

The Devil's Cut

*“Angel's share” refers to the whiskey that evaporates in the barrell during the aging process.
“Devil's cut” refers to the lost distillate which is absorbed by the wood of the barrells, remaining
trapped there.*

Each of these streets is an unfinished project.
I was a deer when I walked them
back then, soft and hungry.
I thought I'd left no footprints
when I left. I didn't think
I'd still remember these things.
After the angels have taken their share
of what's evaporated over time: the mundanities,
the late trains, the paperwork, the lost keys and leftovers —
and the rest has been distilled, aged, and bottled,
arranged by year on a shelf far from its provenance
in a way that's easy to explain: here is where it blended bitter,
here is where it aged deeply, here is the year
it settled into something mellow and easy to sip —

the devil's cut is what lurks here still:
in the cracks in the barrel,
in the sidewalk, in a far quadrant
of a distant city. More potent every day
I don't think about how my hand once shook
with need around an empty glass.
How I walked here with frozen eyes,
left the door unlocked,
left my headphones on,
how I loved someone
who couldn't be with me,
how he didn't meet me at Fort Stevens
on an afternoon where the hills were green
like this and the sun warmed my shoulders
like this and made me
sad and made me
want to shed the jacket I'd just bought
like a second skin.

I want to bathe in that sun,

want to paint it all over my body
because somehow the things you don't remember
you remember live in the most vivid color.

Was it really like that, then? Was the pain really less
a buckshot blasting through my belly
and more the burn of a good whiskey
against lips that had never tasted
what it was like to become
everything you need?

Medium-Rare

Love is rare--at least, to many people's tastes:
raw and slightly bloody on the inside,
presented with the usual romantic trappings
of asparagus and silverware,
warm to the initial touch but pulsing
with the bright red bone of meat and tendon
unadulterated, alive, sliced open. All love
worthwhile anyway, though to some the wait
is what defines the perfect cut, the one that incubates
inside the perfect cow, dry-ages, makes its way
to a table in a restaurant whose light takes on
the glow of melted butter in their memory.

Others like their love rare like hamburger,
the possibility of every butcher's shelf in every Albertson's,
hand-malformations making every patty
seem remarkable, cheddar like a vibrant sun,
a fleeting shot of flavor only swallowed
with a bit of danger, mouth-full bites
each part and parcel with the risk of parasite,
the purge and the potential once again:
hello, my love, you grew to be a part of me
that makes me dry-heave now.

Maybe love's most palatable served in slider-form,
two bites of bison, beef, and salmon
one after another and gone before you tire
of the aioli or the once-endearing way
the juices dribbled down your chin: a little something
to whet the appetite for a more filling course,
but I've always been a fan
of making a meal of my hors d'oeuvres, unbothered
by the balance and construction of a plate.

But what of cooking an entire roast for hours
and sitting down to carve it for yourself,
cold leftovers at 4 am,
the gyro on the street after a parade

of tequila passing through your lips?

Maybe it's the meatloaf I keep making
despite my taste for curry
that I want to find served somewhere,
halfway down the menu of a diner
no more likely or unlikely than any other,
a love medium-rare,
a love bathed in ketchup
with a kick of garam masala,
that I'll overeat despite myself.