



CUTTING ROOM

SARAH PINDER

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FUEL

one street named after a saint or mountain, another after blood,  
pealing bells, loose live gerunds strung across, pitched in hum,  
every eye a question, a pan, an establishing shot.

the alternate ending: wreck this, move with speed, a leash,  
obedient click and what follows, wagging, eager, full breath

after the foot lifts, the cloud of upper sound in flat wet midday  
warmth. you want drag in chorus, field spent, the clench of taking  
aim at exhausted scrap, blowing it all –  
the name of a pocket, a hand-carved tattoo.

in a red state, spell out the lesson here, map out the power  
and water, or the rising lawn to disappear in

some fresh atlas, the new record.  
practice wearing details yourself,  
ghosted, twinned to a lighthouse.

movement in the dark requires geometry or optimism, a hand  
along plaster, counting pockmarks.

streaked trees from the truck bed  
the leaky world wets through  
even this frame and mat

in the reeds, some insistent paper hum  
in dragonflies mating, their drunken  
swoop and hover.

the place where the land stopped and the water  
began to green itself,

we walked here to talk about death,  
to take off our pants.

you could ask me to push you in,  
demand to be surprised,  
your fierce mouth overflowing (bursting/bursting open).

the fine skin of a fever, bleaching. there's some paper, sit with it, a salt  
pig, a fuse, fresh slang, hitches in the running. tell amber in an evening;  
the plant, the factory we call to, trembles, a near-sweet burnt smell –  
name it, four or five ways at least.

~~maybe the only way to think~~ is what's cut is closer  
to being still,  
a pearly stream of fuel across the asphalt,  
a peal – your hand a weapon,

just touching a plant or a child  
in this place, just following orders, listening  
well – that's where trouble waits.



welcome arrow, stippled like split bone,  
the moon's nothing to pray over, a noun in the ear of the watchers

a dog bolts through in arc and amble,  
clots of people weigh worry

wet nose against the back of a hand, a cool comma,  
all moons are comparisons, possible constants, unflinching

this begins, quiet, craning.

ARMOURY

## Echo Chamber

You can tuck your whole hand neatly inside the pocket  
of your cheek. Some girls can, anyway.  
Here's one in a skinny kitchen in Ojai:  
the slip of her fist as a minnow,  
fine and quick past her incisors  
to the wrist, shrugging,  
no biggie, arm hooked to her face  
like a tentacle or a hose.

There's a box labelled TEETH in this kitchen.  
She touches the lid like it could do something special.  
I haven't been here long – I don't even know  
if teeth are inside, really, it's just a guess –  
but I've never seen anything brave or  
famous come from a tooth.

Even while the automated lawn starts  
watering itself, ratcheting a stream  
through the ink of the open window,  
even as she stops up her infinity mouth,  
even now, I won't open it.

## Knife Fight, Glasgow

*after David Gillanders*

Your head wound was exquisite,  
a sheet of red velvet  
obscuring your eyes.

Here, the commonness  
of household tools turning,  
on circumstance, to active  
meat in complex hallways,  
the alcove of a payphone  
where voices make demands  
or even pray.

I touched the place your face  
should have been, cradled  
between the gloved hands  
of the nurses'  
quiet frame.

## **You Asked If It Was Something You Said**

Last night in conversation, the full frame dislodged, a cloud held  
your hair in loose knots as a promise. We woke to a thousand casualties  
in Gaza, a place where they are running out of blood.

A computer screen in an empty office tower gave the news, the air  
circulation filtering the sound of the cloud's breath. While I read  
Al Jazeera, I wanted the crush of skin against my face, rich with sweat, alive.

At home, I eat simple food, make stiff drinks with my sister  
and watch the sealed city sit like a smoking parcel in our kitchen.  
No poems like ribbons today.

## Snapshot

Marina, her  
braceleted  
wrist chops  
and churns in  
the rough barley,

a huge curling. Her  
ghost-pale hair  
threshed back, drops off  
with drift, a slender  
obligation of braid,  
brush-whipped ellipsis,  
gliding into the cut.

## Armoury

A dress flatters when unzipped.  
I'd ask for that much, to draw the tab down, lay bare  
the swan of your spine, the glacial, slackening shoulder blades.

This hotel is powdered latex,  
leather look-alike, neon, a nod  
to sea or sugar. You took me here  
for a two-minute melody anyone could manage,  
even in psychedelic fripperies or a mask.

Your gown in party print  
against the mirrored headboard.  
Watch how it refracts.

## Soft

*after Winston Chmielinski*

chart the ferrous,  
prenatal repeats,

sputum, throat wound,  
knuckle  
into the tape deck,  
kneel before the blip  
in surprise –  
sound his voice,  
lean.

hours condensed  
on the window,  
pearling, tell  
the beginning,  
shaven knuckle into  
wrist, cord-bound, dialing,  
wall behind lit  
like an out-of-focus grotto.

don't and toned  
down in one room  
at last, one folding the fire  
blanket, the other akimbo.

still dangerous,  
keeping reefed.