

Jamie Iredell

Elkhorn Slough

Tonight the moon is new, dark as a continent,
but plump enough to play the earth with tides,
to pluck the strings of your body, curvy as a guitar.
We feel its tidal tug as the blood rushes
to our most tender parts, where heat meets skin,
like landing on a virgin shore where the natives
await in poppy fields, roasted pig meat
steaming on platters held over their heads.
And the moon has pulled the water to the opposite
hemisphere, and the pools expose purple jewel
anemones—their petal-like tentacles open as flowers
before closing upon the intrusion of a painted
topshell snail—and the mussels and barnacles
crowd each other and out beyond the dock
in the slough's low tide chasm the otters feed
on abalone and I feed on you, and our fists pound
like waves lapping as we press against the dock.

Clouds Rolling In

You painted my profile in pastels and I lipped
the whisky like a saxophone, blowing
hot blues at the panes frosted with winter
while clouds swallowed the Sierra the way a Titan devours
his children, gone without chewing, lost in the throat
of an impossible monster. I drank, waiting for her to return
from New York, hoping to recast what had been dropped
like a wet towel the summer before, plopped on tile
in an audible flop, unmoving like a cartoon character lands
from a thousand-foot fall. Tell me how it is in Greece.
Are the hills scorched by the sun like burnt eggs?
You must pass the time under café awnings sipping coffee
or, in the afternoons, ouzo milky from molten ice.
Tell me of your mandatory stint with the military,
running marathons for days, pumping out pushups
on the sweltering slopes of Olympus, your brow sweaty,
glistening like melted wax. Your mother must be appalled
when you eat fries with ketchup instead of mayonnaise,
at your vulgar exclamations: *fucking spatula, fucking Nutella.*
I should have listened to your outbursts while you painted:
Who gives a sheet? Geet over her. Have some coffee.
Instead, I watched the clouds roll in and waited for lightning,
waited to hear thunder fall like a god's footsteps.

Five buzzards

circle the river on thermals, broad feathers tipped
to sky, wind rustling them like fingers,
like human hair, like reeds bent in the current.

We walk after breakfast, our fingers stitched,
and talk of littered plastic and the stench
of fish carcass strewn along the banks.

The bacon grease saturates our bellies, the river
stinks away while the buzzards search for rabbits,
mute as the desert quailbrush, as the bear poppies.

Then we see the body, bloated, bent backwards
in the sage the way flood debris bends around
tree trunks. A man, grizzled and grizzle-haired,

eyes open and dull as eyes, clothing mottled
with damp stains, a rumpled fast food bag,
as if someone tossed him here when they'd finished.

Desert Migration

Moonlight coats the desert ash, and coyotes
yelp and howl behind the yip
of your crying. You claim nightmares,
but dream of more than demons:
the soft light glowing in the morning
of your old home, the lace tablecloth littered
with needles and thread that held you together.
You've unraveled, a loose strand from a Washoe
blanket; pull gently and watch the weave
evaporate. The gray hills stand treeless, a moon-
scape. By morning look closer: jackrabbits
dart between the sagebrush and buds
of desert paintbrush open and reach for the sun.

Sage

Live like sagebrush, ground-low.
Grow your roots deep, your *artemesia*
leaves covered in tiny white trichomes
to regulate your internal temperature,
to cool, reflecting the blast
of desert sun. Be dull green, almost-dead-
looking. But reek piney and sweet-alive.
Let your smell into my skin, wound
into the threads of my jean jacket,
your campfire smoke in my eyes. Embrace me
so I cannot escape, not here where views
of you sweep, spread fanlike
horizon to horizon.