

## *Maize*

It might be getting bad again.  
I find myself preoccupied with corn:  
Spending hours paring kernels from the core  
over the kitchen table.

They look like tiny golden eggs, like honeycomb,  
each yellow chamber straining, full of fluid,  
shelter for the seed of life within.  
How many kernels on the ear  
how many ears on the stalk  
how many acres of American soil  
look just like this,  
rolling fields of nothing but  
the plant that I pick apart  
with eyes, with teeth, with kitchen poetry?

How often do unruly seeds challenge the neat rows of the ear  
how often do unruly birds challenge the neat rows of the tractor?  
surely American ingenuity has answered their call  
has engineered the birds, the roots, the kernels  
to lay neatly ordered: every hill and plain  
must be structured squarely, Manhattan blocks.

Under the kitchen lamp, I stand with knife and cob  
like a whittler, as if the blade  
could shape it into something new,  
could pry out the secrets of what lies  
beneath the sweetness of the seed,  
as if I could make sense of the porous center  
and its unyielding white flesh.

I think about Marilyn Monroe  
begging the reservation women for naloxone  
in her darkest hour—  
I, too, am the daughter of murderers and thieves  
unable to make sense of a world  
made and unmade for me.  
Somewhere the last crow  
still pecking golden kernels from Monsanto's ears  
laughs at this great joke  
before he goes squawking to the gallows.

## *Parting Words*

*“When the assault on a maternity clinic in Kabul on Tuesday was over, 18 newborn babies were left behind, many covered in blood, and most now motherless. The youngest, whose mother survived, was delivered in a safe room after the attack had begun.”*

*– The New York Times, May 14, 2020.*

Baby, this world is an onion:  
layers of carnage partitioned only  
by a few thin, purple walls.  
My eyes itched when doctors  
cut into the woman beside me  
to haul out twins.  
My eyes watered when men  
cut into the roof  
to bring it down around us.

Baby, I felt the world shake within me  
as you moved, your head against  
the door to the world  
like a battering ram  
until I opened and gave way.  
I felt the world shake around me  
as men moved against the doors,  
forcing the clinic to give way.

Baby, I watched someone  
birth a tiny mewling son  
moments before the shelling.  
A freshly cleaned child, blood-spattered once more.  
A new mother dead before the sweat cooled her brow.

Baby, was there time  
for me to deliver the placenta  
that slippery lunch box,  
your sidecar?  
I did not have much to send with you.  
But I wish there had been time to give  
what I had:  
a name,  
a kiss,  
a few months' milk.

## *Obituary*

I think the type of man I like  
is the man I'd like to be.

when my shoulders grow broad,  
I try a swagger in the silver of my mirror  
to impress my reflection;  
(s)he is not convinced, but still  
the strangest desire stirs  
not to touch as much as to become.

couched somewhere deep within my mind  
is a baby boy who neither lived nor died,  
only lay down for a warm afternoon nap once  
in his favorite grass-stained overalls.

I chop off my hair. I spit in the street.  
I plead with my jawbone. I refuse to shave.

someone faked his death,  
printed an obituary in the local paper's runny ink:  
(he was curious, he loved trains, he wanted to be like his father)  
and pulled whatever it is that I am  
from his empty coffin

perhaps the men I take to bed are recompense  
for the life that sleeping child was denied.  
when I seek out unyielding lovers  
in the places where I bend,  
is it for them at all? maybe I am merely  
searching for the body of the boy I never was.

## *Self-Soothing*

i.

There is a loneliness—there is an emptiness there.  
No, don't feel it. Don't linger.  
Trust me, you don't want to feel it.  
Here, a drink will help you drown it out.

Here, I have just the thing.  
If you micro-dose this slow-acting poison  
you won't feel it anymore.  
If you pump yourself full with plastic glitter  
you won't feel it anymore.  
Take in the halogen light, the radio static,  
the endless buzzing of electric wasps.  
You cannot feel emptiness if you are full of sound and fury.

