

One café awaits your arrival, the other has forgotten you altogether

In the entryway to the Yonkers Stop and Shop  
a pigeon is trapped behind a display of Flavor Blasted Goldfish.  
One café watches it, listens to the thwap of a body  
fluttering and flung against the glass.

The other café murmurs in its powder blue sweatshirt,  
It's all right sweetheart, we'll get you out of here.

One café cringes under the doctor's cold fingers and prying questions,  
lies about its number of sex partners and the diligence with which it uses sunscreen.

The other café excuses itself to the bathroom at its neighbor's dinner party  
rifles through the medicine cabinet, shakes out a few Ambien  
slurps straight from the faucet and waits for the real guests to arrive.

One café has memories of being abducted by aliens.  
It tells its roommate about their language, the way  
words swam silently out of their bodies  
    like fish, the way  
somehow it had understood everything that they told it, how  
ever since then it's lain awake listening.

The other café smuggles a rotisserie chicken into the movie theater  
under its leather jacket, spits the greasy bones into the aisle.

One café catches a glimpse of itself reflected in the tinted windows  
of the other café. It feels the impossible lightness of its faux-brick paneling,  
the burning hollowness of its rooms, and right after closing  
it rushes home, pops laxatives like grapes, blinks them down.

Late one Sunday the cafés sit in the parking lot of the Home Depot.  
One café tells the other café that this time is different,  
that it's probably going to leave its wife for good,  
that it misses seeing its children, and sometimes  
its plumbing rattles with grief for days without stopping,  
and its lights drone and flicker for fear of disrupting the dark—

one café says maybe it's beginning to pinpoint a difference  
between love and trauma.

The other café watches the automatic doors glide open  
and shut inaudibly, and the orange carts wheel out  
laden with plywood and lampshades  
and heavy sacks of mulch.

The milk truck declares this a brand new day, but the dead know there was never any such thing

Here they come  
circling in the soil  
they stir the rust-red earth to song

Here they come  
crawling from the candle flames  
with faces that drag like shadowy nets

Here they come  
streaming from the staircase  
coins of blood flicker from their footsteps

Here they come  
blooming through the brick  
bitterness barnacled under their tongues

Here they come  
rising from the rafters  
they sing the ceiling starry with grief

Here they come  
come to mourn us  
one by one.

Myth Cycle

I.

They tell us we bubbled up through the dirt  
like mushrooms  
bearing each other on our backs  
the way snails shoulder their homes

We stay out all night  
scribble the streets nameless, spit out  
ice like broken teeth,  
shake salt from our eyes  
stamp our skins shiny & lick  
the brackish burns

Sometimes we pounce                   , lightning across desert  
bury ourselves  
blade-up in the sand

Pull the roads right out of me  
grab hold of my rivers and run  
unravel my roots til I'm slick pink clay  
then bash out my brains  
with a blue brick of sky—

II.

And we're fire again, as we've always been,  
burning fenceposts and jumping rivers—  
we coax ourselves quick through blood and bone.

We unfurl wild across aching fields,  
let every bruise-green blade  
lick us lovingly to light.

Once we spilled howling from the split bellies of storms,  
held for a moment  
everything in our great trembling glow—

III.

After the storm, we gather  
the stumps of old candles, bones of every blackout,  
drag the wax, scrape our names  
and then the names we would have wanted  
across the pavement.

Caked in mud, blued toes blistering  
we wade through the stubble fields  
    longing still to be struck  
by lightning,  
    slurped from the earth  
in a scorching spurt—

Right before dawn  
    the moon  
looks so bright and toxic

I want to eat it.

Dear neighbor

*after Larry Levis*

Here is the light that has echoed from  
no one in particular  
Here is the weight coming up off of the water  
Here is the unmistakable sky who opens her arms  
Here is the pile of boxes on the doorstep  
Here are the dusty bodies of trash bags, bloated like  
ticks in the shadows  
the stacks of old newspapers left as a testament  
to the station wagon crammed full of rubbish  
Here is the hand of my bearded neighbor drawing the dead  
leaves from the flowerboxes  
And here is a multilayered silence quickly rising from the grass  
leaving its acrid dew in the corners of your eyes  
I drag along his driveway each day  
where the logs are split and huddled in the open  
under the ghosts of the guttering stars, and the dull songs  
sharpened in the strange throats of children  
ruled by breath. Ruled by the longings of lifetimes  
left in the living for years. Not as offerings. Dust.  
Traces for the man turned into a well. Into which  
you tossed all the stories of who you'd become.

Notes about glaciers: the importance of internal distortion

Everyone has an ugly twin, a girl once told me, laughing. Someone that looks just like them, except a little bit off. Up close a little uglier. Trick is in recognizing your own.

My cousins and I used to trade diaries in the summer, catching up with each other. Started living like I was being followed. Forgetting what I'd really meant to be. Some things are better left unframed.

I remember sitting naked, eating Life cereal with water while the dread of failure hummed through the walls of our bare apartment, and I thought about a friend, how he'd said, "Man, will you just check out these trees," as though every spring day was his first.

Gloria the dog is sixteen years old and gone milky blind in both eyes. She is quiet but for the clicking of her nails on the floorboards, and the times she barks softly in sleep, tiny legs twitching in some kind of chase.

For a few years, Dad and I went to the Laundromat on Sunday mornings. He would give me a dollar, and I would go to the corner store and buy us taffies, and we would watch our clothes swirling in the suds, chewing and waiting. Those walks home, clothes clean and folded in a green basket.

I wake up lately uncertain of where I am. I wait for the rooms to sharpen, for the words to come. They say ghosts don't often hang around in graveyards. They tell me to make my life my home.