

The Geese at Camp Fallujah

Next to the city of mosques stretching
across arid land, a compound
of tents and concrete buildings

stood next to a water supply--The Pond.
In a landscape where Humvees roared in,

kicking up great clouds of sand,
and Howitzers fired into air
electric with conflict, the geese

presented their newborn
balls of fuzz with orange beaks
to a city of Marines in camouflage.

Each night after dropping
75-pound packs onto hard earth,
the men checked on the downy goslings,

keeping count of each one
until the babies grew plump and tall,
ambled down the road with their flock

past sandbagged bunkers
in the rising light of dawn.

She Walks Into Starbucks Carrying a 2 x 4,

her frayed wool greatcoat
scented with mold, white hair swirling
about her face as she scans the room
and shuffles to the counter
for a free coffee sample and cup of water.

Without warning, she lifts her 2 x 4
and swings at the air behind her,
sends the other patrons fleeing
like a small burst of quail startled
from their bushes.

Let this serve as a warning,
she shouts to the air above her.
Perhaps there are malevolent spirits
that hover above her,
follow her wherever she goes,

or perhaps she is simply announcing
herself, claiming her right
to walk on this small patch
of real estate, to step across the thin line
separating us from her.

Why Stray Cats Loiter Around The Duarte Family Mausoleum

That day the sky was brushed with a wash of cirrate
at the Recoleta Cemetery. The Argentinian workers
wove their way through thick clots of tourists thronging

the gateway. Then twelve stray cats emerged from the dark
of the tombs and began a procession past the doorways
of deceased notables. A one-eyed tomcat sniffed the marble

statuary lining the lanes and raised his rear leg
to spray the slumbering boy angel before nibbling
the crumbs of empanadas. He stopped to rub against

the doorway to Evita's final home, shining the bronze
with his whiskers before hissing at a groundskeeper
who kicked him away like a wad of trash. The Lady of Hope

kept a silent watch over this bit of cruelty, but stray cats
know that Little Eva will take care of them. Yesterday
they saw her in the eyes of a dowager offering small morsels

of herring and biscuits. Today she inhabits a spray of water
washing the dust from their thin, matted coats. Tomorrow
they will hear her voice call to them from deep in her vault,

once more inviting them into the shadows, safely home,
away from our indifferent cameras, our transient curiosity.
I saw how they ignored me and expected nothing else.

Sean

As a teen, rules and responsibility were never your strong suit.
At least you shrugged them off quietly--
no grand displays of defiance or bravado, no swearing

or railing at the unfairness of it all. You never labored
over explanations or rationalizations, much preferring
the comfortable mantle of passivity. You were sympathetic

to others' frustrations with you—your wasted intellect,
lack of application, no concern for your future. You joined your family
in throwing up hands of exasperation over you.

Years of therapy chipped away at the early traumas: Dad--drunk,
hands in the wrong places on your sister. On you.
You shrugged that off too. Asked about your feelings, you let

your sister speak for you, let her pain describe yours, watched her
work through the hard stuff. You played a supporting role.
When I saw you years later, you wore a uniform of pressed navy,

crisp white and confidence. You shared your plans for the future
as though they'd been in your head all along. Imagine my shock,
then, when I heard about your car, abandoned at the top

of the Mason Street Bridge, no note in sight. I read
the tributes to you on our hospital's website, details about your
funeral. Front and center, your picture, your grin--now gone.

Missing Jayden

Here in front of me—in my memory—
stands a small boy,
his nose almost touching mine,

his sloe-eyed gaze an invitation.
He is talking with great intensity
about vacuum cleaners.

Hoover is his favorite brand.
He wants to know mine
and how many do I own right now.

Apparently he is a hellion
in his kindergarten classroom.
His principal and teacher assert

that he has little respect
for authority, as he routinely
fails to follow instructions

and interrupts them constantly,
sharing facts about vacuums
and their accessories.

His grandmother cares for him
while his mother marks time with heroin
and his father does time upstate.

She loves him but is plumb out of ideas
and bone-tired. Jayden enjoys our testing
sessions, especially before and after,

when we extend our dialogue
about vacuum cleaners. He would like
a new one, but cannot afford it.

When I tell his grandmother
that Jayden is a bright boy with autism,
her eyes fill up with liquid relief.

Jayden's school does not take as kindly
to this news, certain that he is just
a smart boy behaving badly

and has us conned. It took two weeks
to spring Jayden from the special school
for behavior problems, two months

to finish talking about his time-outs
in the isolation room. At our last session
together, Jayden held a photo in front

of my face, almost touching my nose.
In it, he stood next to his new blue Hoover,
its extra-long hose wrapped around his waist.