

Eating Cells

i. *Tambourine*

My sister rides the train
beneath the river

every morning.
Whole orange groves of light

tremble over the water
under which my sister courses.

She makes brief sketches
in a small pad

of the people around her.
The backdrops are always

full of small horses
and fleecy clouds,

broken fences
and naked trees.

*People never look
as good as their portraits,*

she thinks,
clapping the clicker of her pen

with her palm,
retracting the ball-point

in the same way
a singer

might strike
a tambourine.

ii. *Eating Cells*

If only all that could be taken from me
was time.

Instead a confused ancestor sits
crossing his legs on the banks

of my synapses,
eating cells

off the low branches
of nearby trees.

My cells spark
between his teeth,

sometimes they crack
so loudly

that birds scatter
into the air,

all my good ideas
part-panic,

part-hunger.

iii. *Brandy*

Occasionally I go partially blind,
a whole jewelry box

of phosphenes spill
over the right-side of everything I look at,

pooling over the lower portion
of all I see.

There is a single mark
in my Bible,

noting when Saul was blinded
on a dusty road,

after which everything
changed for him.

Sometimes there are competitions
in my head

pitting the fear
of going blind

against the fear
of change.

There never is
a winner.

Sparrow

I enter the old classroom
and on the blackboard
lies a sparrow drawn in chalk,
a sparrow
or rather the lines around which
the hollowness of a sparrow
can be divined.

The problem with hollowness
is that what's revealed and what's omitted
cancel out and the image
seems as much vacuum as shape,

and what I'm seeing
is as much myself as the sparrow.

I enter
something between *rows*
and *columns*
walking between desks,
outlining unconscious
geometries.

The vertigo between lessons returns
along with the silent letters in words
that were only given meaning
with time.

What I learned sank into my skin,
into something me and not-me.

Education seems less
accommodation than accumulation,
a patina, an outline.

I write on the board,

The slow motion of the universe

collects until objects appear.

I write it as far from the bird
as I can, in a long, single line
pointing more toward the empty space
on the board
than the bird lying
at the end of it.

I leave the classroom
the way I had years before,
at a loss
for where to go
next.

Miscarry

She leaves while it's still dark,
in the latter-eagerness of the night,
the sliding of everything toward
what becomes light.

The snow, soft on the surface, hides ice

that she can sense, stepping knee-deep
over the earth.

Everything hides the same core hardness,
the same clarity, the *thru-ness*,
the ability, with temperature and time,
to flow.

A river lies between a staccato of low wooded hills,
its curves pockmarked with trapezoids of ice.

Where the line arcs, matter collects.

The woman, itching beneath her layers of fabric,
rubs her shoulder against a pine tree.

Flakes of bark pepper the snow.

The same thing keeps happening,

she thinks, remembering looking at the stars
from her bed the night before,
her t.v. flashing video snow
through the bars of an empty crib.

She had looked up the definition
of *universe*

by that light:

“the whole body of things

observed

or assumed.”

She kneels down on the riverbank,
pulls a pale-blue cloth from her pocket.

She holds it by the corners,
dips the fringe into the cold water.

The darkness of the water bleeds upward,
a seeming magic unfolds,
as if a forgotten creation myth were being renewed.

She lowers it slowly, the bleeding just ahead
of the surface as the water
gradually swallows the whole cloth
up to her fingers.

Her pinch-grip allows her to measure her pulse,
a falsetto in her fingers and ears.

What was simple four-corner geometry
grows elaborate beneath the surface.

The cloth billows and sways,
flutters then smooths
as if subject to the whims
of an unbearable melody.
The sun rises imperceptibly
behind a thick layer of cloud.
The whole body,
she thinks. Then she
lets go.

Watching you go

I suppose I should offer
some sensation--

the stink of a piss-warm winter
perhaps

or an image,

the sliding of thin fabric
over transparent skin--

something
that would indicate that the hospital

is where we are,
so the title will make sense

in a slightly more focused manner
than say

you simply walking down
the road

away from me
either in anger

or gladness

or simple
necessity...

it seems the simpler
things are,

the more complicated
we become under their influence.

Anyway
you're dying

and we avoid looking
at each other

the way people do
when waiting in line

at the bank
or better yet the theater,

where the smells
are stronger

and a large darkness waits
to fill up

with what we hope
is light

along with ourselves

and it always costs us
more than we anticipate

in order
to find out.

I smuggled in some drink
and you take nips

from a small cup
meant to hold your pills.

We play cards
thinking vaguely

about luck
and what it does

and doesn't mean.

I come every night
and this'll be the last,

though we don't know it.
What's there to know?

Every night is necessary.
It robs us of the exhausting mistake

of some grand finality
in our goodbyes,

and we are able to pretend
it will go on indefinitely,

my freely coming and going (your want)
and your staying (my want).

The hours even out to
a thin singing between joy and devastation.

We play and play.

The cards stack up,

then I swipe them off the table

for them to pile up again.

We are out on our own sea,

our own waves

keep gathering

and crashing.

The night-shift nurse

lets me stay after visiting hours

and flicks the hall light

on and off in a strobe-fashion

from her desk

so we'll know

when another nurse or doctor

or hospital administrator

is en route

so we can say our quick goodbye

and I can take the back stairs

for my escape.

For some reason

I always head into the city

and spend the rest of the night

watching the skyscrapers

as cleaning staff

make their way

floor by floor

all the way to the top.
With each floor

as they finish,
either

the lights go
out

one by one,
or they go out

all at once.

I can never decide
whether it matters

to me

which happens
and which doesn't.