

I Don't Need to Make a Pretty Thing

poems

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Black
Lawrence
Press

For Perrin, for Ruth, and for Ruby.

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How to Go Home

Think of your mother making coffee
early on Sundays. How she pours
water into the machine carefully,

the folds of her skin blue and soft
in morning light. How she moves
about the house in a slow circle

while the coffee brews, opening
each window to let the breeze in.
How the little dog follows her

like she is some kind of beacon,
both of them stepping in and out
of patches of sun on carpet. How,

in moments of sun, your mother's
bathrobe almost glows. This dance
is a map. This memory a compass.

She is not where you are going
or where you have been.

Catcall #48

I'm in the dairy aisle
when the old man stumbles
toward me. *If an apple*

is falling, he asks,
is the moon also falling?
We are alone

with the creams
and cheeses. I pretend
not to hear him. *Listen,*

he says, *something lives*
in the core of a bullet.
Something

moves there. Something
hums. I fill my cart
with yogurt. *Something*

more than patience.
Something like a snake.
I search for packaged

vegetables, and he stares
at me as if he knows
my name. *I have*

*to tell you, he whispers,
the world is not what you
want it to be.*

He gestures wildly
at the frozen blueberries.
Every moment

another garden. His lined
hands close around mine.
His eyes are gray

and cold, cold and gray.
*A moon in free fall
every hour of every day.*

I Tell You Someone I Love is Dead,

and you take me out to lunch.
We eat french fries together
in restaurant light. This is what
we know: the comfort of afternoon
hamburgers, grace of tiny
packets of ketchup, salvation
in filling ourselves with more
than we need. I go home and try
to follow a yoga video. I bend
over my legs and swing
my torso back and forth,
then I rise up slowly
like a monster in one of those movies
I'm too afraid to watch.
*Now shine your heart
forward*, the woman in the video
says, and for a moment,
I think it could be that simple,
to arch the spine a certain way,
to lift the head, to close
the eyes and glow.

Letter for M

I haven't seen a bat here, but every morning
spiders crawl out of my radiator, searching for me.

That is to say, even the creatures in Pennsylvania seem
to follow me, just like the river on black

August evenings, stars unraveling above its silvered belly.
I miss your cats. I wonder how tall your daughter is,

if her eyes are as blue as they were. I wonder if you've found
a catalpa grove to lie down and dream about lianas in,

if cicadas trill your family to sleep when the west
ocean moon cradles near. Are there cicadas there?

By now, I bet you've taught someone else to love the names
of everything: Foxtail Pine, Indian Mallow, Blazing

Star, Snowberry. Do you remember the poem I wrote
about my grandmother? She wore opals on her fingers

and turquoise bathrobes in the evenings and sang arias
when she made pot roast in her gold-linoleum kitchen.

I was thirteen when she told me that fucking
was a beautiful thing. You are the only one I know

who is as strange as she was. I'm not sure
she would have liked you. Two days ago, I was in a plane

for the first time in years, and I was scared until I saw
the sunset beneath me, deep indigo ahead, clouds

snaking like rivers in between. I could go on, but you told me
not to make poems out of sky. You told me that you don't

believe in gravity or hummingbirds, that roses don't belong
in notebooks, that I'm not yet as lovely as I could be.

Someday You'll Want This Too

I've spent all day in the woods
trying to picture myself with a swollen
belly, spent hours searching down side trails
for deer, imagining a smaller set of footprints
behind my own. My sister had a baby
seven days ago, and each night she croons
to me over the phone, *Just wait, you'll want this
someday, someday you'll want this too.* I've never
wanted a child, but I want desperately to find
a deer on this path, to let one stare at me
in its unflinching, dark, wild animal way,
for the space between us in the snow to grow
wide and significant. I wonder how many times
I've passed the place the deer bed down in,
how close I've come to catching the glow
of distant eyes. I've read that babies see
in black and white in their first weeks,
that my nephew's world is mostly out of focus
shadows, that if he met me now he'd see
only a patch of speaking, shifting light.
I have never thought babies were as lovely
as snow and everything beneath it—
vole nests and pine needles and dead ragweed,
years of dirt and stone buried in white—
but my sister says her son is *beautiful, so
beautiful.* His tiny hands and tiny fingers, tiny
mouth, tiny, faraway staring at his mother.

Raymond B. Winter State Park, Pennsylvania

1.

I have read

that there are owls

here,

 fairy shrimp

and caddisflies,

acres full

 of hidden eyes

and wings.

2.

Evergreens remind me
of funeral homes. Polished
pine and strange

embraces. I try not to write
about death, but maybe
all of my poems

are informed by memorial
services. My father
is a hunter. He shoots

deer and wild
turkey in the dead of winter,
spends hours in a tree

in Michigan, saying
nothing, hoping for a chance
to kill.

3.

This place
is nothing like a city,

echo of moss
and lichen spore

everywhere.

This place
is so much like a city,

gray and broken
everywhere,

underbrush full

of detached
mandibles,

hollow exoskeleton
shine.

4.

I spend too much
of my time here
thinking about deer,
wondering if they
dream of summer
in mid-March,
if they
shrink away
at the sight
of spiders,
if they care
about finding
meaning
in the forest,
if they huddle
close together,
shaking
when it grows
cold at night,
if they hide
or run
when they hear me
on this path
drawing near.

5.

Everything is full
of the sound

of winter leaving.

Sound of feather moss
returning
to forest floor,
sound of water bug,
sound of trees with branches
spindled toward sunlight
like spiders,

and sound of spiders
too.

Spiders hidden beneath
ages of dead leaves
and moth wings,

spiders
twining silk through
maple limbs,

spiders waiting
for fireflies
at twilight,

spiders inching

toward the river
carefully.

6.

I wonder what my father
thinks of when he pulls
the trigger—maybe of the deer
and whether or not it will run, maybe

of the stillness in the trees
before violence.
Everything disappears
into hemlock here.

Trillium and black willow
obscured in needle-light,
whole bodies lost
to greenery. Today,

I found a bat facedown
beside the river, wings
becoming forest floor.

7.

Even the sky

seems closer to me

when it's mirrored in water.