

Putting Shebah Down

Morning of, I ate breakfast:
yogurt, blueberry.

She was in my sister's
room, like a salmon, breathing,
with one eye up, the other buried
in carpet.

I knelt beside her, buried my head
in her fur, kissed her, something I hadn't done
in years. I was alone
and spoke words I won't repeat.

My dad came. So did my brother. We talked about the Pats,
that time she ran into the glass door thinking it was open,
what hospital we were bringing her to.
She was standing there, in the grass,
legs spread like an unlocked tripod.

The ride to the vet was short, just down the road,
me in the backseat gripping her collar
as she slid around in the back of the SUV trying to get a footing.
She used to stick her head out the window,
globes of saliva flapping out, sticking to the window
behind her. When it was cold, we would crank the window down
just enough and she would stick her nose
up to the opening, but now she was in the way back
and the windows didn't go down back there.

The woman behind the desk couldn't get the name right,
asked for our address, if this was the first
time we'd brought her here, then she typed away.
I cupped her ears, tried to stand
her up tall, her claws scuffing the linoleum. She was
slipping through my hands. I could see she just wanted to lie
on her side, breathe, or not. Standing made it hard
to breathe. Breathing making it hard to stand.
All I wanted was to rip the keyboard
from the wall and shout *We're just trying to kill our dog!*

Then Sheba was in the room, we all were: a doctor, syringe.
The vet put a blanket down. I told her what a good dog she'd been,
close to her ear, pulled back my hand and came up with fur. I felt guilty,
wanting to wash it off.

Relativity

If I was to throw a ball at thirty mph next to a man running at forty mph then it would appear that the ball was traveling backwards. To the man, of course. To me it would appear as if I was in the presence of an abnormally fast man and that I need to hit the gym. The man would probably share my assessment on both accounts although we would still perceive the ball differently. The direction of travel, not the fact that I have a pretty shitty arm and that the ball was moving abnormally slow. Although how could he really tell considering the fact that he was moving abnormally fast? Could I really consider him a reliable judge of velocity?

Because, say I wrote you a letter, folded it into a paper airplane, and had someone with a slightly better arm than me send it flying at forty mph. The man would perceive the letter as static. Both the man and the letter would arrive on your doorstep at 6:01 EST with the sun setting in the distance. To me the sun would appear to be at its highest point. The ink would have run leaving the message unreadable. You would quickly realize that I was the only person with whom you still communicated through letters. You would email me your reply forgetting that I don't own a computer. I would write you more love letters forgetting you don't care for romance. The abnormally fast man would finally stop running remembering he forgot milk on the way home.

Sestina for Housesitting

Don't you feel like the forgotten piece
of luggage? The product of heel-
scraping left on the rug before
they all go off to forget
the humdrum. Bottle
of cleaner in hand

like a sidearm weapon, you finger
the trigger. It brings you peace.
Much more than that bottle
of Jack. Far from healed,
you just want to forget
the mess you found just before

you went to bed. You think of before
all this, when "scrubbing on hands
and knees" was only a forgetful
turn of phrase acquired piece-
meal from easily-healed
fairy tale characters bottle-

necked into life-lessons. You think of the bottled
up frustration that needs outlet before
they return, the time you had to walk heel-
to-toe along a night-lit road, arms
outstretched like traipsing. *Piece
of cake* you boasted forgetting

this cop had no sense of humor. Forget
drinking yourself numb. You need to bottle,
compartmentalize each and every piece
of envy you have of them before
you snap and decide to hand
the dog off to the heels

of a stranger. You say he's a good dog. *Heel*,
you demonstrate, hoping the dog didn't forget
that command. Seal it with a shake of the hand.
Good riddance. Instead, you grab the bottle
of cleaner again and spray. You knew before-
hand that you would be leaving pieces

of yourself scattered around like shattered bottles
and they would come home and say, "Before
you leave, just so you know, you forgot a piece."