see

the baby who is no longer a baby
and stands on legs you don't

remember him ever growing
inside of you, turning your stomach

like the stream of vomit in your throat
you let out into the soup

the farmer enjoyed anyway
because he knows no better

than to speak the language
of spitting out your ownership

the way he spit his seeds into you
the first time he fucked you, when

you swore you might love him and
his squeezing bear claws

tight around your arms and neck and
uterus swelling with the seed

of another fruit you don't remember
saying you liked the taste of

the first time the farmer fucked you
your eyes were shut but

you do not close your eyes now
that the baby has legs and

hands he got from his father, hands
that know too well what squeezing

is from grabbing everything his black
eyes see, this morning

the fire poker still hot, and you burnt your
own hand making sure he did not

touch what would hurt him and you
are tired of burning

for men you did not want to fuck
or give birth to, so tonight

when the moon is bright and the bear
is hibernating so peacefully

you almost could be convinced
he knows what gentleness is

you will take the poker from the still-burning
fire, go to the barn, and leave

a glistening scarlet mess behind
the prize cow for which he paid

so many silver seeds and glowering
dangerously over his breakfast a few

hours later he will inquire into
the blood, not aware a cow

could make mistakes, he will furrow
his whole great face and you

will not cry or vomit this time but let her
take the blame for you and your blood

is hard to clean off the dirty straw
ground but you do it with the child

on your ankles and your knuckles
raw and terrible like the face

of the farmer, who late that night
will put a bullet in the head

of the prize cow and tell you
that is the price you pay

for bad blood.