

Thicket

All fields lead to the thicket, where
tangled blackberries tempt
wild rabbit who makes his home
there, among stinging nettles.
The cool air takes on the scent
of pepper.

Dog follows his nose

to its center.

Don't blame the dog

or his owner for what comes next.
A dog needs chase, to cull. Now
two animals live a moment as equals --
rabbit, heart pulsing through clover
dog, muscling as fast as his legs will go.
The thicket, silent, still breathing.

Saudade

Again, he smells of yesterday's catch
leaves the dishes just as he leaves them
laced with *bacalao* and potato, saucer of pits
and cigarette leavings. I have thought of it
so many times that it's

already happened.

The clasps of my luggage
snapped shut, my heavy heels echoing
the stairwell. I take almost nothing –
quick-dry lingerie, dress suit, the only nylons
I own without a run, soap and toothbrush
and seduce myself to the City,

to a restaurant

where I can sit in the dark and count
what's left of my money, leave change
for the *fado* singer who releases her voice
into the night, singing

It's no secret.

You must pay for everything sooner or later.

Egret

A stand-alone herald of light in the marshes
among the reed beds. It contemplates. Questions
the shallows for toads and newts. Its body
an exclamation point between land and sky
or a divining rod between land and water.

Regrets start

like this -- a stone unturned. Thoughts, minnows
left unpursued. Weather threats. It risks
the awkward pull of flight. A reach of wings
draws shadow over the hot salt flats. To land
is to make a slow, murky splash. Repeat.

Otter, Vltava

The louche otter
disassembles carp --

cracking scales, splitting
spine, oblivious. Blood

underfoot on his island
of ice. Crunch of snow.

The dog strains his leash,
barks for a better look.

Moonlight follows the otter --
his dive and return.

Another fish, dazed
by cold, its certain end.

After the third, sated,
he steals below the broken floe.

Status Update: Fried Onions on Plešivecká ulice

Conjure a *babička*, housecoat worn loose over gabardine, wooden spoon stirring thoughts to sides of the pan while a ginger cat stares from the kitchen chair. It's the wet end of autumn, when all good smells carry far. Wood smoke curls through her chimney. She remembers how he would sneak up from behind, stick his crust of bread into the melting fat and she would swat him back. She piles the onions on brown bread, wipes her hands and brings her late lunch to the window seat where she settles down to a crossword. The bright patterns of children returning home from school fill the corners of her eyes with a loud and colorful noise.