

WHY I SOMETIMES FORGET MY NAME

The buildings are empty
and their clocks have stopped.
Somewhere there's a banquet
where people gorge themselves
and keep getting thinner.

Maggots are laughing at us.
Berries are allocating
more resources to thorns.
We are stranded
on our own rooftops.
So thirsty,
we pray for floods.

There are still things I want to say
before I reach for the hand closest to mine
and watch the fires with a secret glee.

One of these things is:
Thank you for listening to me
scream into the air
and calling it wind.

Another is:
Please do not leave.

THE TIME I CAUGHT MY PARENTS DOING THE VIENNESE OYSTER

I followed a trail of short breaths
and creaturely moans.
It was a new kind of song:
part glow-in-the-dark, part toothache,
meant for small spaces.

Their voices slid edgewise through the hallway,
staining the walls,
making the nightlight blush.
I repeated after them,
forming my lips around the long efs
and the arcs of the yeses.

New vocabularies can make old beliefs impossible.
For instance, I knew now they were fake—
the shadow lands under the floorboards,
the gypsy arms they said would take me if I misbehaved.

Normal bedtimes found me marshaling my tiger army
for the courage to check the closet.
That night, they cowered as my ear pressed
against the master bedroom door.

Once, we had a beehive behind the wall.
This was the same vibration—
the sound the world makes each time it begins.

I don't know how long it was,
the part where we were face-to-face and frozen.
The room was warm, like a gymnasium
or a reptile cage.

My mother's eyes were rain puddles
I had just stepped in.

I remember the even tones of my father's explanation.
As he spoke, it felt like someone was cupping my heart
like the world's last dinosaur egg,
longing for a time that will never return.

TO SHADOWBOXING

I think about you when real life is filled with bad dialogue.
During work and repetitive sex, my attention drifts to you.
Together we have learned how to give
exactly as much as we receive.
I share a balmy room with you
where we cut the air
as if we think something will bleed from it.
There is a way of fearing age and fading beauty
that only comes to men without children
on quiet nights when the rent is paid.
I am tired of spitting into the wind and feeling only air.
We may never know the results of our kind words.
Our arias will float over the heads in the crowd.
But you travel at a certain speed,
repeat an exact number of times.
When we are together, you comb laughter from the hills.
When we are apart, I remember your burn
real as a wish in a fountain.

TALKING TO A BEARDED DRAGON

I dig your style
hours perched under the hot lamp,
defecating on the *New York Times*.

How's that view at the windowsill grabbing you?
Hope the mornings don't get dreary
when the neighbors make the slow plod to the carport,
shoulders up,
eyes on their keys.

Try not to think about it.
Dinnertime's soon.
Just blink
 once for carrots,
 twice for crickets.

Thanks for being the picture of chill
when markets crash and taxes are due.

I bet an earthquake could tear down the walls
and you'd be all,
Just put 'em back up.
I'll supervise.

Or have you read in the paper
about the ID chips and toxic clouds?
What about the people who think like you
in that sans-cerebral-cortex sort of way?

I know.
Amateurs.

But if everything is all crickets and sunshine,
then what's with you clawing at the glass?
Just blink
 once for snack request,
 twice for escape attempt.