

Mae Carter

Before the Suburbs

That day, Katie's mother had a psychic flash, sprinting into the street barefoot, tripping on a broken piece of sidewalk chalk, scraping skin clean off the top of her delicate veined foot, unaware of tripping at all.

Katie was hit while riding her banana seat by a blue-haired teenager driving a Buick LaSabre. Katie's mother knew the parents of the blue-haired punk when they were all young and happy, smoking hash and talking Ginsberg deep into the Kansas night, back when they believed the earth was a kind mother, before children, before the suburbs.

Katie's mother started howling before she left the house, before she reached her own front door. Her cry was an endless lowing- monotonous, inhuman, a siren echoing down block after identical block. Her cry was a wish for a long, uninterrupted landscape, verdure stretching clean and vast,

a wish for a field ravaged by a fitful sky, rich earth untilled and teeming with teeth, leaf, thorn, the earth dark and oily black as a crow's wing,

the field's air swollen with animal sound-- crescendo, a sound living in the spaces beyond feeling, an ancient stridulating unconcerned with the stuff of nightmares, the naming and parceling up of territory, the spilling of any animal's blood.

Learning Love

Dad palmed the fuzzed skull of his two hours
old daughter like he was picking the ripest
cantaloupe at the grocery. He cradled her head, listened
to the hear the thuds of her inner workings, sniffed, sniffed again,

full of a child's hunger for something immediate,
full of thirst for that too fragile body, the soft skeleton
still hardening, his chest full as a ripe fruit and
as bruised.

Apocrypha

The Black-eyed Susans planted last spring watch me through my bedroom window. They can see the bible never opened, the erotica under my pillow for when the house falls asleep and night spreads its mercy. The flowers see to the pit of me, see back to the time freshman year when Mary snuck into my room, rum on her breath, to kiss me in the blackness, and we undressed, her nakedness a silver-blinding annunciation that knocked me kneeling. Mary of the slight thigh and doe-down, Mary, her tongue to my clavicle, my calves, her tongue unraveled at the root, her tongue finally unhinged, flex and velour muscle, mapping out *forbidden*- Mary, the thrilling dark of her eye staring at me as if she knew me, as if she knew exactly what I was.

Autopsy

To witness; to be present at the very end,
to drag a scalpel down your torso
to deliver your lung, to know that strange grey
fish's blind prerogative—to stay afloat—to insert;
to interlace my fingers through the shipwrecked
lattice of your ribs, darling, to pull you to me like I never
could in life, to dive into your Challenger Deep, open-
eyed despite the thick bluing of your blood, to have; to hold
each organ to my ear, to hear your conchheart's last private
incantation which is a frenzied beating divorced
from my will, your will, oh to finally know you, to get close
enough to hear the last resounding of our love.

Insect

The new pastor talks and talks about gays
and pagans going to hell, about the overwhelming
love of God, about God's far traveling
heart alighting in all believers.

There is a red carpet leading to the pulpit.

It is the straight path to Jesus' heart.

To me, a heart is a winged insect, boneless,
bulbous, anyone's to catch, thorax filmy,
slick as an eyeball, full of a bittersweet
juice that stains, sustains.

The night before baptism, I dream

I am walking the red path, the pastor
on his knees in the baptismal pool.

I'm hungry, so hungry, for his manic

pulse. I take his chin, I bring him

to my face. His bitter coffee

breath fills my mouth, his quick

tongue, a furred moth, quivers

against my palate. I bite

down, freeing his tongue, hot clean blood

tar black and swirling wild

down my throat, filling my chest so that deep

in me something awakens, thrumming and

desperate for light. Under the water,

the pastor's droning prayer's a muffled song

to burst my fatted heart.

When he pulls me up,

I throw myself against his hard beating chest.

He pushes me away, I learn to hate.