

All through the Exposure dogs

All through the Exposure dogs
get their heads stuck
in the chicken wire. Nothing

grows from the bedrock.
I am going to start
I am going to start to carry

a small notebook
where I can save the ears of any lion
I find on the bedrock. Dumpsters

are full of useful rust and tongues,
when the freeze comes, keep
your fingers close, bristle-ice cracks bones.

Under my eyelids an oily world, begonias
bloom and die. He is inventing a device
that can measure precisely the onset of rot.

I am going to start to carry a dousing rod
made of wire coat hangers. I will walk
the dream-time feeling water pull

and eating plums. All through the Exposure
we are learning humility. We are in awe
of dawn. We fear sundown.

Ghazal

I search for my teachers among the graves—
they repudiate me from their pristine graves.

I would serve them a subpoena
but they turn up their backs in their graves.

Wind fractures the air from the east,
churning dirt from their quickened graves.

My teachers know things they will never pass on.
Death has instilled in them the breathless silence of the grave.

All I can do is strut and hum, bring them flowers,
place lipstick kisses on the door to their lead-lined graves.

Last night I chewed over the word *splitfoot*,
it seemed to mean something charcoal and locked, something like a grave.

Shearwater splitfoot, with language like this
who needs meaning, it's all dirt shoveled into the grave.

My teachers are all dead, mother, father, sister, brother.
Rija, why do you so seldom weep at their graves?

Why Did You Do It?

for Joseph Stroud

Stooping into the chicken house, a red pail in her hand,
she plucks at her mother's hairpins to keep her awake.
The fat chicken fluffs, dust rises into the sun pouring through the roof slats.
Her mother drops a skillet full of hot grease onto her feet.

If I bring you into this poem, there will have to be a fire.
The sun keeps on pouring through the night.
The sun shines on her mother's burns.
The nurse from next door comes running

when she hears the screams, they smear her feet with grease,
all night I bring her ice to quell the fire
all night the sun keeps burning,
all night *lions and gold and pearls in the wheat.*

I reach under the chicken and take one brown egg.
I reach under the chicken and take another brown egg for my red pail.
My grandmother says she is proud of me.
later I swallow a nickel and the nurse from next door comes running.

She hold my ankles and jiggles me upside down to make the nickel fall out
but I keep it. It's still there, the interest goes up and down with the decades.
My mother was terrified of fire, my grandmother loved lightning.
I will keep burning as long as the sun.

(“lions and gold and pearls in the wheat” — from Joseph Stroud’s poem Why Did You Do it)

Religion

The heretic's feet are on fire, slow heat
lapping up from the center of the bonfire—

here, see if this helps, says the priest,
handing the heretic a bottle of gasoline.

The brothers Twill and Wilt, their sister Thou,
fill the street with the ashes of plague victims—

the heretic's lips sewn shut to keep him
from screaming out his error, to keep him

from calling down the kindness of God.
Now his hair burns, see the red sparks

from the gold wash he uses fly up.
See the birds fall dead passing over.

Inheritance

He gave me a barbarous tongue, a pleasure in cutting,
I keep it in a lead-lined casket.

I have a strong sense of the absurd,
a desire to laugh and cry at the same time.

I am not embarrassed by that as he was,
I am proactive in shame.

We wriggle and punch, we say love me
with our mouths full of sand.

We leave a trail.