

Bone Symphony

On my windowsill, there are insects whose skeletal remains remain intact. Fruit flies or gnats, I can't tell. They make a small pile of themselves, and I let them stay.

By sundown, I am two inches off the ground, and my hearing impeccable. There remains a small shelf inside my brain where the racket lands. Owl. Talons digging into a cushion of sound. My eardrums, shaking.

For a while, two great blue herons hung around my neck. A yoke of beauty. A beak was missing. The burden deciphering these signs.

Further south: a flock of large geese flying so low, I can see their breast feathers ruffling in the wind. Wingspan of a hundred feet.

How I prefer to keep my suffering private.
How I keep my likelihood of surviving in a gray suede

pouch by the windowsill. Sachets of shallot peels
to drive out the vultures. Stop looking, child,

through the frosted window. Your hot breath makes
the opening clear.

Inside our re-education camps, one inmate
had the foresight to catch a millipede on the ceiling
of his cell, hiding it beneath his bed.

In the morning, he roasted it over a tiny flame.

The texture of tiny crawling.

By sundown,

We only talk about eating, about how to find things to eat.

By sundown,

*The food put into the mouth is like one breath
of fresh air, blown—
into a vast empty house.*

It began with a sharp noise
pushing its pin
into the cushion of my brain.

It began with a whirlwind
a teaspoon a stalk of celery
limp spinning
down the garbage disposal
churning
the voice of a prisoner in re-education
came to me, landing
on my shelf. He instructed me to sing
“Silent Night”

whenever I was afraid.
It was the song he was punished for singing.
The guards, fearing
what it could mean.

He said he would sing it
with me.

When the guards entered
and took their clubs to my shelves
I was ready, I was singing *all is calm,*
 all is bright
and quickly,

I ladled porridge into their barrels
just like my grandfather taught me so their violence
would burst into rice.

A messier night than expected. But the voice,
I let stay.

It was a stately church for the visible	a public memorial losses
gathered into small sachets	the citizens by the stained glass
I scattered all over the water	sat weeping feather-like
felt like rippling off	veils the eyes of my dead
with each intake cue	fresh the funeral
for my brain to sound	was beginning the good news

Two eyes blinking open in the night.

My rescue, arriving like that.

My friends say weeping after being humiliated lasts about eight hours.

A brass cymbal, dizzying still.

In a migrant shelter in El Paso, I meet a man named Miguel, from Juárez. He tells me that during an immigration hearing, he presented the bullet wounds on his chest. *That's insufficient evidence*, the judge said.

That's one bulletproof vest, Your Honor.

Miguel lowered his polo shirt, tucking it back into his pants.

I lowered my head.

May the body's testimony be enough.

May Your Honor reap the whirlwind of clanging symbols.

May my words return: tiny, crawling

into a vast empty house.

Now I think : We are too far gone in the tectonics of the American rhyme scheme for our symbols to remain stable. Now the sheep : disguised in wolf's clothing. The saw : a paddle. The shelter : a grave. The mother who tried to rescue me almost killed me. The savior : a toddler. The toddler : a king. A yellow flag with three red stripes : a soiled rag to wipe down the camp latrines. Now, on walks to the local pond, the one animal I look for is the great blue heron—a sign I have made up to mean there is hope for me.

In the end, I see my father, gaunt, trousers hanging loosely from a thin frame. He stands waving a yellow handkerchief at the dock of our future home, where I am sound asleep on the forest floor, footsteps all around me. *Here, sheep and wolves once slept beside each other*, my father tells me. I imagine ivory wool resting against slick, dark fur. This was the earth's first poem.

Making my way home
is the only ritual I know.

Making a small pile
of my dead on the windowsill

I cup my hands against
the glass like

children do, blowing hot air
into the skeletal frames.

Each prisoner's singing
so clear

inside the funeral, I stood
with them

a tiny flame