

OUTSIDE MY PROFESSOR'S OFFICE

frames of glossy wood repeat down a hallway. empty slabs and then: a sticker, slightly off center. blue and yellow stripes make an equals sign. brand-name bravery.

i feel it in the space between my ribs and lower belly. this small flag we share. an intimacy i had guessed at, had seen in his quietness. that silence, small death, we live with.

it's in the way we speak that i hear it. the gravel of my lover's voice. a boy's twirling wrist. the spaces inside of sentences which trip over themselves, wincing, uneasy. there are no stories about home life here. no pronouns in my favorite love songs.

but on nights in june we look at girls and don't stop looking. we paint our faces and drink moscato. my cousin has one brown eye and one blue and i am no longer scared because it's technically tomorrow and we're going eighty in her jeep, passing dunes to provincetown.

FIVE

five years, sitting in a bathtub on folsom
street and she's standing over
me with eyes gleaming like a set of cutlery.

just got off the phone with your
son of a bitch uncle
what a.

she turns away from me and begins to
scrub furiously
hands under sulfur tap water.

they are too rough when she grabs me
out of the tub and sets me on the bottom bunk
like they were sitting in the sun too long
but i know they weren't even close.

she looks at me, pebbles against the pale
half moon of her face.
lips without color.
we are so faint.

you've got it in you too
god help you we've all
got jack running in our veins.

WEST WIND

in north carolina my sister cries
sweaty and broken in the hot sun.
we eat waffles
and sit by the lake
and try to think of answers.

georgia is every shade
of green but under the grass
is dark red earth
cracked and bright like
the desert.

last night a man entered a church
sat through an hour of the service
and then opened fire.

we eat eggs on biscuits
and don't say anything.

we hit mississippi on a sunday
and the pool tastes like being little
and missing home.

new orleans is a rabbit hole
of sorts – thick air coating my pale skin
purple houses next to uprooted trees.

the curtains are tapestries
and we lean into the humid air
to try to spot a tiger
in the nearby zoo.

we drink moscato in new mexico
and see the way the caves
were carved
the earth made soft and sweet
and pliant.

but it is in california that we allow ourselves
forgetfulness

after cresting santa monica hills
on the side of the road

the pacific laid out before us
oceans unowned and unknown
a rush of wonder
and then the blues
like a kiss.

THE IMMORTAL NUMBER TWO

Andres Escobar spent years praying to that ball,
lived with it between his legs
like a horny teenager, sometimes he imagined
it was his father's red face
he was kicking across the field

but inside an orb of 50,000
it only took fifteen seconds
not enough time to be born
barely enough to die
one fumble fuck up and
an entire stadium chanting

own goal
you are not Colombia

when he got back to Medellín they shot him
outside his car
a month before the wedding.

Sometimes I imagine that I am his fiancé
as I ride the subway cars at night
stoned on someone's xanax.

Sometimes I wish somebody would shoot you
in the head outside a bar
brains all over your new jeans
your eyes scared confused and dark
like always.

A LOVE POEM FOR CAPE COD

September weekends, Cape Cod.
We sleep in damp basements.
In bleak New England we realize what summer has stolen,
after months of spaghetti with cherry tomatoes
and watermelon for breakfast,
an oyster shiver spreads down our spines
and we yell until our voices are raw.
I later learned to call this love.

In a motel in West Hollywood in May
I stare across the room at you to find
that you are not the girl whose shoulderblades
I once drew a universe on, at dawn,
on her fifteenth birthday.

You said, I guess we could go for a drive.
So I drove around the California desert.
So I took you from small town Pennsylvania
back to your Brooklyn. So we went upstate and lay
in thick dewy grass and slept past noon.

It's not that I want you to feel pain
but I like the spark that lights
when we return to each other.
A terrific crash, an ecstasy.

Colette, when I remember you
I see your face, soft and lunar.
Childlike features twisted in an agony
that I have caused you.
You are about to cry.

I see you ugly, tortured, even when I think of you
in late July, your smooth legs resting
in my lap, curls brushing my cheek,
as we head east on the FDR,
dreaming of saltwater.