

HOPE

74 air rifle pellets scatter across the x-ray of a torso

A punctured torso in a galactic sky

A white cotton wedding shirt with embroidered eyelets

74 of them make a memento

One for each year of my deepening confusion

A great-headed blinded orangutan is bellowing

The clinic nurses have named their patient Hope

Just in time, the renowned surgeon arrives to screw Hope's scapula together

I briefly celebrate another heroic rescue of charismatic megafauna by postcolonial NGOs

Because *Hope is a fighter*

I too identify with yet another threatened charismatic megafauna

And cheer her will to keep on breathing with lead pellets starrng her lungs

And want to scream as I hear Hope screaming, wide-jawed, in the photograph

This Hope savagely lost to the forest

Who would rather spend her time chewing sugarcane and rubbing her belly

While I puzzle out the chain of guilt and causation

A dollar's ride out of poverty, an old/new rite of passage

## CLARITY AND COMPASSION

Let the cat be the cat, sprawled on her back, her belly stretched out in the sun.

Let the man be the man, asleep in his chamber, legs tucked, soundless, so I wonder

is he breathing, and will this never end. Let me forgive myself

for thoughts that come and go and come and go again

for pyramids of bone climbing into the azure.

Let the dead stay dead.

Let us escape to the forest, where we survive on berries and seeds.

Equal and opposite pressures keep me upright.

My mother, a painter of icons, had teeth flecked with lapis from licking her tiny brush.

My other mother worked in a factory painting radium numbers on watch faces.

She waited in the cold for her bus until the buses stopped running.

I loved her more than gold but coveted her small gold earrings.

## LIKE YOU

I had a mother.

I had a thin man towering over her.

I had before birth ever after  
and a name for every thing in the kingdom.

Now I have a memory.

Of pensive, of riven faces.

Gravestones subsiding to forest.

Books, covenants, and dust.

Now I have knowledge. Of rain,  
obsession, contrition, isms to die by.

My hands move knowledgeably  
over each other's topography.

I am grateful if spring follows winter.

Like you I can name my terrors.

Where have the centuries gone?

Oak apple crab apple iron gall blossom.

## FEDORA

Every day the father lifted it from the closet shelf  
The ritual attached itself to the girl's sense of morning  
Crowning the mysteries of dress and grooming  
The father fierce and tall as a giant

The house kept its doors closed to the stranger  
The father tiptoed across the floor  
Every morning the clock hands began the same passage  
The father shaped the fedora precisely as he liked it

The father knew little of its history  
Not the felt or the felt-maker  
Not the beaver in its underwater cavern  
Not the formidable Sarah Bernhardt  
As *Fedora* or her androgynous Hamlet

Once a father stepped to a beveled mirror  
Straightened his scarf  
Buttoned his overcoat with pink fingertips  
Adjusted a fedora's brim  
A rare sensuous gesture to console himself

He ran thumb and fingertips over the felted fur  
Tugged on his leather gloves and pocketed his keys  
Stepped out into the weather  
Slid carefully into the driver's seat of his Desoto  
So as not to dent the crown

For he was meticulous, incurious, obsessive, tight lipped  
For he erupted when the girl defied him  
For the Depression was a black cape dragging behind him  
The Shoah, a ghost sea troubling the shore  
And the fedora kept its secrets

## THE LAPSE BETWEEN ONE SOCK AND ANOTHER

Words are wont  
To fall silently to the tablecloth  
Leaving the sound  
Of a father chewing



Handwriting almost indecipherable  
Numbers, bank accounts maxed out for insurance  
The occasional reminder  
*Tell Grace I love her*



One dress sock slides over a long left foot  
A narrative interrupted  
Bewildered interval  
Before time starts up again



After all he was a giant  
So when he broke the shoulder  
Of the nurse trying to hold him down  
It was hardly surprising



Electroshock, psychedelics  
Downers to tame him  
He'd sleep twenty hours a day  
If they let him



The effort it takes  
To forsake freedom  
To flense the body of its terror  
*You can let go now*

