

**Shenandoah, 1999**

*January, Rough Coated*

I speak of the fisher cat's screams.

Of waking with the water stain on the stucco.

The doe who walks out onto the creek to taste the dark melt.

She holds a particular name, rough, in her mouth for this early water.

The stutter of the salt road, chewing a hole in its cheek. The yellow boat buckled under snow.

I stroke the knap of stirring  
to the wolf dream. Run my  
hand wrong, then smooth.

*Cassiopeia*

The ad reads *nuisance animals shot*. A child's  
parka hung from the mile sign  
watches the rusty clouds pull away  
like a moving truck  
down the long steep drive.  
Barn owls stay busy outside my window  
with catechism. They leave bone  
ripe droppings in the lee  
of the old hoop house. Heavy  
with constellations of tiny vertebra,  
  
threads of teeth, the goose  
flock sharp "v" of a feather light jaw.

*Wet Weather*

The rain rubs against itself  
like a boy in the night.

The body does not  
fit into itself.

Into its desire. The rain  
is not blameless. It has drowned

the plums and made  
the chickens hungry for flesh.

They are still in the wet rag  
weed. Moving only to tear

apart a mouse thrown  
into their midst. It runs

without eyes, ears, tail,  
legs. A blur of blood.

Then stillness. Next the birds  
will begin to eat the eggs.

*Running*

Sick on the vertigo scent of lilacs, and that animal taste the glass of water draws  
from the night when left on the sill.

Sick on the dick velvet of the apricot under a thumb.

On the mourning dove calls rising from the cable box outside the window.

Calls rising from her throat, her throat the color of a girl in a wet white dress.

Rising like profanity when you slam your hip into the jamb, like thoughts of laundry  
and death before sleep, the jangle and thump of a pop song between the ears.

The April air is a sulky mouth on your mouth.

It refuses to do the work of kissing.

Tonight, jogging home—let a hurt start.

Then let it finish.

Run past the loud mouthed old dog behind his chain link.

His young companion—so quiet of jaw and body it is certain he will bite.

*Panties*

One bathroom in the old house, tiles  
tumbledown, hot water turned on  
with a wrench. The curtain grey  
facing pane. Outside,  
gardenias a bruise in the heat.  
The anole on his branch braves  
a red tumescence. His throat's taut  
ballad makes him visible to birds,  
his mate still hidden in the hot  
green blades of leaves.  
I step into the shower,

hide from the mold webbed mirror,  
Behind the curtain take off: t-shirt  
shorts and cotton panties  
with the sateen bow sewn  
to the front. Turn on  
the water. It has run the whole  
way from the river in the narrow  
black hose. It has grown  
warm in the rubber,  
the sun cuts easily through  
the trees, chewed up  
here by the acid of the rain.  
The water is too warm  
to make me truly clean.

*Redwing*

The blackbird breaks on the window  
by my bed. I bury it in the stone

thick soil, too shallow, press my lips  
against the pane, leave mouth marks

to set the others for different  
courses of flight. I think often

jogging at night, how I could  
pull the slender cotton cord to reveal

I was bleeding, reveal how  
unclean I was, already. Under the June

rain the bird's body is revealed again. Folded  
like a child in prayer, an envelope's

tight creases, a brand new fitted sheet.  
Inside though, all bones. All snapped in two.

*Astigmatism*

The stranger pours  
the water on the ground.  
I am blind in one eye.  
The stranger thirsty  
for something else.  
Blind in one eye.  
A rose blown. A key  
snapped off in the lock.  
I am crouched behind  
the feral mint, hiding  
my neck, the tender  
ladder of my throat.  
I am blind  
On the left. A strategic  
disadvantage like standing  
downhill from horror.

He asked for water.  
He poured the water out.  
He crushed the bottle.  
Stepped forward.

The mint breaks  
into sick sweetness, beneath.

*Unmentionables*

I wash out my panties  
in the sink. Put them back on,  
still wet. I pull out strand  
after strand of hair. I pull  
my scalp open, my hand  
a bird looking to floss  
its nest, bloody.

I steam and stink in my  
narrow, quilted bed.  
Inconstant, I dream all  
night of eating bread.



*Peaches*

Outside the narrow  
window, forest billows  
with the shy hysteria of doves, purple  
phlox in the rush shade.

I am inside, peeling peaches of their down,  
the way my father took  
the skin from an animal, the tug and slip  
of being with a knife, fingers hot under  
fur. The fox skull crushed.  
The man, breathless, up to the elbow, red.

*Ursus, Saying*

Bears mark up trees with their paws  
and mouths. Not, as we once thought, to sharpen  
thick teeth and claws. But to announce their passing

through. We know them by the absences they leave.  
A swath of bark, thick splinters from the telephone  
poles marching up the cut away.

When I was little a boy taught me to undo  
knots with my teeth. Marl & clove hitch. The trees  
jeweled with resin. The necklace tangled around

my throat wakes me, the sound of them  
in the brambles, the garbage cans. Their musk  
dark in my mouth, my nose, my teeth

set to worrying at the ropes which bind me to the pines.

*Teeth Dreams*

I finish off a dream with my hand  
over my eyes. The sill marked  
with that toothy noise pulled  
from my throat in the dark. Like a scarf

from the maw of a telethon magician  
trying to cure a hurt. Here on the mountain  
moss presses its cheek  
to the wrong side of the trees.

*Cedar-Apple Rust*

I wait for the house to draw still. The tabby prowler in the kitchen.

Fungus in the trunks of the cedar windscreen, sighs, releases spores.

Voles drown quietly in the well.

The galls tumor and tendril in the winter rain, mucous fingers, their rusting apparatus of destruction.

I take off all my clothes.

I get out of bed and lie on the rough blue loops of carpet.

I shiver and roil as though pumped through too narrow an aperture.

I lie still and allow the cold.

Allow the body.