

Cabinet of Wonders

Hefting Mrs. O out of bed required
a winch and a cradle of straps
and a hard ear: she cried, at least
more often than wailing, wordless,
the occasional bark. No wonder,
both hips were shattered, her spine
nearly a question mark.

So, her soft sobs were welcome
Tuesday morning, before bath,
and her sudden shrieks ignored,
at first, until we saw her fist
jabbing toward the floor: a small,
pink, heart-shaped box had fallen
and lay beside the bedpan.

Jamilla opened it, and up sprung
a tiny ballerina, en pointe,
pirouetting to *Für Elise*,
gears plinking slowly, slowly,
the song her sister practiced
forever, in the front parlor,
the sun colored vase of lilies
atop the piano, hair in a shaggy bun.

We all listened as it slowed
to a crawl, one note, one more,
then hung, unresolved, on the C.
Mrs. O didn't have to cry, Jamilla
turned the key before breathing,
let it play, let it wind down again,
then turned the key once more
to watch the ballerina twirl.

I Am Glad I Have Seen Racehorses, Women, Mountains

I am glad I have seen racehorses, women, mountains,
glad I have sung, stretched my back, peeled skin from my sun-burnt arms;
I am grateful to have had a good enemy,
and to have fought, knowing there is no end to fighting.

There are few things to believe, and many things to know,
and they are all mixed up in a rusty can,
but when you are thirsty, even the rust
tastes of life. I am glad I have seen pumpkins, contortionists,

a mound of snow the size of a house; glad to have stunk a while
in the hole left by love, to have smiled
when an enemy was injured without reason,
to have realized there was a day the battle would end, for me.

There are tunnels and crevices beneath our feet, and weeds
springing up from between them, and beneath that, yes,
it is hot, but it is not a heat that concerns us, nothing human there,
though we may, given time, be ground down again into that molten sea.

When This Plane Goes Down, I Want To Be Sitting Beside You

When this plane goes down, I want to be sitting beside you,
your hand atop mine, my hand resting on your thigh
when the air cracks in two and the oxygen masks drop
and the attendants float around the cabin like lost balloons,
the ones without enough helium to lose themselves in the sky,
when all the screams become one scream and we push it
behind us and start to fall, your hand atop mine, my hand
resting on your thigh, toward the trifling patchwork of farm
and park and baseball diamond, or toward the circuit board
of a city shivering. We can fall toward the men and women
who live as though the world is already burning, the ones
whom god has called to rise from this scabrous plain, or the ones
who sell their brothers and sisters daily to the mulch pile
for another chance at glory, no, not even glory, for another
chance to rule and power is the only rule, power grinds
mountains into dust and dust into fuel and fuel is the beast
that carries them into the fortress, locks the gates and pays
the mercenaries to walk the walls, it tints their sunglasses
and wraps the wires they stick in their ears. Or we could fall
toward the center of the ideogram, the heart of the advertisement,
the mainspring, the all-seeing eye, and pray for absorption
so, rather than die, we might multiply and occupy the other world,
the one we make with our bodies in space, the one that floats
up from our bodies like scent rising from a rose, the map
that we carry and share and inscribe together—but that is not
a life, yearning to be another stain on the wine-press, one more
palimpsest lurking on channel 132, 257, 308; instead,
let's just fall, your hand atop mine, my hand on your thigh,
and look at me so we might live each in the others' eye,
an infinite recursion of selves and eyes, each smiling the same,
each ringed with hair alive in the wind that strokes the earth.

The Mower Obeys The Covenant

--after Marvell

The grass keeps on growing,
and I keep on mowing,
and then there's the room where I cry.

The carnivals come
and the cancer creeps up pantlegs
and lovers draw their curtains
and go about their days.

The grass keeps on growing,
and I keep on mowing,
and then there's the room where I cry.

I work, I follow the covenant;
I am a homeowner and a responsible
digit. If only they knew
how I longed for a sea of blood.

The grass keeps on growing,
and I keep on mowing,
and then there's the room where I cry.

Instead, the food court.
Instead, I watch the carousel
turning, a galaxy of fiberglass horses
collapsing too slow for the eye.

The grass keeps on growing,
and I keep on mowing,
and goddamn I wish I knew why.