

Asher

Thirteen years very

old, disillusion smothered
in a *Venus di Milo* mold. Eyes

burning like stolen Marlboros

see how bold, how impulsive,

stripping fleece jacket and shirt

in the snow on a dare, full
of what we all want.

She dives

into volcanoes like Sick Mick—
fixed in constant flex—who stays

deaf to the weary music of her

sighs. She forges affection
for intimacy, solely human

currency, with the same

measured focus we'll witness
in a spider weaving

its home

in the empty corner of her

mom's trailer that spring,
beside the broom she'll use

to sweep the webs away

Appalachian Incantation

Up the hill, past bare branches that whisper invocations in the wind
Dogged to the top, then breathless down the slush on cardboard sleds
Snow slips through holes in our North Face gloves, freezing thin fingers
Only Swannanoa, in late January, can grind this brown and gray

Dogged to the top, then breathless down the slush on cardboard sleds
Lonnie and Tonya brought the boxes their family's fridge came in
Only Swannanoa, in late January, can grind this brown and gray
Near the top there is a cave where we can build a fire and warm up

Lonnie and Tonya brought the boxes their family's fridge came in
This high you can't hear the houses, the swollen train groaning with coal
Near the top there is a cave where we can build a fire and warm up
Sometimes I see my future self, without a dirty face, in a dark blue pantsuit

This high you can't hear the houses, the swollen train groaning with coal
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Davenport

What I think about when I think about
you. Love. The green needles on the limbs'
intersections. Julie's mane of yellow
and grey. Beneath the roof, the chimes
calling the hours against the heart's
rhythm. Rowing this line, wall,
this egg. A tree born for an orange
cleansing. Chablis spilling onto a beach,
into a bath. The cool, June breeze. Cooking
on the stove, steam from the white teapot.

A Song for Yoko Ono

Just before Christmas, two weeks
before my father's massive heart

attack left us fatherless and my mother
a formidable widow, and eleven days after

John Lennon was jettisoned into eternity
by an unhinged nowhere man seeking

a badge, my mom left home for some
last-minute holiday shopping.

Yoko Ono, Lennon's widow, issued
a media message to all John's fans,

suggesting we wait until Christmas Eve
before plunging into *Double Fantasy*,

his five-years-in-the-making-don't-call-it-
a-comeback album. Two shrink-wrapped

copies (one to save/one to play) tempted
from atop my parents' record player.

My mother, who'd spent the past
week and a half since his murder weeping

as if a family member had been gunned
down, would have us respect Ono's

wish, but my father—ambivalent
about rock music as he was about Lennon,

but just curious or upset enough to give
the disc a spin—once Mom was gone to shop,

brought my brother and me over to the stereo
split the shrink-wrap, spilled the vinyl out

onto the turntable and sent the LP revolving
into the living room. Thanks to myopic love,

John insisted every other song be one of his
soul mate's, and when our ears were

first kissed by Arabian disco nightmares
bleated by sheep, or goats, being trampled,

my father erupted, his laughter shaking the
jalousie windows closed to keep out Miami's

alleged winter. The moans were actually Yoko's
recorded orgasm, which to my brother and me

sounded like she was dying, but my dad
knew what it was and skipped to the next song,

"Clean-Up Time," when my mom walked in,
Macy's bags slipping from her fingers, shouting

"How could you?" at my father, who just couldn't
contain himself. His joy, her pain

juxtaposed. For a second, I knew my isolation
in the midst of family. Then slowly the next Ono

song—insistent, calculated and ridiculous—
began filling the gaps, and even my mother

started to laugh. So that's why I have a soft spot
for Yoko Ono, the one people say "broke up

the Beatles," who can sing like something
between a laughing hyena being catheterized

and the cries of a noblewoman capitulating
to a squeamish desire, who lobbied for years

and finally got co-writing credit for "Imagine,"
and whose last song on *Double Fantasy* still

stones me with irony—"Hard Times are Over"—
sung on the cusp of her widowhood, and my mom's,

her son's fatherlessness, and my brother's and mine,
because before that, she made my dad laugh,

giving us all one magical moment to hold, beyond
death, funeral, the long nights waiting, listening

to that record and recalling someone who loved
to watch the wheels, the carousel horses flying by.

The Coroner

who came to get my mother's shell the mild morning that she shuttled into the ether to be with Yeshua was not disheveled but not sharp, either. He had a fresh haircut, but it was a bad one. He wore a suit, but it was the most unbecoming shade of brown, better suited for a toilet than to hang on any human. He tried to impress or reassure me with his efficiency and professionalism. "Watch how very fast," he said, zipping the ash-colored bag he'd just put her in, then rolled her over onto a dolly I thought was a gurney, until he tipped it back on two wheels, scooted her out her bedroom without looking back. He could have been whistling, *shooby-dooby-doo*, he was so chipper. But he'd already given me something special on the phone, an hour earlier, when he asked for the address and I pressed my temples, slowly shared the numbers to the home I grew up in and a flashback to thirty years before, in this same house, her hands around mine, which held a yellow pencil, helping me shape the numbers and letters, teaching me, should I ever get lost and need to tell someone, where I live, a memory suddenly unsheathed real as her empty body that shocked us this morning, deserted, curled fetal with her mouth still open, as if she was sight-singing something that rested like a robin in the sweet spot of her voice.