I have just the 8-bit garbage for your ears,  
just the flashing pictures for your eyes,  
just the sickening sugars for your lips.  
Feel arteries clog, neurons fizzle out,  
eardrums rupture, eyes go blind.

It makes you feel like a person, no?  
People do these things.  
People experience these sensations.  
People gorge themselves on glitter and neon and booze,  
people are eternally chasing the next high,  
the next three-minute sequence of static,  
because it must mean *something*, right?

ii.

We prayed for answers and the gods on high told us to consume,  
that taking in creation would save us.  
We have made ourselves arks for more than two of every kind.  
Walk to the grocery store while having a breakdown.  
It's nothing but wall to wall  
color slogan purchase consume this will feed you this will fill you this will save you.  
Dinner so easy you will have more time.  
Time for nothing. Time for what?

Please avoid the wet floor sign; it doesn't mean anything.  
Don't look at the slick sheen of water on the floors; it is a mirror.  
Don't look at yourself in the mirror.

In the mirror are your eyes and in your eyes is your soul  
and if you look you will remember that there is an emptiness—  
that you are a beast alone in this world  
that these sugars and statics and lights are not saving you they are rotting you in an ill-fated  
effort to save your soul, and what soul? What could there be left to save? You let yourself be  
dazzled by the lights and colors and glitter and static and act like it means something, like you  
are less alone—  
you are alone, dreaming  
your own static to produce.  
What would you do but give more garbage  
for more to consume? Nails on chalkboards, bouquets of carrion flowers,  
strangled sea turtles beached by thousands,  
anything to avoid the fact that  
you will always feel alone—

iii.

Oh, I told you not to feel it. Here, take my hand, please, it's okay,  
we don't have to answer these big questions now,  
look, I've got just the thing:  
it won't ask you what you want to become,  
but it will sit with you for a little while.  
We're mopping up the spill on aisle seven.  
Please, take a swig,  
turn on the TV,  
put on some music  
until you fall asleep again.

## *Meditations on Mars*

Mars, red planet, drove men mad.  
stare at red dirt long enough  
your eyes go blind.  
travel far enough from home  
your heart forgets the way.

Mars, scarlet lining of a matador's coat  
made men like bulls,  
and women like bears emerging from dens  
like women emerging from spacecraft.

they strung themselves out to find water on Mars.  
in their eyes, dry hills ran bloody.  
they were looking for the path  
of the liquid in the dust  
for proof the vision had been real  
proof they were more than mad scientists.

they last saw Sally in the airlock,  
scrubbing at her skin  
until her flesh matched the beaten landscape  
obsessed with her fingertips, her palms  
*out, damned spot, out I say.*

Mars made man beast  
not moon-bayers, made anew:  
*red dust red dirt red desert*  
there must be water (always after the water)  
somewhere, somehow, there must have been water  
returners thirst for splashdown sensation  
*blessed water blue planet blue sea*  
under the red light of a lifeless planet calling them.

they last saw Yuri stepping out with water rations  
desperate to wet the soil,  
a diplomatic gesture from the red representative.  
pouring amniotic on a dead planet,  
waiting for life to spring forth, he said:  
no God up here, so space  
for man to reign creation.

if there are impressions in the dust, then necessarily  
there must have been water.

Mars made man made bot made beast:  
our inorganic child sent to locate life  
in the dust bowl, mass grave of human hope  
to feel less alone in the universe.  
blue home world Houston beamed up human lullabies;  
in return the Rover beamed back a likeness of ourselves.

we last saw Rover singing its funeral dirge  
dust-choked in red storms  
as if to say, death is not decay of flesh;  
death as offline status, death as proof-of-concept.

if the Rover died on Mars, then necessarily  
there must have been life.

we were searching for others on Mars  
we were searching for ourselves on Mars  
we were searching for ourselves in others  
we were searching for ourselves in our creation.

dry-mouthed engineers watch Yuri crash,  
watch Sally cover herself in the sea.  
they take off their headsets when Rover stops singing.  
they rise all at once,  
staring at palms caked in red  
each of them desperate  
for a glass of water.