

Sallekhana

Hunger overtakes in many forms; first,
an obvious shadow in my guts, burnt
in the lining of dying stomach cells,
expanding to a waist eating itself,

my legs built by a life spent carrying,
the cracked feet, dull toes, starving now, empty.
In the beginning, disembodied hands
floated past my arms—lost in their digits.

Now they are somewhere else, a memory
of touch. Soon I am weightless and godly,
this nothing I inhabit inhabits
me. Thirst is a different hunger, sterile

as salt, bark-brittle and air-quiet: thirst
is sky-deep and relentless until light
breaks down the body and pestilence drips
away, out of my nose, eyes, then oneness—

some say *death*—engulfs the shadow, the thirst,
pulsing brilliant towards my chest, eating
everything, every bit of a world
I was not made to withstand. There is light.

Existential Crisis in Bed with a New Woman

He's clinging to something outside of himself,
hoping that the meaning is clear and naked, as she is,
as he was before he put his underwear on—
he's uncomfortable sleeping exposed.
He spends his days looking for patterns
in behavior and numbers, ways to capitalize,
but in his own life he wants transparency.
He wants her to be a symbol of everything
so he can stop searching. Her face is sleep-hot;
he burrows into her warm neck like a mole in dirt,
blind, hungry for safety— a place to think of nothing.

She is drowning in and out of sleep, resurfacing and falling
throughout the night. He tries to catch her eyes
accidentally, gaze her into consciousness and ask her
in half lucidity, *is this all there is? Have I made it to a point of rest?*
Do we keep going? He knows the questions are vague,
Unanswerable. She may even assume he worries
that when breakfast is over she'll call a cab
and never return like so many before.
But in dusk's steady light he doesn't care about that.

Last night, he remembers he liked her very much,
how they used one another openly, after drinks
deciding their bodies deserved each other in dying Fall.

He discovers her face again and again as sun
hits the rear windows. He wonders if he looks peaceful
overcome by sleep, or if his unease follows him everywhere.
He gets up to pee and she stirs, not waking.
He hopes, in his vanity, his body is memorable—that she'll cling
to details of his back, his arms. In the bathroom
he sways, lightheaded, imagining the pale feeling
once she leaves.

He is all anticipation; he breathes for a moment
and feels empty, flushes the toilet.
He wants her to stay there forever, to not recall herself
before they slept together. He floats back to bed, empty vessel,
lies beside her and the curve of her left hip fits in his palm:
perfect symmetry.

Foot Sonnet

He kissed her feet to taste where she had walked.
The sole's curved instep, like an archer's bow,
held steady. He wanted to learn journeys
by the cracked skin at the very bottom

of her being. He printed damp tongue
at each fold of her body: fingertip
salt, swirled ear hollows, tumescent clit,
inner thighs silken with her body's drip;

glorious all, but the heartbreak, he knew,
was in her feet. He needed to know streets
they stamped alone, cradled in high-heeled boots,
the loneliness of evenings, toes perked up

to hear her weeping. He wanted to taste
the cold hard ground that led her to his bed.

When I Question my Passion, Then Question Everything Else

What's still air and smell,
mountains spilling
up from fields; what
are red-tailed hawks
circling, cityscapes
stone-silent at dusk;
where does a mind fit,
when will a body find
rest; what is season change—
humidity drowned
by Autumn, where is life
enough, when will this
inevitably
break me or exalt me
until I am sitting
cross-legged in a mountain
temple, quiet pines
surrounding,
easily-named birds
perching in the stone garden,
my face lake-smooth
wrung of questions,
deep only with answers
my head nodding
imperceptibly
accommodating wind,
saying *yes. yes. yes.*
yes.

Raw Beautiful Oneness
for Kawinzi

In a king bed somewhere in New England,
a bed that is actually two twins
pushed together, two people—mid thirties,

from two other places but stuck here—
unite disparate bodies in dark fall,
the dreary bleak morning combining dim

sky, sooty earth. They are mixing sounds, not
words, but moan-music, primal speech before
language rounded noise into being, then

the man (white, average height, Irish-nosed)
tells the woman (black, tall, oval-eyed),
that he can't remember where their skin ends;

when they are in bed he feels warmth and width,
a flesh-horizon pulsating waves, raw
beautiful oneness in a world

combining, splitting, falling, receding
constantly, that he finds memory in touch,
her breath sour-somehow-everywhere and

addictive. She is silent this morning;
after they clean themselves and kiss, she stays
in bed and he leaves to write, brings coffee,

a trail of heat and bitter scent visible
as they retreat to separate mornings linked
by what blends sky into ground on bleak

mornings, some raw beautiful oneness.