

SAGITTARIUS

poems

AGITPROP

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For Louisa Johanna:

Clean up your room.

Love like a ponderous trained bear
Danced upright at our slightest will

—*Guillaume Apollinaire*

Oh daddy, be proud of your planet
Oh mommy, be proud of your son

—*Mick Jagger*

ONE

Zodiac

Is that a muskrat or a wheelbarrow
pushing itself across Sixteenth?

The little blonde girl with the tree-frog
balloon points from a pink sleeve

and shouts, *Muskrat!* Her mother,
in a green neoprene kerchief (Coiffure

d'Avignon is just around the corner),
jerks her pink arm into dislocation.

The popping sound arrests me, as does
the silver dollar push of bone that jumps

from the girl's collar. I've never been good
at these things; at deciding what they really

are. I have trouble distinguishing
between hornets and horseflies.

On my back, I can't tell if that's your finger
or your breath.

Elegy for the Eunuch Sagittarius

A lampshade of hummingbird tongues hums
its light. It is light enough.

Three kilometers away, Henry prepares
his tweezers with a butane lighter.

(Nothing erotic
can save you now).

On the lighter's sequined flank, a cowgirl in pantaloons
prepares to bite through a stallion's ear,

the air in her mouth, bare,
weightless as a jellyfish. In the sugarwater trap,

a pandemonium of wings. The animal
like a liver in Henry's hand.

The word you want to say still hides
under a ten-gallon hat,

rubbing salve on its cock.

Parts of a Feather

The superstitious geometry of the rock dove rests
between its first and fifth rib. And you

rest between it. It's easy
to call you a disease. Better: a heart or rain

or our dinner plates, last night draped in the leavings
of cherry. *Of course*, you say, *my hands*

*are the skeletons of everything with wings, hiding
art in their armpits.* You say, a feather stripped

of barbs is bone. I say, Don't get me started
on Venice. Too many chicken frescoes laying

their ossuary, Stravinsky tied with a piano string.
He plucks a music like yolk. Good for you. Bad

for you. Bursting with fat. That was the honeymoon,
whole storms going on in there. Your mother

wouldn't have put up with this. She was too big
a fan of Picasso: *an idea is never as interesting*

as its ear. So, here we stand, naked as iron,
the puddle for the hail. A marriage license

makes a lousy umbrella and, even worse,
a wonderful canal. But still you convince me,

gravity is only weather, and electricity,
the closing of the beak. Let's stand

outside in it, watch the planes revise Andromeda.
We'll make it. I assure you. Tonight, you play

the worm. Strange how, to fly, the dead bird
needs the hurricane.

Sagittarius at Dusk

In the sand, the crab
turns over, shoots its white belly
to the teenage girl, jogging in yellow
shorts. She thinks it's a dime

but is too wary of the fat-legged
fisherman with the blue-and-white lure
to pick it up, find out
it's a crab.

The fisherman just became a grandfather
at forty-one, holds in his heart
a scrap of metal the size
of a dime. The purple he sees

is not real, the egret dies eating.
The strangest things keep us alive at dusk.
From this bench, I can see the power plant,
but not the tired people inside

murmuring their small stories
in between small sparks.

Communion

There is something of sleep
that is the hushing of a bird's feathers

being shuffled by other birds.
The day travels by train, bridging

both lobes, each errand shuffled
and repeated like a deck of cards.

The cards know the importance
of silence and repeated words:

Each king, each queen, lying back-
to-front with the jacks and numbers, lit

with indecency, must recall
the supermarket, the blue soap

on sale, the hole in the shoulder
of the postman's shirt. There is something

of the mouth that calls to these,
in the uniform of sleep, as a bird

collecting a flock, an ant, who
when threatened with a fall,

discovers that it can spin a web
like a spider.

My Infant Daughter

My infant daughter is talking to whales.
She forgets Montreal, who
once screamed, *to the ocean!*
On the river, the muskrats stop
eating at dusk.

After she unravels her feet, her tiny elbow in the blowhole,
she hears the coal in the stove
coming to rest on these peninsulas of heat
and only one mother. It must be hers.

My aunt, as a child, always,
heaped into the linen closet by her brother, whispered
*Lock me in with a pitchfork handle, the one
daddy never used.*

He believed the river ended
in Arizona.

Now, my mother doesn't remember any of us.
Not with this sort of health care.

It's so easy to forget, spreading her eyes like nickel, blind
to fire and to the grandchildren. Inside the fire is the kayak
the whale will have to use.