

## Bounty

As if lynching's strange fruits and the rapes that devour  
Dates and the serial killers popping their victim's

Eyeballs like grapes weren't bad enough I know  
Now there is violence even in this vegetarian's

Kitchen. The world makes monsters of us all. I too  
must cast my breadcrumbs into the flowing bodies

Of water for even I have peeled the eyes off a potato,  
Gnawed on an ear of corn, broke through the smooth

Skin of a plum and carelessly bruised an apple. I'm sorry  
To say I have crunched through heads of lettuce and, with

Pleasure, slurped the juice that pools on the flesh of an overripe  
Peach. I know now it's true: no one really gets through

life without doing damage. Just yesterday--let me confess  
To you this one more--just yesterday my incisors sliced

Through a mild-mannered artichoke's bland, blameless  
Heart.

Shrugging Jesus

Whose arms you think  
Are open to you but  
Really he's saying,  
*Boy, I don't know. Who  
Did do the dishes last night?*

Shrugging Jesus says, *I've never  
Seen a less lovely sunset*, upon looking  
At your painting,  
But has no more specific critique.

He wants to play in the  
Waves but not be  
Photographed doing so. He wants  
To adopt a dog but oh, too much,  
The responsibility.

Shrugging Jesus will recycle if  
The pickup is curbside, will compost  
If he's passing on the road  
To the farmer's market drop-off. He'll deliver  
A sermon on your soul, shepherd  
The offering money into his hand-sewn pockets,

Give it all to the bum who was  
Yesterday picking scraps from Murphy's  
Garbage, today strewn out  
On the corner, asleep and half

A man. Not because he's good.  
But because oh, the weight  
Of those coins  
was too much  
For shrugging Jesus  
to carry.

## Unprimed

*After Unprimed Canvas 1944-N No. 2 by Clyfford Still*

They used to sketch on cave walls,  
bump of rock forming the hump  
of a buffalo's back. Slapping  
bloody handprints onto the stone  
to celebrate a successful hunt.

Centuries later, on church ceilings,  
so eager to create they'd paint  
over what was already there.  
The rust-colored stain of hundreds  
of winters worth of water damage  
became an angel's crown. A clot  
of paint in a corner became a spire on heaven's castle.

Now, people gravitate  
towards only the primed canvases,  
gliding past the rooms of shell mosaics  
arranged on driftwood, not even glancing  
at the shovel suspended from the ceiling.

But in one corner of the room  
hangs an unprimed canvas. Deep, splotchy green  
it challenges, *who declared our surface  
must be smooth even as our souls are cracked?*  
People stand and stare at the sterile and bright  
seascape next to it as all the while it dares you to look,  
whispering, *who says  
we cannot love  
what is raw?*

## City Folks

1

We are city folks,  
all of us,  
waiting for the deer to cross our path.

We are,  
all of us,  
slightly in love with and slightly afraid  
of their tangle of horns, umber skin,  
suppressed muscles and cautious eyes.

We clump on the path as they  
pass--nose in air and nose to tail--  
single file, orderly, and silent--the ideal  
elementary line.

2

I learned, in school deep back,  
how Nacotchtank hunters bowed a deer once,  
followed the blood spatters as the deer ran, watched,  
still, as the deer lay down to die.

I imagine the hunter laying their hand on the deer's cooling hide.  
I wonder what it would be like to feel the last phantom pulse of the majestic dead.

We read this in a grainy packet  
fastened with a staple that was too weak to clasp on the finished side so  
when I turned the pages I'd sometimes prick my finger.

We were told the Algonquians used  
every part of the deer---hooves, marrow, hearts.

I'd like someone to watch over me as I curl up  
by a muddy creek and bed in the trampled grass.  
I'd like to think that every part of me--fingertips, arches  
of feet, blades where shoulders meet back--might be of use.

3

My body is asleep and too often  
still. Sometimes I lie on my floor--

windows open in all seasons--  
place my hands on my belly,  
and breathe in time with the garbage truck's yawn.

But we are,  
none of us,  
breathing now.

Committed to the fine art of not startling  
these precious deer, these  
excessive deer, who overrun parks and starve  
without enough weeds to fill around.

It Won't

*After "Happy Anniversary" by David Lehman*

You've been sober  
three months  
I think that's  
significant I do why  
three is the number  
of months it takes  
all the leaves to drop  
once they've changed from  
green to red it's  
the number of lights on a  
traffic light the number  
of lives you changed the night  
you ran that light while still  
drunk the number of months  
it takes me to fall  
in love with you again after you  
come home saying, "I promise,  
it won't happen again."