

*Capture Myopathy*

*Marked morbidity and mortality in wild animals that arises from human-inflicted stress from intense pursuit, capture, or restraint.*

the tawny stag limps immense  
before my idling car  
slowly  
we watch  
its breath  
cloud its mouth  
and disappear

movement three-legged delicate  
muscled shoulders yolked  
with massive weight  
spine stone-  
straight noble blade  
unlike mine bent, shattered  
into so many stippled shards

its quiet acceptance  
stoically splits the street  
across arterial by-ways  
back left leg unusable stripped to  
flaking peels of bone

mine pooled in the ciliatic delta  
sharp as jagged teeth sawed  
off the trunk  
then tweezered out  
before butchering the cord

*You can't touch it, you know  
my daughter sighs  
It'll die*

as it hauls its heavy-antlered head  
around from the dry bank

for now

in its ink-black eyes  
my face flashes frantic  
forced into trauma's wake  
its waves bashing the battered  
borders

of humanity and its spill into all  
the wrong places  
as I wonder  
who has touched me  
since the fall

eager hands moist, willing  
sparking flame from where  
I slapped them away

*Roy's Roadside Diner at Sherman's Bog (an abcedarian poem)*

*Ain't no man pining for an old  
bitch like me, I*

chortle as Roy's grill singes my arm hair with grease.

*Darlene, the world sure done got its fists into you good, girl* as jukebox

Elvis croons a lonely blues, blue as the blood beneath my paper thin

frame while I hum and slop runny sunny-sides with hash in front of a phone-addicted trucker,

giving Roy a wink as my crow's feet pucker in the

heat and the weight of so many long shifts smacks me broadside with its

isolation afterwards: tiny, immaculate apartment, silence crawling the walls

just past Main where the unfolding of no one just about

kills me. *Can't*

*love no man when my heart be*

*maimed and twisted as hoary knotted pine*

*nine miles deep in Sherman's bog* I sigh to the stone of quiet.

On certain days, I tell Roy: *a*

*piece a' me already out there, Roy, it ain't coming back -*

*quiet, cracked to hell as it is and calling and*

Roy says, *Hush now. You just tired* and wonders if he

should say something to someone but knows

talk is poisoned rough and I'm a'right - probably -

until I run myself empty as a sucked out tidal pool making

very sure everybody's needs is met, not knowing mine or if I even have 'em anymore:

waitress, widow, wreck of a woman,

ex-patriot from herself

yapping to Roy 'bout nothing and more nothing in a roadside dive

zipped neat and far back from the road, bog behind the screen door beckoning me like a lover.

*What We Learn From Birds*

- *When a goose gets sick, wounded, or shot down, two geese drop out of formation and follow it down to help and protect it. They stay with it until it dies or is able to fly again.*

Slipped from formation, the drag is immediate -  
feathers forged in the wake of absent bird:  
an envelope of sky: open and willowing.

The warm goose body plummets to earth: an anvil  
of dead weight, a force of gravity that becomes its last weapon,  
its power in death.

Two healthy birds follow, a dive synced to the sick  
and inevitable.

By the time the body cracks against my neighbor's fence,  
the inky muscular neck is bent into itself  
like a tributary dammed and forgotten

but for the two who tuck their gristled feet  
beneath their wings, hunker down, wait for the body to grow  
cold.

*There's one on each side*, my neighbor texts, sending a picture -  
the vigil: a pixilation of autumnal sunset familiar  
in its crimson filigree,  
belts of black, and total  
lack of sound. Three motionless  
bodies huddled like boulders, one  
without  
breath.

By morning, the survivors are gone.  
Whatever plagued the body has flown  
and the shell of flight rests unencumbered,  
feathers resolutely still, no whispery response  
to the wind.

*Will you help me bag it? she texts.  
I don't think I can do it alone.*

*Ode to My Body in Middle-Age*

I want to let a man love my body.  
I want to forgive it its genetic miscues,

its deformities,  
    its pear-shaped absurdity.

I want a man to know where it's been -

the night the porch swing broke free from its moorings,  
the fragile silver necklace of support meant for a  
delicate throat, not a plaster ceiling that would betray,  
heave me off the porch, crash into my folded body  
like a ship against a fogged-in jetty,

tumbling of vertebral fists  
exploding inward in the inky interior until  
L1 shattered entirely, lit up the spinal canal with bone  
fragments, a dusty calisthenics of acrobats  
not meant for exposure,  
    excision,  
        re-construction from the ground up.

I want the scar(s) deep in my gut to ignite Times Square.

Twice, the same cut -  
first girl head-up, stubborn even then,  
stuck enough for the doctor to put his foot on the table,  
yank her from me so the 9.9 apgar came as no shock,  
my body seizing on the table -

seven years before the second, a boy, torn from me the same way  
while the surgeons discussed baseball and politics and my sister  
covered my ears except when they were silent -

so much blood -

I shook in recovery like steel tracks before the train barrels down.

An absent man for the first.  
No man for the second.

And this body, a map of what it's seen.  
*Trauma*, the scolding nurse said in the ER last week  
as I watched the red line of blood pressure  
spike on the screen, a second stroke: the elephant pacing the floor.

And you, a ghost at my wedding to a man I didn't love.  
I want you  
to see me -

the roads I have walked beaten back,  
grass dusted, blown flat,

but still, even now,  
budding with the most intricate, nubile shoots.

*The Uncivil War of Love*

I

Loving you is a spool unspun:

    my life-long fight in the world's ring must be forfeited,  
        a letting go like air from a pierced balloon,  
        latex body emptied and thrown in a wild release  
possibly recovered as mere flash of color on a curve of pavement  
    or not - instead swirled down a sewer drain when torrential rains  
        rush for the nearest decline.

I mean, how can a scarecrow strapped to a spike,  
    lips painted blood red with straw pushing up from the neck,  
escape its straight-jacket for warmer October sun  
    and a view over its left shoulder?

I mean, you must gut yourself for love -  
not fuel the battlefield tank each day.

No, all that scarring must be scrubbed away, so I can  
    at least stay clean enough  
                                for your voice to blow through.

II

Let's say your mother stands in your driveway one morning  
with a laundry list of your wrongs  
    as a single parent -  
each one a whip-strike to the soul so when you walk away slump-shouldered,  
    she cries, *Do you want to hear the last one?*

Let's say your *NO!* hangs in the air like throat-choke smoke  
and you wonder when conditions became claws  
and the vacant lot she abandons rots and refuses  
    to be filled

even at rush hour, even with men, even with you.

    We still divide ourselves as soldier or supplicant -  
I mean how to make myself vulnerable after  
    a catalog of imperfections is waved in my face  
like a flag pinned but pulling  
    in each furious gust of wind?

III

The cavern of self dies alone,  
a whisper to some perhaps,

but not for long as way paves to way,  
and the same slant of sun spills over the floorboards each day -

I mean this uncivil war of love amounts to nothing -  
not attachments that strangle or save,  
not unmet needs in an unwinnable tug of war.

It is the trunk and roots of you *as you really are*  
that must satisfy so when what has lashed you to the ground weakens  
and threatens to pull free, the hole that remains will not gape  
or cave at the sides but instead turn itself  
over for fresh growth, plow the earth new

and start again.