

Safety in Numbers Is Your Matter of Opinion

When we dovetail
on tiny rafts

the sea says drink
in a muted voice.

When we dovetail
in a riot

teargas says asp,
slashed tire,

punctured air hose
of a diver's bell.

When we dovetail
in the dark

the tips of your breasts,
your tongue,

say pinprick,
constellation,

navigation
to somewhere else.

Iodine

Cattle grazing near Chernobyl
took you into their bodies,
your half-life of eight days
more than enough
to seep into children
via milk, via root system.

Our species and theirs
are so near to each other,
reliant in the middle,
temperate belt of the earth
some mistake for wealth
instead of accident.

This weather
lets us raise things,
put them into pens,
put them down
in the darkest places
of the food chain,
follow the earth, scorch it
to its epicenter, salt
its crumbling bones.

You are black as tar
until put to a flame
and forced into
violet, violet, violet.

Your compound body
in the glass bottle
is cold on the raw skin
of newborn ostrich chicks.

They twine their necks together
in a laundry basket
in Whitewater, Kansas,
freshly hatched,
and I cover them over
with a blanket, touch their feathers
until they draw back
from my hand.

Bernard Courtois

found you by accident,
the British Navy
just past the breakers
trolling for blood.

Desperate for something new
to form black powder,
he turned to seaweed
instead of saltpeter,
a purple, accidental cloud,
sulfuric acid touched to your dregs.

The chicks in the basket
think of me as cold,
black powder, an accident,
the smooth lip of the bottle

I tell myself,
mistake their wariness
for a causal chain,
again, the same old story
of being human

means seeing human
in every other thing,
picking the parts you need
to be your friend,
touching one to another,
clearing the land,

the heavy weight,
of a yoke across the shoulders,
millwheels turned,
a harness on a river.

We use you to clean our wounds,
add you to our salt,
and with your radioactive touch
we stop our cells
from endlessly filling space.

Did you ever feel
you would be so used?
Put a flame to you,
and your name comes out.

In the car, the chicks
let me touch them again,
snoring softly in the basket.

We drive to other farms
never willing to cut down
the full grown. Instead
we call ourselves incubator,
midwife, disinfectant.

Our hearts start black
as a piece of lead,
and then we turn them
over a long, warm season
into violence, violence, violence.

Transit Visa

To ascend and leave you need papers;
beggars roll their own, puff, and take flight.
Moths leave prints of ash from their bodies, chase scalding light.
Fog alone settles on the district.

Beggars roll their own, puff, and take flight.
Tech malls have a nimbus from our distance.
Fog alone settles on the district.
Gray hands caress the spine of an avenue.

Tech malls have a nimbus from our distance.
I feel my way along, from work, to bar, to home;
gray hands caress the spine of an avenue,
dissipated, disappointing.

I feel my way along, from work, to bar, to home;
a kind of migration, collapsed and small—
dissipated, disappointing—
the transition from insect into ghost.

A kind of migration, collapsed and small,
moths leave prints of ash from their bodies, chase scalding light,
the transition from insect into ghost.
To ascend and leave you need papers.

Our Brother the Rabbit

A hemorrhage of sumac
splits the field of winter wheat

into a quarter of my heart,
into an eighth.

Tiny rabbits in a copse
tunnel with their bodies—

generative, multiplied,
the smallest engines

ever to nestle in cleft
of rock and thistle, to beget.

A Railyard's Eyesore's Your Matter of Opinion

Composition by field
extends to railyards,

crabgrass flossing
tar-soaked ties,

the rusted cuspids
of unused spikes.

At the crossing
a thrombosis of freight,

deep and copper,
tagged in neon,

flashes handles from Alberta
and Bozeman, Butte

and the end of time,
forces a moment's

reflection on the earth,
this earth, sedimentary,

this neighborhood's
crowded eyesore.

If only the engines
would let everyone living

abandon them,
the scars on the body

made from appetite,
a name

and some gone year,
might last.