

HANGOVERMAN

Every day an origin story—
an ordinary man swallows a potion
he knows is dire poison.

The change begins at once:
he writhes through blind bliss,
tears his clothes (and sometimes bleeds)

as the poison moves through his veins.
His strength grows great.
His strength remains the same.

His secret wears a mask.
Everyone knows who he is.
At last, eyes red, bottles emptied

by his superhuman thirst,
he enters his fortress of solitude,
wherever it may be tonight.

His bed. The floor beside his bed.
The sidewalk where he fell
on the way to find his home.

And all this just a prelude . . .
He awakes, having never really slept,
alter ego dead, home planet nearly destroyed,

the ability to suffer his only super trait, thinking
With great impotence comes great irresponsibility.
At least the Drunkmobile stayed in its dock tonight,

waiting where it's waited since the beginning,
and in the beginning was the drink,
every day an origin story.

THE USUAL

In a faraway bar in a faraway town
the bartender thinks I'm someone
I'm not. She smiles, arches an eyebrow
and says *The usual?*

What would I get if I were this man
she thinks I am— a shot and a beer?
Something with more finesse?
I wonder how long his usual would last,
this man who looks and acts like me.

I remember my usual and the mileage it got me
though all the time I was riding on "E."
My usual was darkness and long draughts alone,
hairpin roads and a hand too light upon the wheel.

I pray this stranger's usual let him fit into his world
better than I fit into mine. The bartender's waiting,
a wall of bottles holiday bright behind her. *The usual?*
she says again. I nod and walk out of the bar
into this stranger's land where a lake as large as the sea
is drying up.

AFTER APRIL

She spent the whole first weekend in the dust,
rummaging through clutter. *Animal*,
she'd say to empty rooms or to the mirror
as she passed. Beer cans and cigarette scars,
scraps of food and flies. She couldn't explain
the way some people lived. Memorial

cards and flowers came. Memorial
Day passed. The yard urned brown as dust
by Independence Day. She could explain
her sadness when she lost an animal,
her grief when surgeons left a puckered scar
in place of secret parts. And even mirrors

she found she could forgive—it wasn't mirrors
that tore her life. St. Jude Memorial
Gardens. Machines that turned the sod to scar.
a few brief words, some prayers to ash and dust.
That was the place that made her animal
softness hard to bear. And who would explain

how tears can burn as well as freeze, explain
there'd be no toothpaste-spattered mirror,
no piss-stained floor, no reek of animal?
He won't come back. Those words memorial
enough when she knew they weren't true. Now dust
had settled everywhere. She felt it scar

the house the way asbestos fibers scar
the lungs. All dust. All ash. She could explain
his leavings until he left this dust
behind and disappeared out of the mirror
of her life, left rubbish as memorial
of what they had. She mutters *Animal*

today—not him, but every animal—
and stubs out cigarettes to leave a scar
on desks, buffets and chairs. Memorial
beer bottles and cans sit for days. Explain?
What explanation can satisfy the mirror?
What explanation cuts a path through dust?

She is an animal who can't explain
new skin, new scars, or how the mirror
weeps in memorial, reflecting dust.

ALUCARD

In the black and white universe
of 1943, any bad actor could hide
himself just by spelling his name
backward. In this way the son
of Dracula became *Count Alucard*
and no one was any the wiser.

In brains cursed by the love of
wordplay, a verb like *lives* becomes
nouns like *Elvis* or *evils*.
One of the evils of the Universal plan:
that the undead's sperm
could vampirize an egg.

The Son of the Man of 1000 Faces,
Lon Chaney, Jr., ill-suited in a tux—
and what kind of vampire
wears a moustache?—tell tale
droplets, a crimson confession.
Black and white logic: we see no blood.

We've seen plenty of blood in our day,
Stillbirth. Miscarriage.
Yet *Dracula / Alucard* . . .
What bride would ever provide
the ovum and the path
to let such palindromic birth proceed?

*Late fetal DNA-land—
was it a bat I saw?
Dad,
don't nod.
Devil never even lived.
Cigar? Toss it in a can. It's so tragic.*

Maybe that other undead son
was in on the joke when he said
The last shall be first and the first shall be last.
What kind of god—what kind of dog indeed—
grants the devil a son and drives stakes
through hearts like these?

ON THE BATTLEMENTS

There's a photo of a young girl and a man
on a fortress top in Old San Juan.

The meek clouds the placid blue sky
seem like lies in the aftermath of storms—

las tormentas—that rocked them all the night before.
The sea is calm and picture-perfect,

the picture itself a perfect kind of lie.
You see a father and a daughter

on the battlements of the old Spanish fort.
The fort is photogenic, a tranquil postcard ruin

of *conquistadores*' might. The father's pose is casual,
grinning in the shadow of his cap.

The daughter's face is pinched,
almost smiling in the sun.

What you don't see is
the woman's hands trembling on the camera,

the daughter fleeing after the shutter's click,
screaming *I'm scared, Daddy, I'm scared,*

the father's face contorting, shouting
Come back here right now.

You don't see the blood stains
washed by centuries of storms,

dark clouds in the distance,
las tormentas yet to come.