

November 23 2020

Behind Bell's at the loading dock, I'm a small fascination,
early morning, moon still occurring, fingers thin and cold in pockets.
The men take turns talking to me, masks around their necks
and cigarettes, wide faces, breath in the air and ludity.

I'm waiting for one man to come and clear things up.
My fingers stick around my phone in cold morning, chronic air.

Where we are, behind the store, light stretches thin into shadow
and it is unalloyed beauty, really -
the dumpsters and broken down cardboard and pail for the cigarette butts,
and the working men with names on their chests and fat bellies -

it is not the furniture of the world, so present that it's ceased to mean,
but it is the world, and it's so enduring, it's so enduring and easy.
What a black miracle that I care deeply - I think all I do everyday is Love.

And now the merciless light over the stucco, finally climbing the building,
finally bouncing off the trucks maneuvered by shouting men,
bouncing and rippling like against water. And now birds flung
over us in a loose net lie quivering overhead.

It's almost Christmas and somebody's baby won't come home.
And somebody's and somebody's and somebody's.

Dad

Time thins out, diminishing and wide like farmland.
Where are you in all this? I can just make out
your death standing thinner than you are and quiet
somewhere on the edge of the landscape, disappearing
into the clear sky when I am not paying attention.

I was always your favorite kid. Remembering you
is the same thing as missing you. Missing you
invites death on that long walk, allows grief
to come throw its shade backwards over your life,
so that even now, while you are still with me,

I am so angry at your death that I can hardly speak.

You are swollen with memory as much as you are
with water and blood. When I was young, you took me
to the Tennessee farm your grandparents owned
to show me where you spent your summers
as a child, before the land was sold

and the leaning grey farmhouse destroyed.
Inside was nothing, only collected dirt
and the smell of grass and rotting wood,
and then you looking outwards at the hills
like sloping shoulders, pointing to where

a goat once pinned your thin birdlike body
against the trunk of an oak tree.

Taos, Missouri

I.

Mostly this place is sky, a mouth cracked open wider than the land it swallows. It wraps itself around the farmland, gaping and indeterminate. I can't tell what time it is - the light rests inside nothing, white and grey becoming one thing with two split voices. At night I kick off my pants and blanket and sit upright in underwear and socks. Behind the door, my friends sleep in love. Behind the window, snow falls faintly over everything, touching it faintly, patting the houses down more solidly into the earth. I can't see it falling past my own face in the black glass of the window, but I recognize it from its silence.

II.

Cows form tight groups and lay together in the snow. It pools in between their shoulder blades and in the middle of their foreheads. And the white horse standing still with flakes on her eyelashes without another animal to lay with - we debate her capacity to withstand the cold until the sky turns to a strange green and sends us home afraid of the dark, our faces frozen, our legs clumsy over the snow banks - one car slips suddenly into a ditch maybe a hundred feet ahead of us, the synthetic red of its brake lights spreads across the snow like spilled blood. I wonder how we can continue under such a subtle God.

Buffalo Grass

Love doesn't embarrass me anymore so I can tell you:
the other evening the wind slid by the roads and farmhouses
and moved through the grass in waves of white beams,
and whipped the trees and hurled white petals through the air,
and was sometimes urgent and sometimes gentle,
and my first thought was that it was like you.
I opened my mouth for the wind like I used to as a child.
It was like a bird fluttering at the back of my throat.
I am stealing a few breaths to tell you about it.

My desire wants to run up and down these fields past churches and lakes and frozen houses
looking for you. It wants to recognize your smell in the cut grass and creeks roadside.
It wants to measure the space between us with my breaths.

I leave my window open at night in case I want to slip away with the cold air.
I have resolved wherever I am to be ready to leave without warning.

Cannon Beach, Oregon

I rented a bike and sent you a picture of it
leaned against a tree at the final stretch of sand
before the water, and you sent me a Tom Waits song
in return. The lichen practiced a gray, circular forever
on the backs of rocks, and a sign marking a grave made of sea stones
told me that rip currents take people away
and return their bodies unrecognizable.

I biked - dull, lulling exercise - to where the beach
became rock and finally forest at the top of a hill,
then sat and watched the surfers ride the freezing water
with the impossible joy of seals or some other sleek,
ecstatic animal. The birds devoured the pink carcasses
of crabs, the water folded endlessly over itself, until
the day surrendered and summer blew backwards,
cold and blue, until fires sprouted all along the beach
with clouds of warmth and clouds of human voices,
their faces floating like orange tongues of flame
but their bodies hidden in the darkness.

I found myself there, too, pushing my bike over the soft wet black,
remembering the years where I looked for rejection everywhere,
where the things I wanted sunk away from me like fallen snow.

And I remembered, riding home with bonfire caught in my hair,
and going to sleep with sand still stuck to my feet, and waking
the next morning when the sun had warmed my room
and warmed the blood shaking my heart and the day
wandered through me like copper wire,

the first time your skin met mine, how it was
like the shock of water against my body.