

Sonnet

after Shakespeare's "Sonnet 99"

I know nothing of gardens—only that
I am growing a garden. *I am growing
a garden!* Neither tried nor proven,
but I thought you should know since,
one day, I may ask to borrow a clipping
from your thorn bush, a cup of soil,
a carton of compost. I may even ask
to borrow your garden. I should know
how your forsythias got their name.
Why red bells are red, and blue bells,
blue. I may ask from time to time why
they look so triumphant in this light.
You should know why my black

scallop keep purpling your soil. Why my
African violets keep losing their names.

Landscape

a cento

I think that I shall never see the city withdrawn into itself.
Neither my father nor my mother knew of such a time. I wonder about the trees
the same way I wonder about a bed that is left open to a mirror,
when you move away, you see how much depends on your being there
more so than before. Strange to remember
a skyrise really not so. How should I now recall the mornings
I looked brightness in the eye between what should and what should not be
when the wind was right as everything else—
All the complicated details, they say,
but now I know what to do with them.

The Assembled Plumage inside an Unchronological Adaptation of History

2.

It started long ago with trade winds
blue skies

those of the fairest

6.

Me
without primary

secondary
more scapular than wing

a flail
downward

in umbilicus
posture

3.

My father
was Daedalus

(do not linger long
on my tense of preference

nothing here
has been implied)

4.

My mother
I keep safe

from genealogies
and annals

(what I know of her
is not privy

to discussion)

5.

I learned much of the world
through its cycles of moon

and am no closer
to mapping

its coordinates
in tongue

7.

What stillness will do for me here
is nothing

1.

Already my father's work
has begun

Addressed to the Viewers Who Missed the Aftershock of Feathers (in Brueghel's Landscape)

To the novice
 ploughing through the Musée des Beaux Arts;

to the dilettante
 with his gaze fixed upon some higher longing;

to the docent
 hauling in his final catch of the day;

to those on land,
 their solemn wave

to the merchant days gone by,
 to those unknowing—

the fall of Icarus must have felt
 like an afterthought:

like a large stone hurled into the sea,
 into the not-too-distant distance

Again

with lines from Kaveh Akbar

Bear with me,

the porchlight of milk-rotten moon
is no place to begin a poem.
It's like digging a hole with a shovel
pointed the opposite direction,
the way they say orcas consummate
an improper union or rain brings birth.

I never aim at eloquence

the way a boxer lands a cheap shot
after the bell rings.
This may *confuse you*,
but I was taught to hold water
between my teeth,
and I did and was good
until I chipped my incisor
and a river ran out.

If I could be anything in the world,

I would be a simile or stative verb,
so I would become whatever you like,
but *I came out* a swollen jaw,
a black eye.

They say

you're as good as the last
person you blame,
but be careful what finger you point.
Sometimes I'm dog-tired,

chewing the same bone down your throat

before sinking it completely.

If a body turns up,
I'll know you did it.

If nothing happens, you won't starve.

The Rooted Bed

I do not have a bow's string.

I have an armchair.

I have a candle's light in a bedroom.

I have a Penelope
who won't let me leave or board a warship.

I have a Penelope who takes my hand
before asking where I have gone.

I don't know of any Trojans, I say.

If I did, you would not be harmed.

Suitor or no suitor,
you are not free to roam my country.

I call this my country
because I have no other home, just

my Penelope
who works the loom—

unbraids the narrative.

There is always a narrative in my country.

I ask, *What tale will you tell today?*

Penelope, I say

(and there are no suitors).

My love, she replies

(and there are no Trojans).

Ghazal

*I'm eighteen with a bullet
Got my finger on the trigger—I'm gonna pull it*

We sang every word, every hit, every number marked with a bullet.
Picked our afros, we did, 'til they bloomed, 'til they bled, 'til they offered up their bullets.

*I'm picked to click now
I'm a son-of-a-gun*

New Year's Eve, Papa shook the rust off his revolver. That pea-shooter couldn't shoot,
couldn't hit a target if it were the sky. Nearly died giving birth to a bullet.

*So, hold it right there—
We're gonna have big fun*

Coo' California nights that lured me outside. The hood is no Hollywood, no red carpet,
walk of fame, but fame can be gained from a single shot. Dem burn hot, dem bullets.

*I may be an oldie—
but I'm a goodie, too*

Jay-Z shot his brother. If I had a gun, I would've shot mine. That would've been the last time
my nose would bleed. Instead, I went to bed, exhausted by the sun. No gun. No bullet.

*I'll last forever—
and I'll be good to you— Oh yes, I will*

The legend goes: Super Crip was kickin' it before the game. His homeboy was murdered.
He, either Sug[ed] or 'Pac[ed], still played (with a flesh wound or with a bullet).

*I'm a super-soul, sure-shot—
Yeah, I'm a national breakout*

If I told ten stories, the first would have mirrored a mirrored lie.
Nine of jump shots, crossovers, drive-bys: a history of bullets.

