

At the Animal Sanctuary

The ones missing legs, the ones
who got loose, the ones
with their eyes gouged,
clumsy black-spotted pigs
lumbering down the hill in blind furor,
around us the broken scenery
of home, a fence gnawed to slivers,
a splintered face, one roof caving in,
the crippled cow who neither stands
nor sits, nearby a calf, her dangling half-leg
pointed at us; whose severed hoof,
whose disfigured spine, a devious whine
troubling the herd, whose burly mother,
whose farrow of piglets buried
in hay left motherless, the one
chasing my daughter to the road's end,
the one charging a lone chicken
to wrangle for domain, the one
bolting nowhere fast,
several crowding the trough gone dry,
goat with the anguished voice,
her horns stubbed, a plea,
a scream, whose scream
from her belly, the bully,
the meek one, the fleet-
footed and felled, buckling and
slumped, all coming to eat.

It was feeding time.
Apples were strewn, hay
from the mouth. Each of us
wanted a hand in the moment, to be
eaten from. Whatever looks us
in the eye is ours to protect,
we assumed, and over time,
to learn to love. And how could we
not love it? I stepped outside
the scene. I watched each body
adapt to dusk, become contour
against the hill lit pink from the west
then part of the dark,
smudge of moon, blur of moon,
the kick of dirt and time stolen
from skyline. Then only sound.

Lately, it's the idea
of dying that leaves me breathless.
Who took the eyes and left the body?
There is too much pain still
coming at us. And yet look
as my silhouetted children
only see the softness of the land,
only want to touch the thing that runs
towards them, fingers opening, never feeling
the impact, the damage, the earth beneath
them, run-over in the wild
rush to stay alive, calling for me.

In the House by the Sea

I admired the sea, most days,
but not the heirs or millionaires
sailing in stiff-capped winds,
buttoned for summer. After all,
we were the spectacle, two women
touching in all the wrong places,
furnishing rooms with no children
in the hull of a house gone still.
She had some guns, a half-missing
finger, an eye that pointed.
Sometimes you need to be shot, she'd say.
I hardly remember her name.
How the sky came in obliquely
through the window.
How the skiffs were a study in silence.
How I hid my body in a bathtub.
What she meant was *sometimes you're hard
to love*. And that one night
I swore she was coming
for me, I just turned over and took it —

and beyond
the blindless room, a wildness
too foreign to name, tomatoes tied
and splitting in the heat, couples
sipping the wealth of bivalves, salt
of the Sound with open lips, the gnarl
of some animal, cocked and on the mark,
in the distance a lighthouse
haunting whatever darkness
was never ours to begin with.

Swimming on Hvar

A lighted boat.

A bar.

The couple.

Who told me my face
was a beautiful thing.

Who walked me
into darkness.

A room.

Her thighs.

His mouth.

Who clasped me in secret,
went inside all at once.

Were the walls of the island
not built for my escape.

Were the hillside paths
leading me somewhere strange.

I sipped grappa
then wrote: *it is getting lonelier.*

Nothing to record of the taste
in my mouth.

Who scored the goal
for applause in the square.

Who woke to find us ensnarled
in prayer, the rules broken.

I crawled home.
I wept in the place

they had touched
without knowing my name,

wasted on the rented view
of blue.

And when I leapt
from the seawall,

it was to shatter the memory
of land and float there.

An island.
A swallowed body.
The surface of sea:

A cradle.
A swell.
The distant chime.

Something pulling me
away from myself.

How could I know
what I wanted.

Driving Beyond the San Jacinto Range

Inside the car, the lover is a stranger
who drives too fast with my name in her mouth
not out of love but to hurt the silence.
She yells past the exits, across state borders
as we slip into darkness. It is summer. I make a list
of what is native: the spell of the present,
the history of noise. I imagine we're moving
towards luster, but all I see are signs
of animals in the fields
putting down their bones in surrender.
What they fear is something known.
At the gas station we pay for the distance
ahead: gun shells, vanished tracks, a toilet
to nowhere. I imagine escape.
I look at the map between my hands:
how do I account for myself?
The body is an object in a region not drawn to scale.
Landforms hold beauty: mesa, Rio Grande,
a looping line of stars lit from within.
Impossible to locate love anymore, and no one to tell
what she did to me that night or the next, accelerating
East with the force of error while I held the dashboard
and prayed I would get home alive.

