

## **Cathedral**

The clergy of statues sings  
a quiet Mass for passers-by.  
The meander of light on fading saints  
makes them seem nearly shy.

They guard it in a fragile way,  
keep secret from unwelcome eyes  
her slumped and aging disarray,  
and prayers for reasons not to die.

From outside looking in the space  
behind them is no harbor, home,  
or church, no metered sacred place  
but shambles loitering in gloam.

I wonder, do saints grow old, too?  
And when it crumbles what basement crate  
will make their hell? In what grey dust  
will Paul and Joseph suffocate?

## **Earthbound**

The moon always returns,  
geese and a paper fan in stilted, starlit blue  
throwing shadows like a man were here.  
A cosmonaut of wilted iron,  
brought to his knees, oxidized  
and rusted by all this  
planetary air.

Old lovers seem divine as last night's dreams.  
We wake,  
make note of the mistake  
and go on sipping tea.

It is not genius to lose,  
mere inconvenience –

artist-fodder,  
metered out in jilted breath  
by lewd conductors stirred to lucid death.

## Alchemy

Dust to dust and  
poison to poison. You  
sing to me, croon and clutch  
and if I hold the magnifying glass to your eye  
then I can read your spell.  
To make a man:

Arsenic and bone dust.  
Nightshade, wormwood, lye.  
An antiquated metaphor – bloodshot roads that shiver in the heat.  
A blessing from the angel of Dunkirk.

In this alchemy there is no gold.  
The magician drips his tinctures onto rice paper  
just to watch it burn.

## **Magic Man**

I do not do  
not under duress.  
Then I am more awoken.  
A wood-eyed survivor  
grappling for amnesty beside the voodoo cottonmouth christened "Baron"  
like he owns the land.

I am man enough to prescribe suicide,  
doctor enough to find it poor amendment to the spreading sea,  
the tumble of a boned Pangaea crumbling in the wake of grief and greed  
opened on steel and there made one.

My hands are ships,  
my brain an abacus  
and my heart an artichoke beneath my ribs.  
I come in parts like Frankenstein's monster  
and come apart like Dracula, to dust.

I am Magic Man,  
unopened letter from the moon to Saturn.  
There is no escape from the problem that became me.

I am too much myself these days.

## Sekibetsu

Farewell and regret  
hang like thoughts of suicide  
between you and me.

You hold me at arm's length.  
I am a silk scarf in your hands,  
hung drying in the wind.

Drowned man, or drowning, dragon in your skin.  
The kanji of your bones is scripture.  
I bow my head.

No longer human.  
When you were flesh I loved a man.  
Now a monster.  
You'd eat me whole if I had everything.

But you have drained me, love,  
like a lamp that spat back light  
for many sleepless nights  
in fear or loneliness.  
Man of the port, the sea, and old anguish your eyes are kitsune.  
Your suicide note is written there in runes.

If you peeled back your lids you'd bleed a story on the hardwood floor.  
Drowned man or drowning dragon?  
No longer human.

## Ophelia

Look for me in the lily-pond.  
That's where the fish will to eat my bones.  
There are no pearls for my eyes, nothing so precious as scintillating dust.  
I am man made soft by too much water.

Those bizarre fish are skinwalkers disguised as brothers  
who come grinning nightly at the window with  
mouths coy as marmalade.  
Licking at me like the heather that stole my air,  
those fish with their primate tongues grey as mildew.  
The juices in my brain are leeches, my skin undone in  
wolfish ribbons that curl at my wrists.  
I bleed the winter from my bones.

And when I am cut like ham,  
drowned in the stench of flowers,  
those fish come clawing for what remains.  
This one in a lab-coat and that in my mother's favorite dress  
and all with my blood on their hands.

If I cut too deep they'll bring me orchids,  
burial flowers to tuck against my chin in sleep.  
The doctors tell me fish are for the sea,  
that I am of the land. They don't know that  
if I died it would be with a wharf in my belly,  
guts alive with the flap of gills  
and the clatter of scales against light.

## Decompose

Cut off—one by one—my grub-white fingers  
and drop them for bait to bulgy codfish.  
And my toes, fungi puking spores into the cricket-night,  
leave them on the forest floor for toothy badgers.

Saw out and squeeze the marrow from my ribs,  
beached-whale baleen rotting.  
Break away my hands for bird nests,  
my feet for stepping-stones.

Burn my blood with acid starlight until I evaporate  
to where the moon waits like a shrimp, fat with salt,  
wet and dead, heaving deep blue sin.

Find where I am inside the mess,  
the wealth of ineptitude.  
And find where the old oak tree still burns  
so you can cut it down to see what's left inside.

and do not  
do not  
hear me say—

I used to have one  
million, million forms.  
small, light, and fine as an unskinned peach.

But now I have  
-I am-  
just one body.

And that is not enough to please you.

## Alphabet

August. In California the whales washed up on the beach, stink and bulk clogging the shore. And when they died my mama cried until her eyes filled up the sea but I was nine years old and I didn't understand death.

Early June the sun went out and the whales were dead and mama's disease festered like a decrepit younger brother inside her, gnawing at her breast.

He'd haunt me nights, steal my skin and creep in my room, press his needling fingers against my jaw and when I was ten years old my brother taught me to kill so I could fight back.

Loving was for babies and with the whales all dead and the sun gone out and my future withering in a hospital bed the only love was necromancy. Choking on corpse fumes for a kiss, squeezing open sores to feel at home, praying to whatever god I could find:

Quetzalcoatl ate my heart, Jesus punched holes in my hands.

Rahab asked me to tea then sliced the skin from my body for finger-sandwiches.

This I did because I was a balloon full of heartache. My ulcerous mouth cried out for the whales who'd drowned in the air like I veered towards drowning every day. I didn't know they lived, now, in my skin.

Whales don't drown in blood and the sun won't go out if a little girl eats it.

"Xenolith" they called me. "Hyena" violent and grotesque. "Cage her.

Young as she is she'll eat everything." But I'd swallowed the sea and by the time the zookeepers found me I'd already drowned.