

Quarry

Why do you want to talk now?
I'm barefoot, dusty and bleeding.
I replenish my stones.

I speculated so long in labored silence...

When I realized the weight of all these words unsaid,
when the chasm growled between us, filled with cruelty
and doubt I still couldn't shout
and I couldn't scream or say anything true or fraught.

I tossed a rock down into the yawn below
(where our pressure broke the yard),
watched that rock fall and gather pebbles and
momentum and felt bored. You rendered me
irreverent, chained to a shrug and a hum.

You once whispered kindness but
now you are a wooden placard
hanging haphazard over my front door:
"Abandon All Hope Ye Who Enter Here"
burned into the grain.

This morning my back porch opens into this canyon.

It's not powerlessness, or fear, but rather an
unbecoming. Eyes burning across the crisis
until they fade into embers of distance. 'Til
calamity supersedes life and you and me
and We

failed to be.

All this earth
over our bones.

All that time.

We replenish our stones.

Undone

We open on an unmade man
sleeping artful in an unnamed bed.
A gentle ribbon of sunlight
sighs through the blinds
from his shoulder
to his hip
to the sheet
like some kind of ceremonial
sash and sword. He didn't mean
to be here.

A fly buzzes frantic in the window
and the ceiling fan clanks.

We now part the steam
to visit her in the shower.
Over the pedestal sink hangs
a mirrored medicine cabinet
with a slot inside to toss old
razor blades. Her pale skin gleams
cream. She slicks her palms
over her hair, blinks, her wet
eyelashes dark and heavy.

She hums a lonely melody,
one that has fluttered
unfinished at the edges
of her for weeks. She picks
and picks at it and when
it comes to her
it just
opens in her hands.

Last night, his fingers brushing the barest
paisley on her neck, he kissed her jawline
with such cinematic longing that she climbed
onto him and said, *Stop keeping yourself from me.*

So he did.

Danger

I lick my finger, flip the page, write

fray to fight

fray to unravel

so I have some choices.

Either way it all comes apart.

Poems can be shining, methodical,

blown glass turned from a molten

thing into tender tiny creatures

that fit in my palm.

I can almost see them breathe.

Not my poems, though. I can only write

blunt force trauma with a gauntleted

fist,

less a scalpel than a ball-peen hammer,

smashing reckless

jaw aching with anger

wrecking us.

Baby, I used to conjure

you, something phrases curved

around light and easy. You smelled

of cinnamon.

I got nothing like that left.

So I take my forearm, sweep it across

all I ever said before

but it doesn't matter. The sound

of 100,000 crystalline words

shattering

can't cover up the echo

the thrill of your voice

Honey I'm Headed West

On the night I was born,
my daddy played a gig
at a bar called Cowtown.

So it's right I've got me
a warlike mouth,
a honky-tonk heart.

I'm heaps of trouble, smoke
Benson and Hedges
like a lonesome locomotive,

drink bourbon from a truck
stop coffee cup. My soul's
just some no-tell Motel

with most the neon shot out
of its shivery sign. Or a mirror
that's lost some of its silver.

When we met I told you
I'm a dead end on a dirt road.
But you don't seem to mind.

This summer stands
as the wettest on record
but nothing's getting green.

June bugs throw themselves
at the bare bulb on my porch,
trying to hump it to oblivion.

Cicadas preach white noise
from blue ash pulpits, but
none of us are wise enough

to hear their truth—
that the world will end
before the evangelists do.

I, too, call and holler
for you, a small town
Siren with an ivy crown.

Load up the car with all
you can fit, I tell you—
it's time to go. A sparrow

nested in the awning over
your front door, and some
cold-eyed crow'll eat those eggs

one at a time. But hey, you
and I both know: nothing's
getting out of here alive.

Circe in Business

I wear all black, a high-necked frock,
and a straw hat to thwart the southern sun.

My plants, such lovelies, in rows
taller than I, bow now in summer

breeze. They forget how deadly
they are in their beauty, waxy

berries bright, leaves trembling.
I've made quite a name for myself.

Flowers in high violets, yellows and other
likely hues, (those colors are suspect

those colors are a bruise.) But no
matter. I wear leather gloves,

pinch those flowers and berries
at the base. Apply a little heat to help

the harm along. Women come to see
me when rage vignettes their vision,

walk along my wares, smooth their hands
over the glass bottles and decide just

how he should go. I don't do gentle,
so you won't find any soporifics.

Hemlock, certainly, if you'd like
to watch him gasp, or belladonna

to sink him into a delirium, dilate
his pupils as though he were tumbling

in love again, but by then could
you bear it? Wolfsbane hurts,

as I understand it, stirs up the belly,

sends saliva to froth in his mouth.

I don't need magic anymore
so it's lucky I don't have it.

This, my dear, is true:
for every one of you

who seek me and weep.
Later you'll look in the mirror

and see a face tight with triumph
wild eyes dark and bird-bright.

Mark me. Just a drop. No more,
that's the way to even the score.