

Christien Gholson

Lying in a flea-infested apartment while you're in LA

They have a music:  
a violin string  
reverberating inside an empty eye socket.

The music of torture  
before the idea of torture (an unnamed fear  
just outside the light in the caves  
where we painted the ibex, the woolly rhino,  
the horse's curious face).

I hear their music enter history: black hands, black feet.

With nothing  
to light my way except a string of white lights  
draped over the windows facing the street  
I pick one off my sock, flick it  
into soap-water, turn the page  
of a book about American Indian sacred places...

Cars pass.

They are the future: this music of shadows  
inside sandstone cupoles  
dug out by anonymous fingers on the last day. Dots,  
telling the time

Dia de los Muertos,  
Gower Peninsula

1.

A white egret  
banks against the wind.  
Sand flies.  
Bottle of whiskey as offering, we wait  
for a word

2.

*Start with a stone,  
fallen from a wall*

*No, start  
with the imprint of fish bones in that stone*

*Better yet,  
start with the death of the fish, sinking*

*No, no, you have to go further back,  
to the beginning, the face  
beneath the face...*

The puzzle of the dead,  
the poem

3.

Wild horses eat dune grass  
(matted tails, salted bones).

We watch a grey mother,  
her brown foal.

They stop grazing, stare back.

## Lions at the MGM Grand

*after Rilke's 'The Panther'*

Tourists swarm the glass,  
    cameras raised, waiting  
for a cat to move.

    An image enters in,  
rushes down palm-lined streets,  
through klieg-lit fountains, evaporates  
  
into the open black mouth  
    of the desert night.

*Las Vegas, Nevada*

## Song of the Raven Lover

A petrified tree broke open and you emerged,  
black as carbon; cobalt sheen  
your only weapon against the sun.

When did you forget where you put your saxophone?  
There's nothing left inside you but the song of crushed stone.

We can pretend we are the spirits of this place,  
but we know better, don't we?  
We don't belong.  
(I do a pointless two-step with my own shadow in the dust)

I remember your endless taunt:  
*"If wood rings can transmogrify into swirled quartz,  
why isn't anything possible?"*

How many Sunday mornings ago was it, lying in bed,  
reading the Times together, that we realized  
all things are NOT possible,  
and our fury was red manganese; a dangling  
black claw?

Where did we go wrong?

Now all you can do is hop along a crumbled pueblo wall,  
desperate for me to take your picture...

*Petrified Wood National Park, Arizona*

## Spiral

1.

The missing will return.

The train horn scythes the sky in half,  
leaves a door for them to leap through.

They swing down the sickle moon,  
ride the back of a grey and white humped-back mosquito  
through an over-ripe jasmine vine.

2.

The dead will return.

They poke their heads up from the sea,  
eyeing the shoreline, moon burning  
their scales clean.

From a train window  
I saw the glistening roll across the black surface of the bay.

3.

The frenzied legs of a mosquito-catcher  
jangles across the lampshade,  
across the center panel of a Bosch print,  
settles at the foot of St. Anthony.

Every flame is searching for an altar.

At the furthest edge of the night  
a wall of white noise hides the first word. Bones  
in red dust begin their journey back

4.

Where the bones used to be, tracks in dust:  
a solitary seed-husk  
blown in ever-widening circles

*San Francisco, California;  
Mesa near Moab, Utah*