

Crabwise to the Hounds

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LIONS OF THE WORK WEEK

It was the year I subscribed to an absurd
number of magazines. There were lions everywhere.
Lions at the tambourines, lions in the gatehouse, lions
up the sleeve of your bible-black dress, you could set your watch
by the screams, the shimmy-shackle of claws
on the hardwood floor wore down your ear, ghosts
of lions fathered our kids, lions of the long grass,
Barnum & Bailey types, we knelt at the scimitar scar
on the tamer's breast as valets brought lions upon lions,
lions going at us with the violence of a clearance sale, my wife
comes home with a lion between her legs, antelope musk
hog-tied in her mouth, bed-lamp-bright wounds,
a yoke of tear-jars tingling from her nicked shoulders,
lions cornered in her cranium, the wedding dancers slain,
their scattered organs like gobs of fruit, lions
at the chink in our *amour*, lions on the owls, lions
like Labs, the house pets snapped, lions loaded for bear,
lions at the crypt ledger jotting down kills,
plaster casts of claws above our cancer-ward doors, lions
parted the curtains of our ribs, panted like whistling arrows,
starved lions, hair painted on their bones,
lions in the yard with the kids, lions
at the midnight fridge, chicken on their lips,
lions at the watering hole bullying
for beer money, lions mowing through
the Foot Guard, Beefeaters, Dragoons,
standing in perfect pecking order
at my bedside, waiting for me to snap
the bones of my watch to my wrist
and dress in their gift of slipper-thin armour.

HEIMLICH

Comes up behind you at a party, masks your eyes
with his mammogram hands, asks, 'Guess who?'
A bear-hugger from way back. Trains by wrapping
around bridge pilings, vending machines, a Douglas fir.
Avoided at most parties: too clingy, too close a talker.
Hovers near buffet trays glaring at your chest, hands
rasping between songs. You poke fun at his tight
lederhosen, his tin flute, but you've bitten off
more than you can chew. Through the crowd
he rushes to you, binds two fists into one under
your sternum. By his second squeeze, the ghosts
of mine canaries flood your mouth and stream
to that part of horizon he's left ajar.

PROSTHETICS

*Despite all the amputations you know you could just go out
and dance to the rock and roll stations, and it was all right.*

—*Lou Reed*

I'm on the pier with my back against
the wrecking machine. Cyclones of terns
turn atop prop-churned debris.
This morning I feel like the wheel
you fell asleep at. Godstruck by the flag
clotted on its pole like the skin of a starved
animal. The downcoast ferry's
run out of hearing. A spaghetti-strap dress,
a trembling gin, as you shift weight
to your wooden leg.

Ear to a conch, I hear
acrobats in waiting rooms
flipping through magazines,
the gull squawk of the guitarist's hand
going to chord, stunt men falling
through awning after awning.
The sea is a soliloquy
in a buried warehouse.

But March is the month of swollen doors.
Boots bark through checkerweaves of ice.
Lacking prophylactics, we pull apart
to watch our dead sons run along your one
good leg. Hitting the deck, they hoist dust
to their meniscus shoulders.

The sea, a surface unworn by our movement.
Our shore leave, a landscape painted
with a brush made
from the hair of the dog
of those storm-closed roads,
as though a gale had come to town
and left wearing pelicans.

ORONOLIAN REEL

Down the orchard ladder our Emissaries came.
They had been letting the sea do their laundry.
They had been sentenced to bear false witness.
Part the blinds and the sun guillotines.
Pull them, and light chokes back its lure.
Bigger than any country music legend.
Brighter than a birdroom for stars.

Down the orchard ladder our Emissaries came.
With a taxidermist's jar of glass eyes.
With the underwater wind of riptides.
Part my low-lying lap-pleated hands.
Pull my hair back.
Bigger than a blind man's once-over.
Badder than sailors home from their maroon.

Down the orchard ladder our Emissaries came.
Afterwards my armhairs lay like floodgrass.
Aftermath is the sum of nothing but the facts.
Part my seeing into staying and leaving.
Pull the chute on my left-leaning heart.
Record the euthanists rehearsing.
Mic the trapeze snap.

Down the orchard ladder our Emissaries came.
In the household of their cupped hands
are the rivers we ransomed.
In the pits along their mantrap lines
are the acrobats we let go.
Part the flaming bulrushes, the sunken river sticks.
Pull yourself together, because our Emissaries have come

down the aluminum rungs we sawed
half through, and they're standing,
wearing *I'm with Stupid* T-shirts
beside you.

THE SHOWER CAPER

I had come to brush my teeth.
You had been in here for some time,
standing in the corner shower.
Splay of toothpaste speckling the mirror
with constellations, snowpoints.
The water circles above the drain,
brings its buffaloes to the cliffs.
Your toes squint on the lime stains
left from the pouncing of the taps.
I missed you turning to me,
or maybe you didn't, hands up
on the shower wall as if some water-cops
had you frisked. And me moving in
to interrogate just as they
were beading away.