

Wrestlemania III

So much depends upon
a scoop slam, an atomic
leg drop. Hulk Hogan's shirt:
red wheelbarrow ripped open

as if by tornado or rust.
Jacked, his waxed skin
glazed with sweat, he is flexed
perfection. Bleached strands

worn like a bald-rimmed crown,
if ever he was apex, it is now:
all 7'5" 500 pounds of André the Giant
muscled impossibly overhead

like a mythological burden,
like Muybridge's mid-gallop,
airborne horse. Though too young
to have witnessed, I somehow remember

gripping rabbit ears, counting to three
as Hogan peeled back the Giant's leg.
I remember my father posing, partly
to me, partly to himself,

What makes a man? but never
the answer. I am trying
to pretend I don't see the future
in his now slouching breasts,

or deeper inside slack flesh,
his heart hammering like a one-
armed carpenter worked too long
into the gloam. I am child again,

beside him under what relief
(I'd yet to fathom) a hot shower
bestows blue-collar bones.
Naked, I make lathering

grease from his hands
a game. Father, can I know
of love's inglorious sacrifices?
Can I someday sing of its gristle?

Can I? Can I sing?

Crawl Space

Imagine this dark, this quiet—
kingdom to cricket spiders
and blacksnakes—where
the family dog will choose,
or already has, a corner to escape
into its solitary passing. Sand.
Cinder block. The low
whine of machinery no longer
cooling the home inhabitable.
Belly to earth, I squeeze
between two feet of shadow
severed by pale flashlight
and the plop rhythm of sweat
scoring the afternoon's work;
dust constellations
risen from my stirring,
emblazoned with vented light.

It's a kind of pact,
a miracle, trusting
this mess of parts to fuse—
shingles and tar, nails and beams,
glass and sill. Me, grease-palmed,
a snail tinkering beneath
another intricate wooden shell
and the absence inside
its underpinning—box ditch dug
into clay, bone-colored cement
mixed, stacked stiff enough
to found a family full of voices
disappearing into each other
disappearing into sleep
as night's cold weight settles
like floorboards above
every broken thing.

Hatred and Honey

Fledgling blunders, routine
tragedies, a dusk-bourbon sky

chasing us home. Suburbia –
what's salvageable:

this viewfinder of warped images?
Or rather, memory as a hose

untangled with coordination
and patience? Copper-sweet

water the spigot rewards?
Now the sour must of an office

where my uncle hid monolithic
stacks of skin magazines, all airbrushed

areolas and bush. When it seemed enough
to simply palm my flesh

like an injured chick. Flash
to swimsuit snatched below

my bony knees, prick a sudden
offering to the golden

lifeguard with Fibonacci curls.
How the pathetic yelp I mustered

before bolting sounded
not my own. A summer anthem,

shame became inescapable,
became like gravity

teaching the moon
to orbit alone.

So I lifted weights in our oily garage,
tore muscle like sacrament bread.

The friend I hated most once snapped
my hockey stick in half for no reason

other than cruelty craves reaction.

So too he set fire to a pine

in the neighboring woods;
I entered briefly to see it blaze—

 a blood-red exclamation.
That was how it went: rarely living

between hatred and honey, not rebellious
but ignorant of consequence

until we witnessed how indifferent
and vibrant the flames, how surely,

when stepped on, a rusted nail
settles the soft meat.

This tender recess left
once the nail is loosed.

Ode to Mosh

But for now, 17, we are
acned and beautiful, tornadic

in our angst. The venue's strobe-
dark striates our flail

neon/black/neon/black.
Lost in an undulation of knuckles

and chains, bedraggled bangs
and B.O., we are tossed—

paper lanterns in a storm—

slip, are lifted, return

to riffs clipping the beer-thick air,
kick drums pummeling our love

for the necessary rebellion
punk rock affords. After,
the lingering

sting in our ears we smuggle
home like anything good
that fades. But for now our bodies,

apertures through which
revolt and song, prism brilliantly—
solar flares through stained glass.

Ode to Asymmetry

Bless the smaller, left breast, untethered, swimming
under faded cotton you wear to bed,
mattress begun to cup like hands
held out for the drizzle of our sleep.

Bless the 37 crumpled drafts of “Virtuvian Man”
Da Vinci, flustered, arced into his waste bin.
Drafts with one testicle slightly drooped,
one longer leg, six fingers, wonky eye.

Bless the crooked pocket sewn for pennies
in a country not quite our antipode. The unpredictable
course blood runs from a needle-nicked finger.
The unpredictable course by which cancer conquers,
finally, the dictator’s lymph and marrow.

Bless the fractal crack of lightning,
its flighty refusal to lick the same ground.
The drunk man struck while scrawling,
sloppily, with earnest, into the oaks’ flank,
he hearts her – a declaration
to whichever sidereal big shot
rules over us but does not appear
to reward our psalms.

Which is not the way I feel for you now,
Honey-Bum, as you saunter braless, against
exhaustion, toward the commitment
of another dawn. Not asymmetrical, exactly, our love
but chiral, Icarian in its fluctuations. Not golden
our mean but a perfectly flawed stone
in a ring too small. This, the only way
I’d have it: waltzing off-beat,
mismatched,
mooching booze
at oblivion’s dance party.