

The Hairpin Speaks

I refuse to police the wind, though it pleases me
to weave
through the heavy traffic of shine.

A woman can seek order
and still allow disorder. Say, the wisp at her brow.

True, I'm fond of curves that turn back
on themselves, again and again
the undulant view.

Swept up
in my grasp, a woman's hair is her name.
See how it's written in cursive.

Indispensable?
I'm not that vain. Just bent metal. Take some wire,
make a coat hanger, staple, paper clip.

Clever, yes. But if I'd meant
you harm, I'd have maimed and murdered centuries ago.

Well, there *was* the long, efficient kansashi.
If a woman unbundled her hair, beware one's throat
or any vital organ.

Hammock, Rain

Not to be outdone, I stand in the living room—
this is after I lose my bicycle,
after I lose the boy who creeps me out with his stare—
and having no other recourse, I admit I am poor:
no ride, no love. The day is short of rain,
and I'm wishing for a nap in a hammock.

I know moves in a hammock
better than I know moves in the boiler room.
After all, consider the rain.
Lately my dream cycle
has become dimly existent, piss-poor.
My favorite pastime is to sit and stare.

It's like falling over a toy on the stair-
way, like being lost in a Florida hammock
and the sun beating through each pore.
On Tuesdays I quit sleeping in the guest bedroom,
quit riding my motorcycle—
too dangerous, especially in the rain.

So who cares whether it's going to rain?
I refuse to station myself at the window and stare
to see if the weather will cycle
to new weather. Some days the hammock
sways. Other days there is no room
in the ground for rain to pour

its apologies for drought onto the grass. Poor
rain, and all its regrets for being rain.
I retreat to the dining room
to watch the squirrels, who are too busy to stare.
My day has turned into an empty hammock.
The best memory is my old red tricycle.

I could sleep late on Wednesdays or cycle
my fantasies into a faster gear to pour
new life into my secret hammock.
By now I'm wishing for rain.
I don't care how many people stare.
It's my bathroom.

I shout, *Give me room, people, to ride my unicycle.*
Is it worth a stare, this hotdog lunch of the poor?
I am the hammock, you are the rain.

Headlong Spell

Pelsified if not jibbed with anathema.
It balms the heart, how the river
birch skews and rusts any question.

But the ragweed caterpillar, when?
Blue leafstone trees a loud mercy.
My father housed such amble,

his days pinnate with inflorescence,
his nights a catechism of wood battles.
O pester the rain, pilfer my father's sky.

My Nails Tap a Tabletop

They wear identical skirts
with white hems. They are bonnets without ribbons,
lost whalebones & ribs of miniature foxes.
I bunch my fingers & kiss the nails
like some good Italian. My old habit is to flick them,
one by one, against the thumb. Their duty is to give
the lover another place for lips, the new mother
a handful of tiny pink shells.

The longest one tends its proximity
to finger food & loves to ping the glass
glad with wine. An agile host, riding
a wave of goodbye moons. Easily broken
like a heart—quick to repair, unlike a heart.
When cold, blue as a plucked hen.

I once lost one,
that blackened curl of horn bone, that tough old goat.
It pinched & pinched until the end. Having shed it,
I didn't know myself, my toe a soft bunny.
O fortunate, nail-forsaken toe. O strange body
fleshy & flightless. Fish, for a time, swimming free.
Ever adaptable, the nail is the best chameleon.
It is a useful beauty.

House outgrown, it inches out
into the mystery of air. On relentless wings, long
& graceful, an albatross soaring the open sea.

Dash—

Of salt, never enough. Though you're sink-
ing through the snow,
its light crust now caved in, a well
peppered with dirty ice. And frozen fields
no horse would care to pull a sleigh over.

Some do it well with *off*: a will, even;
a song, a string of notes.

Others know little but broken
table legs and backs of chairs. No wonder
the straits of their hope.

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A pair traps what's in the middle,
like when my mother safety-pinned
the top sheet to each side of the bed
so my sister and I, her two small contradictions,
would quit our tugs-of-war.

What's in the middle: an interruption.

I expected your long retirement, not this chunk
of death in the middle
of what would have been simple and periodic,
winding like a river. Not a sequestering, Paul.
And don't think I'll forget it either, though I wasn't there.
Your battle, the silence after.

A rainforest—say, along the Amazon,
where I've always wished to go—is nothing
like a long chain of clover blossoms.

—for P. R.