

Winter in Choctaw

Hens bobbed across the barnyard.
You were in his housecoat.
Beans, day old, on the stove again.

The hens made chorus
with jackdaws and red birds,
who stayed in bald trees
and nests made of pretty shards.

You remember young summers
plucking cotton, bloody fingered,
and your brothers barefoot
in the field that was your father's,

Like the housecoat was your father's.
You rubbed his tobacco smell in
with your mother's long sighs
between the threads.

Snow Storm

In the crest of bald oak trees
sunlight burns orange like cane
as it's pulled and stretched
a heat so bright it's glorious.

Robins.
Dozens of them winter fat
flank the snowbanks
like tiny furnaces that sing bold
into the hollow dusk.

Swirling ice
clips the windows
and the stone. Green
and brown varnished pale.

All the warmth has fizzled out
except for the robins that whistle
in the cane of those old trees.

Let Her Laugh into Your Mouth Again

For Travis

First Kiss.

It tasted like the crab rangoons
heated all day on the buffet line.

And you had the dust
of Dollar Tree candy
stuck in your beard.

In the films (sent
to you in patchwork reels)
the first one is never dirty.

And they aren't like this
treasure tucked inside
the breath of a minute.

Movie love, so carefully
stitched together,
is always freshly scented.

Teeth free of tobacco stains.
Hair? Perfect.
But true magic?

Oh! That's in the take-away
boxes of Chinese food
for an impromptu picnic

At the lake.
And she laughs because
the ducks sound like they're farting,

and because you've climbed
up a tree, chasing after her
whim to be fifteen again.

She reaches for a hand,
leans into kiss you,
and to steal the Necco Wafers

from your pocket.
She breaks one in half.
It dissolves between teeth and gum.

I'll tell you a secret -
She never knew the right way

to love you.

But,
my God,
She tried.

In the Kitchen

Quietly, ever so, Nani leans against the counter until she's done with the crossword. Cigarette in hand. It's a Virginia Slim that she dutifully lights up each morning before six. Before breakfast. Thursday. That clue stumped her. Four across. Ah, it must be Thor. A thunder god. She remembers next week, she promised to make a rain quilt for her grandkids, that would protect them from summer storms.

Love Poem Number -

For David

Sometimes

I think of your nightly ritual
how you fold your durag and place
it in the middle drawer,
brushing those artistic fingers
against the fabric
with the same tenderness

that you hold a camera
a lock of hair
a gun
a clay knife
a dumbbell
deployment papers –

things that have meant nothing
and everything.

Come and hold my naked knees
in this amber dusk,
when the cicadas are
climbing upward, singing.
Singing for that which they burn
and, also, me.

Once I come writhing out of the earth,
it will be for a touch that isn't mine.
Your touch.
Not just anyone's.