

The 18th century forecast

The pouring rain hit pianos, paying homage
to a classic era of masquerades and periwigs.
Lightning spread like the veins on their wrists,
striking down like a thousand mallets to a thousand kettledrums
while the cicadas played percussion with perfect pitch
keeping dry beneath the crowns of mahogany trees.
Shades of scarlet covered the lips of their Venetian masks.
The rain lifted and sunlight persevered—beaming
off a marble floor under the sky. The golden orioles
blew their flutes as men courted their Marie Antoinette's.
Ladies wore hoop skirts and thick midsections,
confined by whalebone and laces bound
tighter than the horse's mane on the fiddler's bow—
their hand fans and pale cleavage powerless towards the sun.
So were the three-cornered hats tucked tight
under the arms of blacksmiths and farmers
dressed in their frocks and cravats and knit stockings—
their breeches bulging of sexual narcissism in the wake
of a century obsessed with hard cider and a man's phallus.
But on this particular day, the ladies led the waltz.
And the butterflies performed with perfect symmetry.

Apartment 1B

The flypaper hangs like ribbons,
catching clusters of what one might mistake for black pepper but
are actually dead flies and the ones that aren't dead
are feasting in my tiny kitchen.

Trash covers the countertop. The sink is full
of stagnant dishwater—an oily film collects
like the one on my flaky scalp and for the sake of comic relief,
I chuck the closest object: a plastic ladle, confident it'd crack, rather
stunned when instead it shatters a couple of stale Coronas,
rotting limes fall on linoleum. And all the while is apathy,
lingering with the fruit flies.

The power was cut today, 3 months past due.
I'm not worried though, I don't need much energy.
All I really need is to remember
that the carpet is not the ashtray
and at no time will my piss covered bathroom
ever feel the urge to clean itself.

And I refuse to squander the few urges I have left
on Pine-Sol and scrub pads and showering each day
(underarms the smell of barbecue chips).
I even refuse my very own mother,
who will never refuse me,
who falls asleep before the sun goes down and will never remarry
as she withers with pride but still withers nonetheless,
suffering in private just to spare me the guilt
of the selfish and ungrateful son.

I'd stand to watch but my knees wobble

like a marionette, my heart wears to residue.
My head is a bucking bull but
some thoughts just never go away,
like the 2 year old boy with leukemia
who went back to God in his mother's arms.
Or the 2 year old boy who went back to God
trapped in the backseat of his daddy's hot car.

It's the baby ones that always stick,
like the Band-Aid on my daughter's forehead.
They spread on Facebook: so-and-so shares so-and-so's
local news update and this time there's tragedy in Ohio.
Witnesses say all they remember is the trailer in flames,
the aluminum corners peeling turning black
like the end of a candle snuffer, that awful feeling
when the windows blew one after the other and
you could see the bodies carried out.

I can't get them out of my head—
those poor little girls in the fetal position,
how truly frightened they had to have felt.
Or that little girl from Arlington, beaten to death,
shot with pellets like some sort of target practice.
Or the boy from Los Angeles used as a human ashtray.
And when my 15-month-old cries herself to sleep
I think I know what it's like to be helpless.
A precious daughter completely dependent
on the mercy of my own wearing heart.
My knees still wobble.