

INVENTION

This darkness is a serious problem.

It makes it difficult to properly read
my Scales of Justice and reassemble my AK-47.

My woman asks me how her hair looks
and I have to tell her—like blackness.
Endless blackness.

I run my fingers along the wall to find my way
back to her and I'm surprised to feel the plaster
turn into her face.

Across the street, at night, the homeless living inside
the hollowed out stores of the strip mall
hunt stray dogs and possums with broken bottles
and BB guns.

We watch them sell drugs under the olive tree
in front of the auto parts sign. When the cops
cruise by, they flash their empty palms

at the the officers and say, "Magic."

Touché, bums, touché, I say under my breath.

In the morning when the sun rises
to nourish our tumors
there will be a line of people half way around
the block seeking their advice,
survival tips.

Where do we sleep?

Where go when rain come?

How we build big bright sign and dig?

How make fire go back bulb?

I notice a woman near the back of the crowd
with duct tape wrapped around her arm
"to keep the loneliness from seeping out."
She's rubbing two sticks together
to light her last cigarette.

Me, I'm at the kitchen table,
which is this park bench,
devising a new calendar with broken teeth.

AND BY REDRUM I MEAN GOOD MORNING

This courtship is tender, but when do we
break out the tribal masks and call on the gods
to consecrate the nudist ceremony?

When does the paint fly?
When do I put the tortoise shell on my penis?
When do I slide on the animal horn?
The glow-in-the-dark lamb intestine?
I mean no disrespect when I say
I want to carry you back to my mud hut
and kiss your sun-swollen mouth,
your sun-swollen breasts. Undressed, your
heat is a summer hymn heaving against my cheeks.

Gauguin is resurrected in our first coupling.
We hear the applause of our families.
They are lighting fires. They are plucking flowers
from the cruel earth and throwing them
at our four feet, wedged together
like two bowls. They are singing, *The sun is going down,*
the sun is going down. But your eyes

are lit and there are drums under your dress.

They are singing, *Death is in the darkest trees,*
she's blind and knows your body as braille.

The sun is going down...your eyes are lit
and there are drums under your dress.

They are singing down the sun, they see it
seep through the branches. They are pointing
out our rosy cheeks and wine-stained teeth
and laughing with us. They are catching grasshoppers
between their toes and dancing in circles.

Momma feeds us caramel-coated
crickets. Momma will knit us a sweater
if we so much as shiver. Momma pulls the thread
from her belly and unravels the moon. Sister
slaps the spiders out of her moon-mossed hair
and pines under the pines. Sister has a thousand
sadder eyes in her two eyes. Sister sweet. Sister country.

Brother has made a voodoo doll of you tonight,
my love. Brother is on his hands and knees scrubbing
your shadow off the floor, breathing steam
out of your old clothes. Brother beautiful. Brother rage.

Sitting at the edge of the bed, Gauguin paints you.
He does such a beautiful job rendering the shape
and warmth of your breasts, I don't know whether to
touch his portrait or your actual breast.

Suddenly I'm in a crisis, torn between
two worlds. I'm nervous looking
at your waist—that curve that gives
every letter in the alphabet the shakes,
sling blade to my salivary gland
comma in the thrush of my pulse—

But I am aroused and ready to devour you
in the painting. Does the dead man love you
more than I do? Does he see the sunlight swimming
in your thin blue veins? He holds you
by the shoulders. He paints a flower between
your fingers, a fox on your face. He knows your breast
like the flick of his wrist.

Every cell in my body is gearing up for the march
from here to the other side of the room

where you sit with your eyes turned down. Alone.

Stranded in the serenity of your skin.
All song in a red sundress.
Silk for eyes. You wrap me
like a burning flag.

Look up at me. I want to dance
until your body is a blur
until your shadow's dizzy with red wine
flailing against the walls, falling against
the night.

Gauguin, get out of here. Go paint a Tahitian.
Point your paintbrush at the sea. Find a sunflower.
When morning comes
we're going to want
to be alone.

DOG BITES OLYMPIAN

If I were the last of the Mohicans
my name would be Dog Face In Wind.
My joy would be indistinguishable from other people's
joy. I would pause in the middle of my sentence
to spread out blankets. I'd train my laughter
to be an Olympian. Then I'd force myself to stop
laughing. I would think of war crimes.
I would curl up with a good book about the
Holocaust and say goodnight by calling down
clouds that carry the ocean and are crawling
with jellyfish. I would bite my tongue naming it rain,
naming it lightning, naming it light. And pinch myself to see
if we were really having sex. I would change my name to
Japanese. Your hand would move over my
mouth. I would snap. I would throw a fit at
your funeral, say mine, mine, mine. I'd throw
rocks and cough up the light from my
right lung. Water my liver with an
alcoholic's tears. I would suggest
vertigo then leaning against someone.
Then I'd make you laugh. Then I'd keep making

you laugh. Then it wouldn't be funny
anymore.

FINALLY SOMEBODY

I'm in a large crowd watching a band
try to snuff out the stars
with their accursed trombones.

We part like skin for a scalpel
as a pretty girl in a wheelchair rolls in on a wave
of chloroform and gin.

Speaking in a lovely old dialect of Bitch,
she puts us in our place from her place
close to the earth, belittling us from her rolling
soapbox down there, banging into our kneecaps
and batting her eyes.

The men feel a need to bathe her, to kiss
her numb parts and carbonate her bloodstream.

We the men will become President
of a small company for her.

We will bring bottled air from Tasmania

for her to stick her nose in.

We are elephants of the Himalayas bearing
her throne on our backs.

She forces her way to the front
in her motorized carriage, commanding us
to swallow our tongues.

We pray for strobe lights and seizures.
We dream she plows through burning plains with doves
flying out of her coat sleeves.

The band forgets how to play their instruments.
Foaming from the mouth, they suffocate their psychotic
saxophones and drown their tragic violins in the river.
They shave their long beards and handlebar mustaches
laying them at her feet like ears of wheat.

We surround her like a mob of eunuchs
waving genitals and drunken sonnets, fighting
to light her cigarette with our torches.

We carry her through the dark streets on our shoulders,
dancing and screaming, muttering the names