Field Notes from Hollywood

It is June on June Street
in Hollywood when I lose you
under the heavy sun as the earth
ever so slightly gives in to the impact
of our bodies. Before the child
we both want to make
will ask me *Do skeletons have eyes?*
Or *Why do the trees look sad?* But
I am not a mother yet.
I am the wife who fell
from love, the daughter
who left the mother at the edge
of another country. We are rocked
by shifting faults, by strike-slip
and thrust, by relative motion,
by the mistake of our hands.
Our house is broken. The ocean
recedes. What can't be predicted
is the safety of one another.
I make columns of hope
and no hope. Fire in the hills.
Desire in the stomach. We eat
from one another's memory.
I miss you like water misses sky.
I don't miss you enough.
Asleep against the dark,
the city coming apart, I am most alone.
And the boulders we saw as living
things in the canyon: elephant, lion,
spine, skull, mouth, battleship
gone silent as the queer history
of our longing,
and everywhere we look the Live-forever
of all that we are not, blooming.

Birth

Imagine this: I am lying
on a metal table after a quick needle
to the spine. All feeling goes away.
Below my breasts, a blue curtain
divides me from me.
There she is. There are her legs some-
where, but mine are lost. A nurse
I can't see asks: *can you feel
this or this or this?* Vomit rises up
in my throat. I am split in half:
where is the mother?
My mind tips backward, off
the table's slant, where
memory lives. My feet run
in place with terror. I am separate
from the baby still inside me.
The burning smell is flesh.
Someone cuts the abdomen.
My arms are strapped down.
My fingers shiver.
There is tugging. There is wrenching.
There are garbled voices
saying words not intended for me. *Distress.*
I wonder: *when do I become the mother
holding the baby.* When do they say: *look
at her,* her breathing imperfect.
They don't promise to save her,
but they try. By now my whole body
is shaking, fluorescent. Page the doctor.
Page the mother. *Distress.* Take the baby
away. All of this is happening
to the body on the table
which feels nothing. Someone presses
the incision until blood seeps.
Tell me your name, she says.
I say *mother.* I say *mother.*
Someone paddles me to shore.
It is not easy. There are under-
currents. *Distress.* I've lost my oars,
my bearings, my atlas, my baby.
There are so many of us
swimming. Look how we weep
as our mouths swallow air.
We could learn to breathe again.

Dear Crow

Why did you have to die in our front yard
Next to the snowman? I wasn't expecting you.
To go silent while we huddled inside.
To fall from sky. To walk your talons
across ice, too hungry to go on when wind
held you for a moment then
knocked you down. Whatever happened,
now I'm trying to explain your death
to my daughters, and I wasn't ready
to talk about death this Sunday in February.
Headlines of an arctic blast. Days of grey
upon grey. An advisory warning of the dangers
outside of us. Somewhere ice quakes,
somewhere sea smoke. Here, a steady grief
for no reason at all. Or is there? And for whom?
Each question contains its own silence,
the failure of this mother's body
whose children stare through
the window wanting to know where we go
when we're not alive anymore. We were made
uneasy by your rattling. Now we want
you back. Or for something to prosper
from the taste of you, but you repel
even the raccoon whose prints flee
the scene near the patch where zinnias
will grow in summer, which we long for.
Even birds get cold, I hear myself say,
and stop singing. Even mothers lose track
of time. Even children feel the sorrow
of what shines, the resting black body
we couldn't save. *How do you draw infinity*,
my daughter asks. Who will remove
the shadow from the object we fear?
Who will dispose of the lustrous thing
that haunts our picturesque view?

July Still Life

And when the lake went mute it could have been my child we were searching for beneath the water —
and what would she have resembled, arms resting in practiced stroke, her heart the sunlight piercing its way through dusk, somewhere motor somewhere wake somewhere mother, all the other children bobbing there, enlivened by danger, murmurations at the gentle surface — until I put my head under and opened my eyes to no one's child, to the whole wrackful world, silt and shimmer, knowing I was the one whose hand had let go.