

Rebecca Volpe

Ablutions

Have you ever wondered if your mirror
is just itching to tell you how fat you look?

Does she hold her tongue as you pop
that zit on your lower lip?

My poor mirror splattered in my saliva,
toothpaste from the new hard bristle tooth-brush.

I wonder if I took out my “occasion” red
lipstick and filled in my mirror’s mouth.

Would she have a Puerto Rican accent?
How you gonna catch a man like that, so stiff?

I jump back from the charge trying to regain composure.
I want to explain that I already have a man.

I can picture her cocking her painted eyebrow up,
Really? Followed by a stare that makes me wonder

if I have ever really caught anything.
Far behind me she eyes

my dining room table: I’ll follow her and see
the half-finished coffee in chipped mugs

and the unnatural orange
of a kit kat bar wrapper.

Counting Time

*

The neon green light in the closed
liquor store beats. Homeless,
Ricky is warm but awake.

*

The man in the corner
is on his fourth Martini.
Soon he'll be forced to switch
to water. It won't make a difference.

*

I've never been to the desert
I am afraid of sand.
That feels acceptable.

*

This morning I woke up and got up.
The day did not start with defeat.

*

Some people, I have heard, like freshly
fallen snow. The way it protects
the city. I have always liked the gruff
sound of the plow, pushing snow and loose
gravel to the side of the street.

*

I'm embarrassed that I'm likely to eat
potato chips for breakfast.

*

You kiss me goodbye and I'm not ready
for you to leave. I call you back three times
to kiss my neck, face, and lips. I leave
the door unlocked.

*

There's a man on my street corner
who carries a gun. The outline is unmistakable
in the waist of his pants. He recognizes me
from the neighborhood and we smile.

*

In the subway station
another man does not
need to hide his gun.
He never smiles.

*

I've been known to call my grandmother
late at night. She sleeps like me.

*

I wait for the next
laugh. When it doesn't come,
I try to beat the high score
on the arcade machine
in the corner of the bar.

Riot in Piccadilly

There was a day
the men wore masks
all over town, balaclava
covered faces and wooly
Willy moustaches grimly leered
as I passed.

Across the line
they wore different masks,
plastic covering their twitching eyes.
Angry they had to be there.

The air was sensible
enough to keep moving:
why wasn't I?

The smell of ammonia
being poured into light bulbs
made me sick, skin crackling,
drying as glass hit someone.
The whole beautiful day
rumbled down.

Samba

When I gaze at him
shuffling his feet,
wiggling his hips
and finding the beat,
smiling as he slips his hand
around her waist,
leading her into the spin,
she looks more beautiful
for being in his arms.