

Uncle

They found him on his face in a motel room
where he paid rent with his hands, painting walls
and cutting lawn, keeping things up--

There were notes on the upright
that I could not play,
keys that would not sound.

You were afraid of his hands. You all were,
as if they had buried a part of you,
deep enough, you all had thought;
until it came time to bury him,
his death in your minds
like water too hot for the skin.
It was still morning and you were all old
and thinking the same things--
just as helpless as you were then,
those nights when you were young
and he, deaf drunk, found you
cold and still and silent

There were notes on the upright
that I could not play,
keys that would not sound.

It was me who held his cold hands
who straightened his curled fingers
so that they could lie flat like the rest of him,
crying like the rest of the room,
thinking of how
you were only girls then and already
full of feelings without names;
left with the ugliness of his touch,
the blame of his hands:
as if they had buried a part of you,
deep enough, you had thought--
there were moments in the night,
in your night--

They were notes on the upright
that I could not play,
keys that would not sound.

Somehow, Distance Becomes A Bosom
I am Gawking At

Today I walked to work with a Steinbeckian tractor for a heart,
a dust covered machine lurching towards the Bethlehem behind my eyelids,
overworked from plowing the cropless field of our love. I am stuck in oscillation
between honesty and victimhood, searching myself over for a wound.
I turn around to spot no trail of blood or chain and ball-- I yield only a sense, a memory
slipping in and out of focus: Wrongness.
I woke today from a dream of Krishna dancing with his gopis,
my dream self juggling a blue desire to be recognized, to be collected
into the arms of God, to be seen dancing,
chanting the Maha Mantra with my eyes closed
out on my permanent lunch break.

But these wrongs, even renouncement can't smother:
the injuries acquiesced along the curves and protrusions of togetherness--
the yo-yoing of the heart, the titter tatter of my brain--
my hands
always in your braids,
fucking them up. In the dream, Krishna laughs as I approach him,
and his laugh is an ocean, eclectic with death, darkened by sex. I am embarrassed.
Ashamed of the limits of my love for you,
guilty for pretending they could be any less severe,
for never taking my eyes off the distance I would place between us.
In another dream, you were the turtle crossing the road
that I didn't swerve to miss,
that I told myself
I had only nicked.

Unsearchable

“The heart *is* deceitful above all *things*,
& desperately wicked: who can know it?” -- Jeremiah 17:9

If I open it up to find it bare,
unadorned with the sap of experience,
beating fast, (though I'm breathing slow),
I find its red almost insolent, the way it's
both bright and pale, shimmering and dark,
the way it wavers but doesn't fall, like
infrastructure made with the earth in mind.
As if we are children playing on staircases,
faced with the peril of the questions we
didn't think to ask, or else older, grown and
always mesmerized by the consequences
we seem to escape; dogged with the trouble
of looking out and only seeing our wide-eyed selves.
After a while I start to think of light as the first
and most elegant fiction refracted by what
is really there: a parched desert bush, a fruit tree
by a stream, my hand as I reach out to touch you,
always and forever wishing that each time I do
really *is the good flesh continuing*.
I am aware that I shouldn't trust it,
that it is not mine to search--
but here, with you, beneath this blanket
of coalescent days, perhaps I am
folding into the thing of it now,
perhaps I am catching on.

Fever in My Pocket

Up until now I'd lost it, that tune you'd hum between A and B,
us alone and on foot, our stomachs ruined with an idea:

the difference between wisdom and ignorance,
between how the two make you act.

How you'd known all the ways to keep me out,
and yet neither of us knew when to let me in,

nor did we guess that when you did it would
do nothing for our stomachs. Even months later,

with you off for summer, the light still
pours through the hole in the window above

the sink from the last time you sent me home.

Alone in my kitchen,

I shake the thought of us around in my head

like a riff from *Exile*

on *Mainstreet* or a lyric

from *Blonde on Blonde*,

how the one bleeds

helplessly into the other,

how a plea is a plea

and every time the a/c clicks on or off

I hear myself singing

--come, come on down Sweet

Virginia--

--because sometimes it gets so hard

you see?

Because someone once taught me that flour
doesn't rise unless you've remembered to sift it first,

and like your dress on so many of those dead note
nights, I am afraid we are not self-rising.

There's a difference between someone you've fallen
mad for and a lonely pool of light,

but I don't think I've found it.

Skipping to the Back of the Qur'an

I.

With hardship comes ease

with hardship comes ease

Twice it reads

and I think

practice

practice

practice

Earlier

I read

as sure as rain as grass is green

this is a discerning recitation

not a flippant jest

II.

There is an image of denial

as men reclining in mirth

and as I read of their damned fate

I am afraid

I myself

am too in love with distraction

At times

these old recitations

are less words on a page

and more the coarse

whistle of wind eroding rock

the only cruelty of God is time

III.

A garden and a river

and always a cup of nectar in your hand

hatred

and

injury

removed from your breast

the blind are not

the same as the seeing

God

be gentle for a while

do not leave me alone to my pleasure