

Starbuck

At four the alarm proffers its regard,
rife with insects, faintly ethereal. Peaches
in sickly phosphorescence, hale hares carved from tremulous bone,
stoned but yesterday, populate granite counters.
An unruly feline savors its chops
under beige covers. I stand in an oblong mirror,
stare at books, unwilling friendly fire,
dream of salt and indigo, protracted moonlight
filtered through a garage, a headmaster swaying
drunkenly, miming ingestion of peppermint tea.
I am the shift unwilling to relinquish
words of satyrs, shadowed herbs, alchemical alloys,
preparing for day, an insistent buzz
of flies in my ears—unwaveringly deceased.

After Moby Dick

Atoms of a midnight concoction of whiskey and water
languish in a mason jar stuffed with violet petals,
cat hair, ancient pearls—
persisting amid a racket of trombone and gong
emanating across the harbor,
the mouth of a slothful intruder, carnivorous troubadour.
Ishmael harangues the cabin's walls,
his makeshift altar: floating coffin, quarters
assigned by a livid, knife-scarred man.
The Pequod, illumined by sputtering lamplight,
bobs atop murky waves, loaded with game and oil.
Rusted harpoons clutter the deck. Ahab marches through
silver clouds, snores on straw and feather,
while the city burns in impenetrable fog—arch, oblivious.

On the Death of a Family Friend

Closeness, and the illusion of trees: you hear
tears of rain and the grumbling of the unknown,
as if it were near. You can fathom neither the call
nor the news, such tragedy wholly scandalous in its reach,
framed by incoherency, loss. Something rough,
unsuitable for life—a veil of woven violets
black as night—dwells in the heart, must be quelled.
And yet shadows walk among the living, tender oblivion.
To what purpose, then, the scent of lemon meringue pie
on marble countertop, or even a baby's breath?
All, it has been said, ends in disaster. Life surges, breaks
against an unforgiving beach. We are left with hands
clutching familiar keys, fingering forgotten melodies,
somber as the orphan soul, yearning for absolution.

Forty

I'm not as feral as I once was, no longer believe
idolizing golden calves is a sign of intelligence
or insist dancing during an earthquake
will cure multi-drug resistant tuberculosis. Ten oak staves
in this bourbon are fueling strange postulations,
cavorting with notes of coffee, soy, and cane sugar.
You too will sing, relish the taste, the sensation of living *pro forma*
according to regulation of myrmidons. I'm recycling
the notion of surrender, while sirens gyrate
according to echolocation of wombats,
tattooed marionettes conjoin to the asceticism of autodidacts,
and what we graze upon—charred strawberries, roots—
yields to unlikely precepts, wagers, in bloom,
and the paradox of the disenchanting, the dream, rages.

Instruction

Delineate panthers from swans, erect a barricade.
Time will have its way, erase, portend,
guarding death from its instigators,
protecting innocent and damned alike.
Erstwhile aggressors, panthers become prey
of swans' illimitable sorcery. Therefore, any structure
must be constructed of finest wood or stone.
Swans ascend in luminous swaths,
though mere mortals clumsily ambulate,
depend on spells. Beasts' skeletal remains
blacken in rain, disintegrate.
Poor panthers—mercurial, well-meaning, extinct—
vanish in air, so much dust,
clouding the eyes of the redeemed.