

Swiftwater Rescue Drowning

A desperate throw, a downstream float
For a body to catch as it's spun against rock
And eddy in the churning. All that air added
To shiftwater frothing a distraction from the loss
Of buoyancy. A body cannot lift, but swirls and shudders
Under the con of driftwater weight. A flood rushing
On the desert floor, the hard earth unable to absorb
Relentless rain or blood. Would-be rescuers are warned.
Don't jump in. Don't be another body lost in driftwater deluge.
But bodies twirling in should-be giftwater keep coming.
There is not a tree branch, a life ring, a rifle or a line
From a country song to hook or lash or catch the rush
Of bodies caught in the pulling driftwater crashing past
The strobe-red lights of abandoned rescue trucks.
No telling the arms of saviors from the drowned.
No refuge. A body and another and another body.
All souls lost and sinking in the swiftwater.

The Surprising Grace of Big Men

They were once the big men on campus
Football heroes, wrestlers, athletes
Now turned tall and girthed
Into mountains that dance
Holding up their trousers
With elastic and ties. Sporting shorts
Even in winter, to show off their
Best features: muscled calves and
Well-turned ankles. Ladders of muscle
Wrapped in abundance, never falling
When they drink too much, a line of dance
Partners waiting for them at parties and weddings.
They lead, pushing and pulling from solid strength,
Turning sweethearts with heave and sway of hip
Guiding would-be lovers with the ease of leg
Pressed against joint and bone, between thighs
To beats of long-stepped fox trot and gliding waltz.
And, oh! How they rumba
On size 15 slip-on patent leather loafers,
On feet that seem impossibly dainty.

They manspawl on bar stools pulling their women
Into the mound of belly, tree-trunk of their arms
Hands that cover like paper on rock,
A quilt in winter, the low clouds of distant
Snow. To be his woman you learn to climb him
Build up the strength and stamina to hold
His heft, his weight, your hands finding purchase
In his bulk - the dihedral where chest
Meets shoulder, footholds at knees
And in the flattened mesa
Of his outstretched palms. You glissade
Along the long length
of his major muscle groups
Skirr over the slope and massif
Of his body, his hardness hidden
Beneath a world of flesh,
No mere mountain,
A range, no an entire planet,
Of him, creating gravity as he dances.

What We Talk About at Caroga Lake

How coffee never tastes as good as it does on the porch
In the morning before the rest are awake. The perfect
Number of water shoes. How old the kids should be to go
Without life-vests on the dock. The couple in the red canoe.

The proper way to break down cuts of beef, cook fresh corn,
Slice tomatoes. The number of hot dogs, ate split and burned
It will take to kill us. What small words count In Scrabble.
How we don't miss cell service, internet, the daily, hourly news.

That time the tornado rushed unchecked over the mountain.
The giant float, the one the Aunts commandeered on sunny
Afternoons for wine and sass and the boys call estrogen island,
Lifted over the waves, strained its anchor and pointed like a hand to god.

The planning of funeral parties. Lines of succession. Who to write
Out of wills. Costume changes. The puzzle pieces and people
We are missing. The propriety of jewelry that holds remains, ashes
Bodies. The shape, size and color of urns and songs on eagle wings.

The order of loons: Gaviiformes. The rare hatching of two chicks
This year. How many more bottles of the crisp Italian white,
Gavi de Gavi, we should buy. And how, despite our trust
In science, we know that the loons here really do mate for life.

The Bodhisattva Angel Speaks in Tongues

The Bodhisattva angel
On the Clark Street Bridge said
She's all mouth of hens...
We heard the woman peck
and sparkle, hen-pecking stories and sagas
Scratching truth from earth and concrete
In the front-room farm-yard of the city.

The Bodhisattva angel
In the stained green apron said
She's all mountain spread...
We heard the woman gravitate
and grace lowing, lip-bowing a kiss.
Blessing the heft of bridge beams
In the span-space reach-range of the city.

The Bodhisattva angel
With sharp painted nails said
She's all mouth and hands...
We heard the woman holler
and grab, grasping dollars won hard.
Howling hunger and greedy hope
In the great empty-mouth open-hand of the city.

She said write it in your own words. So we did.