

Salmon

To be with you is to fight a waterfall.

Default Human

Our love doesn't grow.
We're iron people, touched by so much air
that we've rusted together.

You corrode me, I turn you red, and
we're happier than grasshoppers
chirping at oblivion.

You're my default human, hard wired to me.
The million filaments of you fill my hair with static
and every time my heart beats its defibrillator-crazy.

You're like an old penny in my pocket,
pressed between my seams,
going green in the eyes from all the times I've kissed you.

Only Blue Changes

As we sleep
the space between our closed hearts is dreaming.
I know you don't dream of me.
When you hold me
your arms are an empty fishbowl.

I press my ear to your barren chest.
There is a birdcage in your skeleton.
A spacious drum where I am unwelcome.

El Dorado

Our garden hid a native population –
a group of Picts with blue paint on their skin.
You could smell them in the port town of the birdbath,
and the vegetable shade of pumpkin leaves.

You felt their treasure moving in the clay.

Filthy anteater, grey in tongue and spirit,
you spent one summer night with nose and tongue bone-deep in the soil.
You were the Hoover dam and they unwitting fish
vacuumed through the backwaters of your mouth
and into the reservoir of outer space.

You came come home gorged as a bubble of ink,
dirty fingers and churned up worms spilling from your pockets.
Now we live like smugglers on the Silk Road,
in a house alive with insect currency.

Spent from your work you lay flat on your back,
arms open to the troposphere,
and say
“Now worship me.
I am the Ragnarok of nations.
I am the knell of wriggling El Dorado.
I am Cortez.”

Moon Song

The moon returning is like geese and a paper lily.
Through rice paper I have seen your silhouette,
couched in the channel of my sorrow.
I do not dream of you anymore.

You taught me a duck's quack doesn't echo and
that elephants don't swim and so
I thought yours was an eternal geology.

But you are like me.
As impermanent as limestone.

Without you, summer blows on,
pear blossoms on the water and
the promise of a place below the muck
where loons are loose-silt angels and
the moon wanes more like darkening hills.

My love poem is steam above the kettle.
A flock of umber letters I could never form like you.
Migrating. The way geese sing.

I wonder how it is in the shell-pink womb of August evenings over Kyoto.
Could I translate myself to you there
across the delicate sipping-bowl of twilight?

A moon gone.
That is my memory of you
wavering in swan-disturbed reflections, a thousand
universes—broken teacups on the floor.
I cut my hands.

Peter Pan

Never young again.

The thought makes meat of me.

Sorrow a scallop dressed

and buttered. A coquille

without echo. But you

are with me. Tender, new,

in song, in violent green.

Just out of reach. You are

something intangible.

You grew out of my skin

and into space. I fear

the depth of atmosphere

acutely. Every breath

I take is air between

us. The Hook in my heart

these days goes unseen,

opening windows, urging

me to fall and prove

that grown ups die,

not fly. And so do you.

Geology

Today mercury disfigures the instruments and snow the streets.
Mourning keeps the afternoon at bay.
Unfamiliar affection steals the breath from public places.

I dreamt last night of a pied piper with a cunning tilt to his nose,
an implacable man with music in his teeth.
When I woke he became you and you became the morning,
grown out of your skin and into space.

We speak in hushed tones
so as not to disturb the memories orbiting like fragile moons between us.

I say, "You're beautiful.
Loved and loving, careful with your words,
a summer continent.
You have metamorphic eyes and a rift valley smile.
I live like prayer in the oasis of your Hebrew hands
and you like a frozen corpse on the Everest of mine."

You say
"I love you."

I say nothing more.

Orange Blossom

The last woman on earth
bears war songs from the concrete womb between her sulfur hips.
Her soft hands cast a spell like
Jerusalem made the sand into oil but that wasn't quite as magic.
She opens her own sores with the delicate fingernail,
the lips you'd love to touch the parting
of the dry-rock teeth in the speechless cavern you

thought you were a soldier you
thought you understood that silk is just barbed wire
singing backwards.

