

BALLISTIC

I know about the mice in your cupboards,
what you see when you look out your window,
the first things you do when you wake up.
This is odd, because we have never met.

With other poets, I know different things:
the thunderous hairbrushes of their childhood;
the humble lump in their husband's pants;
their children, those screaming bundles of hope.

But of so few poets do I really know so much
of the ordinary stuff: the songs you can't play
on your piano; the worn robe you amble in;
the food you eat when you are at your happiest.

This must be why my hand fluttered from
my brow to my heart to my neck with so much
sad electricity this morning, your latest book
slouching weak and mournful on my lap,

a road map of your broken heart, without you
once saying broken, without you once saying
heart. All your usual wandering, all the cups
and spoons and dogs and beds, all the things

which once wriggled under your winking eye,
now sit heavy in your verse, steeped. You,
quiet and alone in your kitchen, cigaretteless.
Me, left tapping on your rain-streaked window,

wanting you to know that everything is going
to get better, and really hoping that it does.

L'CHAIM

I found out that David Foster Wallace committed suicide while I was dancing the Horah at my friend Jordan's wedding. A writer / groomsman leaned into the circle, drunkenly staring into his handheld, wetly slung the news in my ear:

David Foster Wallace has hung himself!

And the Horah turned, pulling me in the opposite direction.

Later, when the bride's family wanted their ancestry represented in dance, my middle name was all that was needed to pull me into the center. All I could remember about the Irish jig was while your bottom half whipped the floor, furious as a seizure, the top half stayed frozen, immobile, paralyzed.

HOG BUTCHER OF THE WORKSHOP TABLE

The other students say you're beautiful,
and I believe them for I have seen how
you beckon, the thrill-soaked ripcord
of your laugh, tender gash of mouth,
the dark play of your wet eyes.

And then they say you are kind, and
I try to see what they see, the small birds
tucked into your body's nest, the weak,
the tired, how you give your whole body,
your insistent lungs to prop them back up.

And finally they say you are honest,
like tetanus, like an affliction
you deserve, the honesty of being cut,
the rust, blood, clear-eyed truth of it,
how maybe you should've known better.

When they talk of you, their eyes
glitter and spin, they draw their fists
to their hearts, ardent. They believe
in every painted inch of you. Look,
I don't deny your talent, don't deny
your shiny slate mind or the raw fever
of your words, but I have to admit,

I don't like the doggish way you lick
your chops at the beginning of class;
how when we read, I can hear the knives
sharpening in your mouth, the pale retreat
when your assassin hand slaps the air;
how careless you are with their yields
to you, the abuse they take just to hear
you say their names. I know

what it is like to be ambition-slick,
so rigorous that you can't help but see
everyone's alleycat flaws, the snaggle
teeth and torn ears of their writing,
how lost they seem. But girl, you

beautiful brute, don't mistake
the knife's glint for God's brassy horn,
don't assume that your apocalypse road
is the only one, don't slit every calf's
throat just because you can,

just 'cause you've got a clean apron
and a hungry blade, just 'cause it begs
to be done, wriggles in front of you,
one less heart beating, one less mouth
in the field to worry about.

AT THE CONVENTION

Robbie keeps telling me
that when he goes up

to the booths of literary journals
that have rejected him,

he wants to happily tell them
Hey, you rejected me!

as if it might give him
cred, as if it says,

*Hey, I'm not any loser,
I'm your loser.*

Don't do that, I say,
but later, I feel his itch,

the firing range of booths,
disposable monuments

of failure. My tongue's
shiny trigger, the shiver

it sends through my ego's
hard-earned buckshots.

The bored interns working
the booths, notice me staring.

They nervously meet my gaze
and then break it.

They couldn't possibly know,
but I do:

my pilot light flickers,
but never goes out.