

Sunday Best

The adjunct preacher's in the pulpit, hair parted and kept still
 from many Sundays waking earlier than dawn
 to wield a boar-hair brush
 and rake it through a mess of fine split-ends, a routine borne of faith in all
 the smallest industries.
 In a new gray suit he speaks in tones he'd call *piano*—
 —Jonah's in the belly of the great big fish,
 and it seems twice a year, at least, this story is retold, since burdens,
 they do come, *oh yes*,
 the preacher says,
they come—
 the preacher sets to listing things that Jonah might have seen:
 a pulse and throb of waves of acid sloshing in the dark.
 In the first few pews the boys are silent, all motions and mouths,
 hands below the backs
 of benches as they pass
 a smartphone back and forth that plays a silent clip—
 —a woman after really taking one—
 her insides prolapse on a loop, her twisted face the answer to men's inquiry of pain—
 unknotting his voice
 in *pianissimo*, he thinks,
 the preacher says that Jonah has been vomited ashore—
 —the smallest children run excited to the pulpit for what's next,
 a chance to show off what they'd learned at Sunday school that morning,
 a song, a list,
 the new side of the book and things were great,
 till they forgot the letter sent from Corinth up to Rome.

You've Got the Right Idea

My mother kneels down on the first step of our spiral staircase, built from steel, I'm told,
 by my pragmatic grandad, the twisting heap
 a necessary flourish,
 a space-saver that allowed for dizzying up-and down runs, up
 and down, repeated.

Momma was flat sick of all the heaps of blue jeans stained Bermuda green
 after afternoons spent
 playing on the next-door neighbor's lawn.
 One hand on
 my shoelace knot, my mother speaks so I'll remember:

The rabbit runs around the tree

Around?, I said,

around, she said,
and down into the hole.

It pops right out the other side
beautiful and bold.

Bursts of foster
 in the transom window, light for my incident strings — it wasn't like that,
 though I do remember running, or at least,
 feeling that I wouldn't fall—

Morning Wax

The sun is rising, up and at 'em now —
a heifer stares
from her side of a livewire fence.
Behind, a tractor's parked
in the middle of a crosshatched field. Someone,
the farmer's hand,
his intact son, or him if he gets back
from the nearest cash-crop town,
will be by here to crank up the machine,
continue yesterday's keyline plowing — back and forth, we'll both double back
and forth, two dancers in antistrophe.
This dawn is pale, slashed clean with syllables of blue.

Ad Hoc

The down-street girl texts me to see if I can call in sick, her father would be gone near afternoon,
 too bad I have to work
 in a field of busted hay bales, walking through crop straw
 piled dusty to my knees, sifting chaff
 for broken wires to pick up for the tractor, so it can swing on back around, try again —
 — I squint
 into the all-day sun so hard it seems my eyes will become elegies
 with nothing else to watch but that new river,
 ambitious, distanced from an ocean, its shallow the reflection of an empty sky.

*

In the hollow of a grain silo in the empty part of June,
 the temperature graphed
 in sweat on my friend's face and mine, our bodies smooth as young oxen,
 indications how fresh blooms
 marvel at the world, we swept wheat dust into gatherings,
 hauled them in buckets
 up a ladder, dumped them out the door we left open for the sunlight, yes,
 but for the work, too,
 so we could see our hands and booted feet at the occasion
 of becoming aches
 through the pressure on our backs, the yoke of work
 our way of crashing to salvation
 hour by shared hour — our hands on the cracked and splintered brooms,
 we talked of what the down-street girls might do,
 and the women,
 when we ourselves were older and our bodies had grown up to be
 the same size as our tools.

*

Subtext next to me and the Colburn boys in the afternoon as we nap close,
 faces milled into our elbows,
 sweat-soaked feet crossed one over the other, fawns asleep till twilight
 when we would go back to the field,
 when the sun would linger at the fade,
 when the oldest, Shane,

would put it in first gear and tow his homemade trailer, and the next oldest,
Aaron, would stand on top and stack,
and the youngest, me, would toss bales up, easy once you got it down,
bend, wrap your hands around the wire,
lift, flip, and push, harder after several hours, when the hay
is stacked four high —
— work that wasn't holy, though the stubble ground
was gold, and any slight glance upward
was the bluest — it was cheap, something bodied in the summer
when the thumb-sized crickets buzzed aimless past our ears.

Bull

Men recline in polyester chairs
to let the only haircut man in town, Raymond, clip gray tufts onto the tile floor —
the pile grows to be swept up and tossed out, later,
when the sun has angled through each corner of the shop — for now,
conversation swirls toward
the cities and the riots seen therein on last night's news — they must be solved, here,
this morning, while each man sits
higher up than usual, and thinks himself a judge or license of import —
they talk themselves into the plot
to quiet down the silence that they live in, outside of what's breaking on the air —
Raymond twirls them to shave their neck,
and talk turns to what they've all been up to: buying tickets for the game in Dallas,
prepping trucks for weekend trips to out-of-state casinos,
cleaning maple leaves out of the gutter — they're liars, full of cancer lurking in their mush,
their bodies overused
and bent like penny nails — nearly finished now, every man avoids
his own face in the mirror —
Raymond flourishes the capes, soaps each neck for the glint of a razor's edge.

Let the Children Speak on Memory Alone, as Birds are Born to Fly

To the auctioneer, everything is going or it's gone, the rusted plow discs,
 the loose and splintered handles of junk hatchets,
 the oozing air compressors, in need of repair, he admits
 though these folks here before him look the kind
 that are not, he repeats, are not afraid of projects. Right out in the midday,
 upright summer sun,
 a group of boys across the vacant lot, in the opposite corner, can't make out the words,
 and opt instead to mimic the delivery
 in volume and in pitch, and in the way he stretches
 phrases longer
 than he ever should —
 and one boy, the tallest, stands up on an old milk crate, shouts out to his friends,
 saying, *ColoradoColoradoColorado*,
 fast as his mouth will let him, *Rhode Island folks, Rhode Island—*
 he hears fifty dollars from his crowd,
 and he replies by asking if there's fifty more — there is, and the price rises
 to a cool one hundred —
folks, he says, right hand lifted, showing one uncalloused palm, the other closed,
 left thumb tucked into the loop
 of his stained denim jeans, as he decides to sell the place he's been declaiming—
you can have a place like Colorado.
Do I hear it? Do I hear a hundred? A little boy out in the makeshift crowd cheers,
 ecstatic, rips off his T-rex shirt —
 the offer's made and settled on — Colorado's sold.
 The auctioneer across the lot, the professional, continues,
 drives up bids on ancient implements. The rust is giving way now
 to something that fulfills a need, imagine it: a plow disc
 worth its weight in gold —
Hell it is gold, he says, *just squint, go ahead and let that rust*
become a different color.
Let it shine the way you want. Do you see it? Can you see it going,
going? Picture it before it's gone.