

What We Know

The body speaks
like an orchestra, in commotion
and stillness.

I still remember the lake breaking
open then closing around me as if
I were a fish it recognized, the horizon

sewn to the water in a silver seam
like the earth started there.

The body asks
to be smoothed or roughed up or run ragged.
The body loves oblivion
and with your sleep reminds you.

Blizzards of leaves swell in morning wind:
cottonwood, ash, quaking aspen.
The body sees this and its spirit participates,
shimmering.

And even when the brain of the body raves that love
is pointless,
it can't help but replay

the kiss on the dark sea of sheets,
the pulse of the guitar in your two hands.

Mexico City

I find a scrap of a poem I wrote in 2013 that says
none of my friends have died yet
that's not true
anymore writing is difficult these days
there are rules and small dazzling limes
in a yellow bowl on the counter
from the sink to the fridge to the mirror my face is like I imagine it
from your angle
flushed ready to fight and starting to crease at the eyes
I like this face
when it is mine
I have come to the end of asking magazines or married people
for answers
I want to go to Mexico City
and look at Diego's lilies up close
on the plane I will sit by the window not thinking much at least
not of myself
remembering how you used to whistle "Idiot Wind"
who knew I'd miss something like that
something any person can do

Our Country

Pine Ridge, South Dakota

Sunset, the headstones glow like tavern signs.
Horses crater water in a rusty trough with their cracked hooves.

A Lakota man rolls a cigarette out back, lights it,
smoke flowering blue in the dusk.

I don't know how to skin a buck, or resole boots.
I don't know how to wash a three-year-old child in a bucket.
But the starved plains,
the scabs of mud in brittle grass,
the bald patches on the church railings,
these I know.

I think of my grandfather, the preacher, who if he hit a deer
would bring it home and feed his family roadkill stew.
Of Chicago, where I once spent
half a paycheck on a blue dress, later spilled wine on it,
and never wore it again.

On Pine Ridge, nails backbend out of ragged holes.
The war cry of hammers, and the rasp
of rust and chains.
Scraps of light are pinned to the grass, like trash to the fence posts, like all of us
to our stories.

On the far hills, black pines flicker and fade.

Prayer for a Flat Tire

A confetti of smashed glass and the air
went hissing out of my bicycle tire on the shoulder of route 36,
which begs the question:

Who has been here shattering bottles
in the dirty roadside scrub? What a place to drink, I think,
wishing I had one.

As I knelt to unclasp wheel from fork, peeling
scarred rubber from its rim,
my knees were cut with salt cast from the plows that churn through grim dawns
to keep us safe from ourselves.

My prayer is the plastic lever
freeing this punctured thing. My prayer is for
the small grace of fixing something yourself

without witness, though I wish you could see
this moment of breakdown in the small life that loves you—

You, who may never read this, and God,
who will not fix us.