

“Ghost Talking”

Dreamt of an interrupted road
severed by a train rails and a chain-link fence,
a way through now struck dead.
On the other side, a deserted house,
a colonial, white with black shutters,
windows mostly broken,
a grandmother forgotten.
As I stood, the old rattle seed shook and whispered
to the burrs and dried thistle.
And then, a muted whoosh, the whip of the express
flashing by and departing as quickly,
leaving the weeds and old lady alone again.

Here's a memory my mother says:
When I was twelve,
my mother died, breast cancer, a certain death in 1955.
I took a Chock Full O'Nuts can from the trash
and on slips of paper
torn from my father's insurance company letterhead,
I wrote to her.
For two years,
I asked her questions,
complained,
informed her of
my comings and goings.
But when my father remarried,
four kids too much for a widower in '57,
I squeezed the can into a knot hole of the tree in our backyard,
stashing away all I'd written,
untrusting of this new life my father had chosen.
In 1987, that tree,
belonging now to my youngest brother, and the house too,
was struck by lightning and died.
He cut it to stove lengths for the next winter and
discovered the can,
half-crushed and rusted.
He called on the telephone,
I have something for you.
A secret from my siblings was known all along.
I drove over there the next Sunday afternoon,
alone for once,
without a husband or children in tow.

We sat at on old picnic bench in the yard and wrestled the can
open with a screwdriver and pliers.
What did we find?
Nothing but bits and dust.

Yesterday,
my mother seems relieved to see me as I walk into her kitchen.
I'm surprised you found me, she whispers.
this old woman who seems to remember so little.
Yet, the things that stick seem so strange and fantastic.

“God Shaped Pothole”

A gaping pothole yawned open last winter
and now waits for me whenever I leave or return,
avoidable if I'm attentive,
if I pull to the left side before rolling
awkwardly into the driveway.

A few nights ago,
the summer air intoxicatingly warm,
after beer lulled me toward vulnerability,
I drove right into the pothole,
hard enough to make car and driver groan.
I lost a hubcap, too,
and found it the next morning,
scuffed and cracked in the street.

Today, two men from Public Works were shoveling asphalt
into any holes they could find and I pulled up
short to ask them to visit the one in front of my house.
Mr. L., one said, a former student.
When I left, I wondered if I'd been an asshole to him
in the past or if I'd been good,
and whether the hole would be filled
when I got back.

“Orange Squash”

Is it bad that during your poetry reading
in the art gallery on the corner of First Ave and Liberty,
I wasn't listening?
Instead,
I was checking out the lava lamp
on the table in the corner,
wondering it were for sale,
the blob of paraffin
floating about like a loose syllable on your tongue.