

Five Poems for Sixfold-JNB

Eagle in the Tree

The eagle in the tree
I want to see not as myth
And majesty but as fisher
Or thief, as a working stiff
Like any other. Obliging
It struggles with a knuckle
Of vines in the thatch-brown
Woods' upper story, a medallion
Of white wrenching side to side,
Leaning back, perspiring
I imagine, with the indignity
Of wresting still-green fibers
Free. Its talons in the tangle,
Its shoulders inclined
Above the void it is briefly
A lunch-pail lineman lifted
By their bucket truck
To the pole top. When the last
Sinew snaps, the eagle
Shifts and hauls its booty heavily
Above the tickling high brush,
Fills the empty space
Above the canal path
With its breadth, and banks
Out of sight, a fistful of cords
Dangling and flexing in its trail.

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The Screen

That whole time with your prostate, brother, I didn't know your mind.
You didn't say you had cancer and didn't say you didn't.

You mentioned PSA levels and hormone treatments,
Delicately what you could and couldn't do, and what that meant

For your marriage; your girl's fear of your absence. You refer
To yourself now, with the ease of a practiced ritual gesture, as a survivor.

But when a fraction of your blood has a deviate feature
I imagine a rodent penned in your core, shivering, a creature

No measure of care can calm.

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No Title

In the amber eyes of fighting cocks the light of no love tinsels,
Just a hard glint of cold glass. The birds evince no doubt,
Advance with bantam urgency, and surge together in flapping
Elevations to body one another, peck, and popcorn dance
With jagged slashes until the spirit of one rends, its will too tattered
To contest further. The corpse rebounds limply beneath the unchecked
Beating of the victor. Rising and falling for each fight, a tidal lust
Seizes the spectators, sweats them with that buzz of blood
That voids a brain beneath caress of breast or thigh. Unsated,
The crowd of voyeurs cast about for a fresh scene, finger
Damp locks from their foreheads, knead the flesh of their legs
And gather themselves before thrilling again, before wagering
About this round which will be the lump on the floor at the end,
The one wearing the kifah or the one with the kaffiyeh.

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Pocketknife

I keep a knife in my pocket,
Flick it open and worry it closed
Like a loop of prayer beads.

When I drag the edge
Across my fingernail
It gently grabs,

When I press the tip
Into the yielding
Ball of my thumb

There's a point
Beyond which I know
It should not go.

The blade chunks home
Each time with a metallic
Ting that resonates

Briefly after.

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Counterpoint

I admit to disliking Canada geese.
They're supernumerary, and their ubiquitous
Shit clouds lakes, encrusts docks
And I regret to report has greasily smeared
Several shirts of mine. I cheer

Their predators, note with satisfaction
The episodic feather sprays along the canal.
I always think: "Somebody got got,"
And wonder about the killer's identity.

I've never mourned the gosling my dog
Basil once snatched, horrified though I was
To see the black leathery webbing
Bob at the edge of his muzzle, a final
Delectation. That all said it was unthoughtful

To buzz their nest so close by bike
This morning. In flight a goose's wings
Are quite majestically wide, its bite
Surprisingly accurate.