

Jockey

There's a hoof in his chest that beats like a heart.
If the question is speed, it stamps once for yes,
twice for yes. He is knee-high to bluegrass,
missing front teeth—his wind knocks clean
through the gap. A slip of a man on the back
of a beast, prancing, yes, but flank
and barrel, powerful withers that shiver
under gossamer wings. The gate snaps open,
he pulls the pin from the horse's grenade,
quick cakewalk around the inner track:
he and the steed make one machine.
In the wind the mane catches his mouth;
he sucks the hair until under his tongue
they're tendrils, fine as the silks of his sleeves.

The Dead of Summer

The sun's got his teeth in by ten.
Neighbors ignite their bricks
of firecrackers from the service road stand.
A flag in the window and smoke
in the yard, fresh kill
splayed on the grill.
At the fairgrounds,
the long-paired partners promenade
in a honkytonk time warp,
kids run barefoot over
gravel, pull-tab bingo cards
and paper cones stained with shaved-ice syrup.
Clay pigeon shooters
yell *Pull!* well after dusk.
Someone gets thrown from a carnival
ride every summer but that doesn't mean
you dismantle the *Octopus*.

Closing Time

It's so late, it's morning. No more songs.
The barkeep unplugs the jukebox.

Tonight I was purely ornamental,
perched and misty, swooning on my stool

as a band of tanked groomsmen
lifted an old man to his feet

outside the dancehall. I buy liquor for later:
one for me, one to carry home to my friend, Afternoon.

I've inherited my father's rowboat of despair.
Last Easter, under the cathedral's pastel banners,

I thought, where have we all gone?
The regime is ending as easily

and inconsequentially as any door
clicks shut. On the walk a sparrow left behind

a single feather so slim
it wasn't even a cloud, it wasn't even

a breath. A tangle of honeysuckle vines
sweetens the arm of the fence.

Morning is a new order of seraphim
burning in their wings—

beyond the canopy of trees
the sky is quilted in their light.

The Scrambler

The carnival night was moonless.
Moths fluttered against the lampposts—
bodies so big, the light was fitful.

Sandwiched between her sisters,
she was flung toward the river

and toward the street, a controlled loop
set in motion by the man who took her ticket,
snapped the lap bar in place,

pulled the lever, leaning on his hiked leg
as he looked off,

unrattled by the mock screams
same in every town.
She was not afraid, so she screamed.

Her sister laughed so hard
she wet her pants. By two

that morning,
the operator had the ride folded
snug as a confidence table.

Born Singing

Evenings, the spring crops are born
singing, singing to deafen, a forest
of throats that open, swell, croak.
Swallows flush from the bush where
lilac blush so faint, the blooms levitate,
unbaring the branch. If you scan
the treeline searching for the source
long enough to hear the chorus
die, the silence is like the first,
after seas and tar pits were made
and the thundering to cleave the canyons
tapered, and what's left is a robin skirmish
among the early daffodil, geese
pink in sunset formation, the quiet
that must come after such choir.