

## Hunger Strike

We are the unfiltered faggots, the martyred ice of Belfast.  
We are a mattress of maggots under a body of screws\*.  
We are bloated flies pierced by the bayonets of swallows.  
We are snow through iron bars under shit-smearred feet.  
We are British thumbs spreading our own anus.  
We are ragged blankets made of bruised blood.

We are British thumbs made of bruised blood.  
We are snow, the martyred ash of Belfast.  
We are ragged blankets spreading our own anus.  
We are a mattress of maggots under the threads of screws.  
We are faggots passed through iron bars over shit-smearred feet.  
We are bloated flies skewered by the bayonets of swallows.

Are we a mattress of maggots skewered by starving swallows?  
Are we snow through iron bars of blood?  
Are we ragged blankets over shit-smearred feet?  
Are we British thumbs, the martyred ice of Belfast?  
Are we bloated flies under a body of screws?  
Are we burning faggots spreading our own anus?

We are British thumbs corking our own anus.  
We are charcoal faggots, the starvation of swallows.  
We are a mattress of maggots eating the heads of screws.  
We are ragged blankets woven of bruised blood.  
We are bloated flies, the martyred shit of Belfast.  
We are snow soft into iron eyes over lock-stepped feet.

We are snow soft through iron bones into hollow feet.  
Are we British thumbs fucking our own anus?  
We are a mattress of maggots, the crackling ice of Belfast.  
We are bloated flies caught by the barbed hooks of swallows.  
Are we blankets of Gaelic speaking of bruised blood?  
We are the wives eating the lies of screws.

We are body screws.  
We are iron feet.  
We are Gaelic blood.  
We are bolting shut our own anus.  
We are barbed swallows.  
We are eating Belfast.

Hunger in Belfast is two feet  
of charcoal snow, six screws, one anus,  
a lit cigarette swallowed, brother blood.

\*end\*

Forgiveness is Violet

Peel back the violet sunset –  
my father's anger.

This is not the weekly crash  
of lawnmowers, the soft jazz  
of old Bordeaux, the pockmarked  
puddles of November.

I wish away the scars, brush my finger  
against the yellow halo  
around each mottled bruise,  
and this is not anger.

I was roto-tilled  
out of my adolescent greenhouse,  
my farewells to the shelves  
of humming orchids unheard  
and that was not anger.

I feel like bold coffee,  
a melting iceberg,  
a bull moose grazing  
on thistles blossoms,  
and this is not violet,

not the taste of plums,  
the spitting of pits,  
how the death swallow rings  
inside my head.

This is the jungle reclaiming  
the ruin, the Pacific of my body  
claiming all the suns  
of all the days,  
and letting go.

\*end\*

Perseids

*Please come to LA to live forever  
California life alone is just too hard to build  
I live in a house that looks out over the ocean  
And there's some stars that fell from the sky  
Livin' up on the hill -- Dave Loggins*

My daughter and I set chairs in front of the car  
to take advantage of the residual engine heat.  
She is fifteen  
and her mother lets her visit us  
about once a year.  
You wait inside our warmer car.

It is near midnight between fields of acorn squash and barley  
and already a few meteorites have zipped open the night  
and then let it shut.

She slept on the roundabout way here  
and at each two-lane, non-California road,  
I almost heard,  
*sure daddy, I'd love to go out into the middle of the cold night  
and sit on a gravel road. Sure, no problem.*

I do not tell her I lived in the farm house the other side of that field  
or when I was twelve, that I picked squash over across this ditch,  
or rode Mr. Turner's tractor planting barley.  
Nor do I tell her our puppy played too hard  
with a kitten and I held it in my hand until it stopped breathing,  
or that my parents divorced here  
and I left this gravel road home.

The engine creaks as it cools and sporadic streaks  
cut open the womb of the sky.  
I wonder what it would be like to climb through those slits  
and be reborn on the other side. How volcanic it must be,  
how furious would the puppies be over there?  
Then another ember slices the face  
of the moon and what wishes I have left  
I split between the squash and barley.

You watch the two of us out the windshield  
and douse that heartburn of jealousy  
with the smoke of your belly.  
She gets on a plane tomorrow and you will be done  
with the unspoken role of other  
stepmother.

She is asleep in her camping chair.  
She will be home tomorrow,  
so it is time to fold up her,  
the chair, the campsite of her visit  
and put them away: where all of these falling stars  
have gone to live.

\*end\*

## Shades

One grandfather's shadow is fresh tar  
on the roof outside my window.  
The other grandfather's shadow –  
a wind-up Indian with broken hands.

My grandmothers are whiskey radio baseball  
and a garden full of curio cabinets and canning jars.

Corky, Blackie and Sam are dog shadows  
warm under my blanket. My cat shadows  
all ran away.

My father's shadow is the Wichita Lineman  
belted to every creosoted pole, spurs buried  
in the wood, headset clipped to the wire  
listening to his own static.

My streetlight shadows are Spirographed  
around my shoes, each a different shade  
of black. These are my mother.

I am on the Pacific rim embracing a bruised sunset  
as all my shadows fade to twilight.  
This is where I used to hide.

When my face rises in your bright hands,  
I hold your kiss  
long enough for each of them  
to have their turn.

\*end\*

## On Pruning

*"Must we starve our children to pay our debt?" –Mwalimu Julius Nyerere, President of Tanzania,  
speaking to the IMF.*

It is the winter;  
the Macintosh is overgrown.

The roses are still blooming  
but need cut down  
to make room.

The grapevines are slashed.  
The grass fields have given  
their seed and are burned.

All of them are compost,  
part of the changing seasons  
so familiar now,  
hardly anyone notices.

\*end\*