

Elegy for a Body

I take up ashes
like taking up space.
I am dis-embodimenting my body
or what I once called skin,
its remnants rounding out,
the insides of a blue funeral urn
whose curves make sense.

Inside here with me
the afreet's ghost
and the memory of feeling thin
like a butterfly's wing
like water in a glass pitcher
like telephone wires
filled with energy
of the me I remember only
in the soft nail beds
and crane's neck
and boy's chest
of yesterday.

Two-Hundred-Fifty Seven

I have eaten 942 sunflower seeds
(roasted, unsalted, in-shell)
and written 257 words today, today
I have told the character in the science
fiction novel that he will die, and
he has responded with the
casual and unbroken flick of a middle
finger between his teeth, today
I imagined several haikus that could
not really be defined as such but
at least they looked pretty, in a nice
little block shape like literary wood
engravings on sheepskin or the desperate
secret note of a fugitive, squeezed
onto the back of a postage stamp, today
I revisited the scene in the back
of the black pick up with the blood
on the floorboards, concealed by the
litter of cigarette butts, coins and receipts
and reckless cell phones that will
not stop ringing hip hop ring tones, today
the pregnant girl, wooed by the stack
of gold rings upon the older man's
fingers, will not escape into the thick
crowd of New York bodies and mist
that lies at their feet like death's
odor, she will not deface her
rapist, branding him for the bastard
he is with the hush of the gun, today
instead of beginning anew I instead
made honey lemon herbal tea, which
was so hot that I had to drop a tiny
ice cube into its surface, which refused
to melt away anyway, but at least today
I managed to recreate the sound
between my teeth when my pursed lips
hit my tongue and the cat comes running
besides which the noise of perfect
silence.

I Think My Taste is Questionable

In my childhood, I ate one ninety-nine cent candy bar a day
Walking home from the gas station,
a cold Dr. Pepper between my legs as I jumped
the fence behind the woods. I had a panache
for Smarties, hoarded at Halloween,
and I would slowly bite their white rims
until a hard heart remained.

In my teens, ahead of my time, I drank Jello shots
that gulped down, formed a strange pile
like gummy bears at the bottom of my self-respect.
At the movies I ordered tubs of popcorn
and sour patch kids, and sat in the back row with my friends,
dreaming about the projectionist, and his freckles.

In my twenties I smoked clove cigarettes,
coiled in brown paper, little love letters
chased them with orange sour Altoids,
which at first glittered with a layer of diamond white dust
but later, in the hot car on a Texas day
congealed into sticky sweet oblivion.

In my thirties I developed a taste for pickles
and sunflower seeds, the latter's shrouds littering
my desk, in the cracks of the couch and my bra,
the former folded in white paper, saved for later,
always in secret, to avoid uncomfortable questions.

Will I take up pig's feet in my forties? Perhaps
kimchee and caviar? Will I finally mature a taste
for Grape Nuts, like my father? Or will I swill
a diet coke with brunch like my mother?
Or perhaps, the tawny suicide
of a whisky bottle
kept close at hand,
under my pillow
like a tooth for my
guardian fairy?
Like my brother?

The Ghost of a Living Man

Sometimes, I see a man who looks
like my brother, in the parking lot
of a Wal-Mart, or a grocery store.

Mostly seedy places.

He's got a shaved head – his ears poke out
and there's a gray shadow of once thick,
richly dark hair. He wears an oversized
tee shirt, always black, usually a band
or a video game. His beer gut hangs
out beneath it – like a bee hive
on a skinny oak tree.

He wears faded jean shorts. There's a sko
ring in the back pocket, or a pack of cigarettes.
His legs poke out beneath like
little bird stalks. He wears combat boots
or torn-up sneakers and clean white socks.
Sometimes he has a tattoo.
His hands shake.

I think – there goes the ghost of a living man.
Estranged brothers can haunt you that way.

A Tourist of Sorts

I am rediscovering you, in pieces.
In black and tan voices behind
gray partitions, tongue on tongue.
Syllables made American, New England.

In the retelling of Joyce on sky lit stairwells
Irish men and women, pride in the morning,
 “Think you’re escaping and run into yourself.
 Longest way round is the shortest way home.”

In the quiet hum of
rows and rows and rows
of white screens,
their light simulated
in faces, eyes, glasses of the hoi polloi.

And also in the smell of you,
amongst the rows an intoxicating
scent of dust, memory,
earthly and incompletely human –
the contribution of the heavysset homeless
who bring the street with them.

Today I found the back hallway, unaccountably
leading into the front hallway, like a Penrose
staircase in a painting, and I began to wonder
is this art? No, it is just a vacant vestibule,
but it is mine, and I begin to wonder if it exists at all.

White on blue arrows demarcating, nonfiction,
archives below, further down, inexplicably, magazines.
Where the newspapers are, nobody knows.

Above me, in the atrium, I am struck anew by the
daylight through the panes of the skylight, four-sided
and devastating, as if I have never seen the sun before.

You are almost too much, as I slowly uncover you,
mapping you, until I know you, just as I am.