

CORNER BAR

A wages-of-sin-is-death kind of winter.

A measure-you-give-is-the-measure-you-get kind of winter.

Furnaces burn like prophecy.

Ice tea glasses alien.

There is a man frozen as the banana-peel version of
himself.

He fits right in with the local drunks.

Endless hours in bars bear seashell smithereens in his pockets.

Weather talk.

He jokes that Spring is a minnow-lipped old man, smoking
a pipe on a little boat in the Baltic Sea.

Beige parasol.

While everyone is scraping ice from their car windshields
morning after morning, Spring is absentmindedly
picking at his marble skin, glancing at his watch.

A little fox with charming birth defects curls up in his lap.

The jokes end when the bars close.

Now is when the woman always crosses his mind.

The iron lung that sang his heart out.

The window that always lets the rain in.

Distant shutters bang as he makes his home.
Winter whistles like an unstable bridge.

Missing her makes zero sense.

Tonight will again be measured by the tick of her hips in a
new man's grip.
He shudders like her kneecaps do when she melts against him.

Feeling like a trapped pest, devouring its own leg, exhausts.

He's a vertebrae disguised as a luscious green apple;
unable to stop shaking, he starts to walk in the direction of
her apartment.

Meteor showers forming in his forearms.

MY FIRST RODEO

I'm here like the fog meandering around a hotel that'll
never move forward in time.

Wanting you with Christmas lights and lightning rods
stapled to all of your angles.

On every street corner around this town, old-time-movie
chefs erupt from the ground, presenting trays of our
togetherness.

I imagine donning rows of hammer-chisel teeth, mowing
unmalleable surroundings,
metabolism grinding like a glockenspiel, the gears in my
stomach splintering wrenches.

I don't have the guts needed to digest the hard news of
your leaving.

This place has become blocks of translucent cement with
me suspended in the middle, fragile as a newt.

Every hallway echoes tak tak memories of your stiletto heels.

Your facial features transpose on bookshelves and
watercolor the kitchen tile.

The swelter of you fades the tattoos left by other lovers;
all I can say is “Sorry, baby” to the women offering me their ink.

You’re the kind of woman that puts hair on a man’s chest.

I want my ear against your abdomen again, even if it
means hearing the sound of fast-approaching hooves.

I want your fire escape necessitating kind of love, your
wanton gasoline spotty on our shirts and jeans,
puddling around our feet, lit cigarettes falling from our
lips, azure hues sighing up our bodies.

Maybe I’ll have to settle for a surgically embedded fan in
the side of my skull,
to blow out my starving thoughts for you.

No one better stand on that one side of me, though—they
might be compelled to swallow their own jaw.

TAPEWORM

We were twenty yards beneath the wrangle streets of Paris, France, in a candlelit bar smack-dab in the middle of the Catacombs.

I first noticed her eyelids, thick as a chunk of shark. She blinked with succulent resistance.

The barkeep's fingers were like clarinet keys, silverfish glittered in his hair.

He served only gin distilled from green glass and bog asphodel; we sipped it from cups crafted out of junkyard sparkle.

When it came time for me to go, she stopped me and requested directions to my home, handed me a bottle of white-out and pointed to her thigh.

I was thinking that the black leotard seemed more to oil her legs than to clothe them as I dabbed a small map.

Months went by before I saw her again.

When I did it was midnight on a sleepless night and she was standing in the stretch of yard outside of my bedroom window among the flip and forge of glossy insects that move across the night like sheets fluffing in the wind.

She began to appear in my backyard every night that the moon glowed orange and I'd watch her through my window.

Some of these nights she would dance a geisha's dance, wearing lingerie with lace unfurled. She appeared malnourished and awkward, yet her dance was as beautiful as a child's first word.

Then there were the nights that she would just lie there in the dead leaves, allowing insects to dart this way and that across her body and face; she'd let them get stuck in her tangled hair, all the while just staring up at me. Her face was like one more sun setting on a ship lost at sea.

This went on for a very long time.

One morning, just after dawn began to span across the sky, I crept back into bed where my estranged lover usually lay sleeping. On this morning there was no indication of her breathing. The lumpy comforter was as still as a painting.

I tore the blankets away and there was just this mail sack shaped in the form of a woman's body.

Envelopes spilled out an opening and I ripped them open one by one only to discover that every single letter was just these words:

“Joshua,
Not until we are in the teeth of pigs do we do our death-
wish wishing;
your treasure chest lids snap back like broken necks,
and inside of them are just fingernails and locks of hair.
My blood is sangria.
You crave the blood of a museum.”

MIRACLE TRAUMA

Our soldiers returned covered in pollen.
There had been a full moon in the sky every night that
they were away.

A couple of the other children and I snuck up the clock tower,
smoking stolen cigarettes and avoiding the spot where
Danni was sitting before she jumped last summer.
We watched our heroes marching toward the village for
hours, remembering when they had trumped away
with such stellar fierceness.

Town hall was an overcrowded terrarium.

The captain spoke.
His face was wormwood.
His voice, a gearshift,

“We arrived on the other side of the world and there was a
great blizzard.
We huddled together like bamboo.
No one could tell if it was day or night, or how many days
and nights had passed.
Gripped with fatigue, we all eventually fell asleep in the ice.”

He paused and looked around the room;

“Most of our men never woke up.
The rest of us woke with what I would describe as
discursive neurons.”

Dr. Whithers was sweating.
The governor’s face was flushed.

The captain continued,

“The stars that were supposed to guide us home kept
falling from the sky,
leaving violet trails of mica. It looked pretty, sure, but it
didn’t do a damn thing for us.
We have been praying that the gods would send bees to
sting us all to death.”

Everyone just stared at their pollen-covered armor.
After that, nothing anybody said in that town ever made
sense again.