

Sonnet for Small Rip Rap

Here is a wooden clothespin that grips
a striped beach towel, rusty nail in the hinge
no one has seen since nineteen thirty six.
Yes, and safety pins, straight pins, bobby-pins

used to plaster curls to my head when I
was twelve, obscure and forgotten as old
bones of the lesser saints. They lie
in dusty drawers, the plain things that uphold

us—buckles, zippers, paperclips, all
the small earnest rip-rap that insist we
button and snap and allow us the small
pleasure of undoing. Praise especially

that which attaches, is unseen, spare—
the needle that mends and binds up the tear.

Why I Don't Write Poems About My Father

Old, mottled,
algaed
and scarred
where hooks
have ripped,
the fish
has gone
deep, has sunk
through brown-gold
pillars of water,
as if through
a temple ruin,
down beyond
the reach of light,
to lie hidden
among weeds,
tattered fins
and fronds
tremulous
with the lake's
slow breathing—
the only sign
of its presence,
a shiver of circle,
unnoticed except
by the watchers,
the heron
and fisherman.
Well hooked
by his quarry,
the fisherman
wants both
to catch and not
catch, to scrape
away the armor
of scales,
to open, gut
the creature—
and still to glide
upon the wide
eye of the lake,
oars dipping, just
rippling the surface,
the shadow

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of the boat
sliding across
the shadow
that is the fish.

Seed

I lay down
life, crave

earth. Time's
bell clangs

death, chimes
birth, folds me

in its grip.
Harrowed

in the grave
I twist, split-

ting the shell,
I leap from

the furrow,
an old god,

green
and knowing.

Hottest Summer on Record

there's no
resisting

the heat the air
sags with moisture

boundaries blur
between sea and sky

washed in bluegray
congruity

air becomes
ocean and we wade

into it lungs
open and close

like gills back
bones prickle

with forgotten
fins each cell

a pouch of liquid
edges dissolve

speech thought
becomes vapor

spangled with sweat
your body slips

into mine wet
boneless and salty

we stroke together
away from shore

The Sleep After

While the pleasure of it
rips through me
like lightening on water,
while I think this is
what I could die for,
have died for—

it is the sleep after
in the arms
of the fugitive moon,
in the hands of that saint,
the rose, in the mouth
of the god
that I long for.