

The Village Discount Outlet

Two glass automatic doors parted with my hand,
I bring my knees sideways through the turnstile
into a library of clothes.
Clothes. Color coded, a pack of thick jackets huddling close,
I hear whispers in the sleeves,
and ranks of brown slacks like trunks of trees,
two little kids come crashing out,
one with crooked glasses.

It's blue tag day.
A guy back in the maze of isles
in his underwear, tries on everything first,
trying to get his money's worth, says "perdoname."
Whole place hums with secondhand stories
—Past hearts beat behind my dank chest pocket—
and cheap Christmas carols:
Destiny's Child recounting late night cookie baking over
"R n' B" drums.
The moms don't listen. They peck tags like hens,
Say "oh sorry" and keep picking the same side as me
to pass their carts until
we halt abruptly.
One laughs. I say "no problem" and wonder if that's the right response.
Wandering the flannel isles,
brush a high school girl's arm with a hanger and she thinks we're in love.
I don't look back, counting the tar stains on some beige corduroys
when someone's grandma asks "do you surf?"

The baggy leather jacket afro man nods to me in line
like we'd be friends but likely never will
while the woman with candy-red hair twists up my clothes in a bag.
She has this rose tattoo, not well done, on her left upper arm
and waves to someone past my head.
I fiddle with my change and there's an old guy with a cane and his face
Buried in the shoe shelves.
The cashier's phone rings.

Roadholes and Astronomy

Powder and pebbles,
Are avalanching off the edge,
Of the red tailgate,
Landing with a crackle and a thousand tiny splashes,
Bursts of limestone dust,
Swept into shallow craters in the road.
I spit in the dirt, he in his bottle, chunky brown juice
“That’s a big dipper there! ‘Nother shovelful maybe.”

Seeing my face in a sunken puddle, I blink,
Rub my nose across my sleeve,
Palms tight and dry,
Push the spade in once more,
And toss a shovelful of stones that for a split second,
Hang in the lighter late morning air,
Like planets, revolving in space,
A little solar system, unsuspecting,
Swallowed by the road.

Leaning on the wheel well, mudflecked jeans,
Watching my breath, inquiring
Through lenses fogged like the sky,
What was lost in that instant?
How many little worlds,
Might come and go by tire treads?
My partner flips on the radio,
A couple kids got shot,
And there's a meteor shower tonight.

Ledgewood

I roll in at humid dawn, back sweat sticky to my pack,
And lean my bike against the brown brick shop,
Hornets crawling through cracks in the wall, I see
Rodkey high-stepping through the morning dew.

Boss with his coffee in the shop, playing with his kills,
Soaks the last bits of meat off the skulls in buckets by the washtub,
Presents to me a fresh ripped ten-point,
I pretend that I approve.

Lift the garage door to let the morning in,
It glows in whirls of stirred up dust,
Swarming up my nose, I sweep the needles
And dead male mosquitoes out into the road, and spit.

We check the list and shoot the shit
Grab the Raid, the wrench, the sledge, “no, the other ladder”,
The bag of odd drillbits and screws, I take a leak on the ivy behind the barn
While Rodkey packs his chew.

Truck doors slam, stiff necks crack, and engine roars,
My bare arm hangs out of the window drumming on the scratched up door while
Rodkey twists around, won't use the rearview, we roll real slow down the road,
I pull my arm in as we pass the thorns.

Shocks blown out, the cabin bucks and pops,
We patched the holes four times since spring.
Four-eleven mix won't hold but boss keeps buying and
No matter what we do we get paid the same.

Ratsnake in the road, I say “don't run 'im over”
Rodkey brakes and I jump out, grab it gently by the neck.
Same drill with the garters every time we flip the tarp,
To split the rounds piled up beside the shed.

We change some bulbs and blown out screens,
Dig up stumps and busted pipes.
At three o' clock the shovels drop, stow the tools and park the truck,
Chainsaw cools down in the dark,
Just like our bones until tomorrow.