

Returns

coming back from a voyage
descending through turbulence
becomes a habit

yet return, itself,
demands a reentry
a catching of breath
a recalibration

note how a suitcase
once unpacked
feels like a memory
the mind knows
only how to record
contents but
how quickly
we lose sight of
the way things are situated:
shirts folded and stacked
under summer dresses
rolled tight between sandals
tucked beneath jeans
socks edged into corners
making efficient use
of space
replicating the
brain's coiled layers
a tangle of dendrites
ordered marvel

look again:
hold fast this last look,
this picture

of everything packed
the next time you return
looking back
the unpacking
will be its own

each memory doomed
to devour its own
shadow

returns
converging
irrevocably
effaced

Makeshift Recovery At Dusk

I.

It began with a feeling of stickiness.

Because the balmy summer night
with its adhesive air makes
heirs of humans, crickets, and fireflies
by gluing my bare thigh to an
unremarkable concrete stoop.
We laughed, swatted mosquitos,
the revolving-door of conversation
made you feel tired and dizzy.

II.

It began with a remembered splinter.

Because the memory of how much
it hurt to have the world's softest
fingers mining my expectant
rather eager left buttock for
a sliver of sharp, gray wood.
How much I wanted her
to use her teeth- laying there
flush with ache for her
lips in that very moment.
And everything else.

III.

It began with a sexual impasse.

Because I am the wife who can't help
how she uses a summer night
and all its interior stickiness
to explain why lesbian fantasies
feel so natural, so uncontrived
for females, even women.
Maybe just for me.

IV.

It began derailing itself.

Because he grinned to imply "naughty",
and besides, who was I kidding
to let him wield the male privilege
of an unspoken word? And so
the force of my objection was final.
Or was it, finally, what disrupted
the soft permutations of a shared dusk.
Anything to take back the nights from him.
Rip away the dull plastic spectacles
which blur the vision.

"It left us feeling innocent,"
my voice cracks under the weight
trying to explain transcendence
within a context .
For the way she made me feel
all the splendor
none of the exile from my own body.

V.

It began afresh with a reckoning.

Because he surmised "You loved her,"
we fell into a manner of speaking
about sex and its spirit inseparable
from surprise- being allowed to
inhabit my skin as she scavenged
it for the pretext of a splinter.

V.

It began to grow tedious.

Because explanations get hard
when dudes mistake the clinical
anatomies of porn for eros' teeth,
its sinews, the cloying aroma of sweat.
Hard to explain to him
the erotic price of sex
as spectator sport.

Harder still
to begin with what
we've been given:

the tenderness of sweat on the tongue,
the burning when it slips into the eye,
how we swallow what follows,
maybe tears.

What I Say To Folks Who Misunderstand Me

I was born clean and full of stars. My parents were rebels who refused to ratify the Second Law of Thermodynamics. It was a privilege to abide by the formality of their whims, often to bask in the milieu of lentils and astonishing particulate matters.

The proliferation of dismantled landscapes filled my developing mind with awe and reverence. Only the peninsulas were suspect. Like pockets, in which one might hide idle hands.

Moderately calm weather and meals. A surplus of stripes and awnings. The warnings of affection's treachery lined the soles of my toddling shoes. Wise penguins bond with their babies without ever loving them. Carnivores must keep their teeth sharp along the edges. Nothing chaps the cheeks so much as the evening's katabatic winds.

How you can learn to throb with the fervor of freshly-minted statistics. How supple the skin of a bar graph. How the price of intimacy will never be affordable or tax-deductible. How to pity the fools and vote for the fanatics. How remarkable the explosion of internships given the decline of possible jobs. How to lay secondary eggs and buckle a language barrier. How we take lichen for granted. How to measure the atmospheric convection currents while safe within the berth of an equation. How to keep oneself free from motive or plot. How to hurtle through time without losing your hair.

The world in which I grew drifted away. Such is the sullenness of memory. Only the snarling stucco remains.

War Reporters

The pen must march forward
through skirmishes and small
battles, spilling black ink, ever
appalled by each unbidden
carcass. Truth is, veterans
say that war sticks like porn-
immutable images you can't
erase the way the eyes of
the dead remain open, wide
flies settling over lost sight.
One recalls the unattached
hand blown away from the
body, how blood dries black
around the wedding band. I
write to tell their stories, to
kiss the widow who stays
married to that lost hand.
The weary pen soldiers on.
Words falling left and right,
some in self-defense, all
the others dead with spite.
No time for being bothered
by all the innocence- the
babies, worried bystanders,
hapless civilians, collateral all.
We soldiers strive only to
survive the coming attack,
stare down the bullet bearing
our name; it's no disgrace to
seek shelter in the ruins of
buildings I've bombed. No

surprise when the battle widens
embracing the village, our town,
all the neighbors and friends.

Your sad chocolate eyes bid
me stay sweet within the
walls of our home, a place
safened by the passage of
idylls past but so much death
stands between our bodies now.

I push the pen across the page
watching you wince, I push it
faster, the old trick- to rip the
band-aid before little fingers
realize the time to stop me.

Surely you knew, you realist,
you, that war requires its
devout reporters. That I
would not shy away from
printed truth fearing the
stickiness of blood, the
way it stains the nails.

The war widows buckle
beneath the horror of
images, too- imagining
the death, how quickly
dread becomes their dead.

Townsend, TN

We split a cigarette to honor our arrival
at the edge of the Great Smoky Mountains.

Why not worship big thinks like happiness
and pay tribute to prosperity's fantastic blessings?
Rent an inner tube and coast down a creek
all day for just nine US dollars.
Play inside Noah's wooden ark with
swings supported by a crucifix.

I tithe more than I see-
pay forth nature's wonder and awe
for the cheap plastic grin on my face.

We aspire to resemble our keychains.