*I'm high on the chart—I'm tip for the top
But 'til I'm in your heart I ain't never gonna stop*

A bullet has no name, no number, no family to report it missing, no returning address to address.
This is what Dre was trying to say after they gave an enemy a ride, put bullets

Never, never,

baby

aside to end the beef. The peace pipe triangled between three before the backfire registered the slump against steering wheel—before an angel entered in, jamming the second bullet.

*We got a smash double-header if we only stay together
Talkin' 'bout—you talkin' 'bout me—I'm eighteen with a bullet*

Sometimes running is all that's left. I swore to myself, I'd never go back to the land of not-knowing. Someone's always going. Charon docked. *Doughboy, Ricky dead*. A bullet for a bullet.

*Got my finger right there on the trigger
I'm gonna pull it—pull it—pull it—*

According to Brueghel

It was spring:
dancing
rain
a procession

the jasmine were orating
the four o'clocks
when it drummed
immutable

their fragrance,
to the dew of yesterday's
infinite:
in song.

You were there
somewhere
as stems began
their celebrity

(my dear Icarus)
between
to bequeath the earth.
(however riotous, however short-

when waters were rising,
sunrise and ocean
And O how you admired
lived) their bloom.

On a Spring Day, an Interracial Couple, & Variations of the N-Word Substituted with Wildflower(s)

After breaking mid-sentence from his conversation to shout: *Wildflower, Wildflower, you made it*, I was _____

a.

passing by in Ray Bans purchased on a visit to see my father, old friends, a mentor whose cancer, as I write this, is still shedding layers of him like the rind of an orange beneath the sunny skies of San Bernardino County, California

b.

warming myself in the sports jacket purchased on a budget vacation to a blistering cold, Christmas-lit Portugal

c.

under the umbrella of assumption with insufficient evidence, latched to the arm of “my white queen” (as a many-blood St. Lucian put it resting on the blunt-end of a store-front bucket when we strolled through the streets of my sister-in-law’s native tongue)

d.

days away from my visit to the suburban Wakanda of an American city & the skinhead who would walk behind me as “my white queen” watches with a corner-eye awareness

e.

in a port land, where a brotha proved the term grammatically sufficient while hangin’ out of the passenger window of his homie’s ride

to shout: *Quit diggin' in yo' nose, Wildflower*

f.

Wildflower or any version of the form my beloved knows
not to say, will never say, not even under the throes of passion

g.

thinking—

h.

thinking:

i.

thinking:

I must be a Wildflower everywhere

j.

off my grind

k.

on some inclusive ish

l.

with you—

at the tail end
of the rainbow

(the wildflowers
at our feet).

When I Was a Feathered Thing

after Threa Almontaser

I existed between space and ash // fell in love with a girl / who fled a rose-bomb village / between Saigon and Hanoi / took to an American elocution / over the tonal regions of her name // I placed the dust of her over / my skull like a fedora / like a chain of stolen legs / a five-six parabola in stilettos // I was *mi dang* / the boy who sold packets of gum to a busload of tourists / In a story of refugees / one is always a tenor // Her mother scolded her for living too darkly / for unbuckling her skirt before takeoff // I stood in line opposite the peanuts / smiled / spooned faucets of *nuoc mam* / *bun rieu* // In a book of naps / I braided a narrative / that would later become corn-rolled / The next summer / I sang a song to a Polish girl / who carried the scent of McDonald's fries / and dro in her knapsack // In San Bernardino CA / her name meant *Earth* / *Gospel* / *Survived Orange Groves* / *Knew She Was More Than A Visit* / Always a bomb threat / I shared my vision with lemons // paired with plum trees / It was delicious—

so I let her name
drip down my chin until she
became a witness

When the 80s Happened

after Threa Almontaser

over a red bird city / my grandmother was chambermaiding / behind a locked door with several latches and six shots // On the other side / me / my father stood waiting to enter // She would call out *Who is it?* / He would respond *Open the door Carrie* // My grandfather was a confusion of feathers / No fault of his own // The household / an empty nest / My father's name is Louis / Grandmother called him Billy / We lived in a city awaiting saints // down the crease-folds and fissures of our sidewalks / where roots of shade trees exploded like bombs over a pre-dawn Iraq // A neighbor: a double-barrel sawed-off / was the same as what he held in his hand // Everyone's mind was a kind of show-me state / Every summer / I fell in love with tree bark / a book of matches // Michelle who loved Snow White but not too-dark boys / not Tabarro who pierced her side with the screwdriver / that lay hidden between a hammer and a pair of pliers // Tabarro who stole a two-liter of soda across the street / from where my brother lifted donuts // My brother called home / said *Dad* // My dad responded / *You did what?* // I stood paralyzed like a game of freeze tag / when the clerk saw the Doritos bag in one hand / not a cent in the other // Cool ranch / I dropped to the floor // My brother who fancied Sly Stallone / took to the middle of the street / armed for battle // Tabarro and his rusty screwdriver / my brother with Rambo's knife // circled like the Blue Line / on the hour / It could have been a scene from *Bad / West Side Story* / if everyone dancing / remembered their lines