"Breathe deep," the rouged and sherbet-shelled seductress skewers
words like olives at the telegraph-thin tapers of her fingers
those luxuriating wounds the
sheen of lusty sulfur in the darker dark where
guns and beasties hide.

"Breathe deep," she says, "in the trench the hole, tack up those
martyrs like barn owls. I walk on broken ankles, bow-legged and hare-lipped
to you your cutesy-closeness.
My fleeing love the way out's back before your
body was a cake your face cherry-stuffed to bite and chew.

I've come this way from hell to tell you
when the rabbits died in their runs the
cat in Schrodinger's box the
soldiers in their cradle-sleeping caves

It was you that I was killing all along."

Hiroshima

In this heat it's as if death-flies choke the air.

I can smell human shadows in the back of my throat,
the place reserved for the scream of roasted rubber.
They're burned on walls and the undersides of bridges,
gaping through concrete foundations
in racked silhouettes with slouchy, guiltless fingers.

Now they populate the dodgy parts of memory like toads in a deep basin,
croaking accusations while raindrops lick their eyes.
Citizens of human sacrifice they elect their God of Guilt
and crown him with Ute bones and spent shell casings.

Ghosts like that are born bloody.

Fratricide

My brother is my enemy, staunch and hunch-backed
with a mouth of orangutan teeth to gut and gnaw.
I am expatriate of his sallow country,
homeless and guileless as a spent sardine can.

We skirt the streets not hand in hand but heart in hand.

And he, I fear, has squelched me.

Mother

You loved us in the quiet way that asters love the arabesque of rain,
and with the fierce bloom of unsettled dust
caught in brilliant tandem with midmorning light.

You kept us dreaming in color
through the garden of a childhood peopled like a drying Monet
with peonies and watery, green light.
You were the goddess of imagination,
your smile alive with butterfly wings,
your magic hands tracing sentient paths through storybooks.
In the wild days of our summers
you were the kind queen at the bottom of the treasure chest,
that handed us odds and ends
—discarded bottles and yards of mismatched fabric—
and made them gowns and oceans.

As a cello breathes the root of music you stood beside us
with a lioness' beautiful shoulder-blades
and taught the casual doves of our dreams to beat their wings.

In you there sings
Mother.

Cherry Stems.

You have nuanced and peppered so firmly
the loss against your tongue that its simplicity is alien.
A foreign thing, tide-pitched anemone tapering roots,
smell of yew and rosebud tea in a cockle-shell nostalgic afternoon.

Your grandfather.
Paper thin myalgia, the onion,
ginger root buried to the neck in firm cheese.
He left cherry stems and pungent juice
and joined the stars the stars in fizzling tension,
in translation,
to become what being is.

Now in ambiguity and quiet,
he is mostly at the window consumed by news of growing raspberries
and the full moon he once heard was like geese and a paper lily.
He is papyrus and a magnified wing.
Scales after all.

The fingerprint whorl of a plum pit, oaky,
still as a mayfly,
dangling like wind-chimes.

He is the ghost that reaches for a ceramic bowl of cherry stems
your mother still hasn't gotten around to throwing away.

Great Grandmother

In my dream your great grandmother asked for tea.
She came to my garden in her burial gown,
smelling like worms and the lonely dark.
She was a ghost trapped in a face and when I let her in
she shed her skin and left it on my patio steps
like rumpled laundry.

She told me over chamomile and finger sandwiches
"As a ghost you hide where you can,
in church bells and tomato leaves,
and when you die you become a caramel
in the pocket of someone's overcoat."

She said, "You want to haunt in a way that matters,
but the moon goes right through your hands
and the wind passes over the furrows in your skin
and you mean no more than a man in a rumpled suit.

We all haunt the same way.
Like embers at the end of finished cigarettes
and abandoned bouquet in sopranos' dressing rooms
when the opera is done."