

Days like Survival

Beginning in the midst of things
that split or burn or tear the skin
with happenstance, this elegant, unkempt earth
of rust and dust, smashed cat and armadillo
roadkill, abandoned pickup trucks
blocking the berm. A fine scum of rumor and pine pollen
coats cars and sidewalks, spring's clumsy fingers
smear the seen with allergens: the predictable machinery
cranks up and body opens into morning,
damage done and not yet done, the hector and the haze
of early. Open the kitchen window, wait for its
drift and settle; open the front door that won't lock
properly, walk out with calcium-deficient bones, a rising
viral load, testing degrees of never
that set the temperature as something more
than temperate. Pause now, breathe in
an air of joblessness, its daylong sickly-sweet
catch in the throat. Warm
chapped hands at the world, welcome spring
with floods and heavy snows
across the continental weather zone,
a lingering low-pressure system's states
of insecurity, far west of this here and now
awash with these azaleas' purples,
pinks, and whites, these late camellia reds.

By the Entrance to Cordova Mall, I Sat Down and Wept

inside my overheated car, where no one
could hear. Song said *I come up hard*. Song said
Freddie's dead. I overheard, heard under that
the drone of air conditioning
that wasn't on, or wafted from the

women's shoe department, drained the battery
that made the music play those words
into those ears. Song said "Trouble
Man" from 1972, trouble lasts
that long, and longer, sweet badass song

stuck on repeat, a desert wind
inside my paid-for car, sand drift metallic
drifting in Park. A suburban song
for sure, the parking lot
an asphalt meadow flowering

with pickup trucks and budding Bible
stickers planted on every other car. I overspoke,
leaned into beige spokes of the
steering wheel, Toyota, and cried away
the songs I'd learned

too well, I was a secret
that the hurtling-into-summer world
had kept too well. I turned
the key, I drove into the day
that didn't know my name,

drove myself sane again,
and came up hard to the first red light.

And Therefore I Have Sailed the Seas and Come

Everything there was a quotation of itself, “warehouse”
and “access road” and “four-door sedan” tainted
by images, a kind of soundless puppet
opera. The monetary gods stuck in their blank
eternity were selling every scrap
of seem, an emptiness disguised
as beauty, or geography. (The concrete is an obstacle
and will be hauled away with all the other
storm debris, downed lengths of power line
and pine trees for the paper factory.)
I stayed awake all night waiting for empire
while the radio played *Why was I born:*
arose into this blighted wanderland (arose
is not a rose), polluted forest of the

As If from the Dead

One foggy day a photograph
walks down the road, trying to hitch a ride
downtown, where nothing's open Sundays
anyway. I lost it years ago, water-damaged, fading
on a forgetful windowsill, or washed out
with a pair of old jeans, a worn-out pair of sneakers
to balance the load. Or passed it by
like men shouting from the Bible
in slow motion on summer sidewalks,
where it's too hot to walk, or just standing there
in arms-raised white-shirt ties. Rolled-up windows
block the sound, car stereo drowns it out while
other voices swim cool waves of air-conditioned
sound filling the car, rising till there's
no place to breathe: it's hard to listen
underwater, easier to hear
what's barely said. A gesture language of damnation's
blurred by turning wheels and axles and the sheen
of speed, as if everything's been hosed down
and buffed to a reflective
shine. Memory looks into the light
that hasn't changed yet, pulls
the visor down to cut the glare (that fog
burned off hours ago, but left this haze). Song
stops a minute, makes a small
suggestion: *Let us think
only of the instant*. And then it's gone, the traffic
starts again. An empty car is halfway home.

Attempted Birdcage Number Three

The visual surround collapsed into
pine tree, main power line, mailbox, garbage
can pulled up beside the road, repeating
blues and greens; the little interruptions

got bigger and bigger, building gaps
among the live oak branches. For days
the mower wouldn't start
because of cold, finally cut the damp yard

down to size. Grass mocked our aspirations to be good
with its tangled root systems, its determination
not to be supplanted; dew shone in early sunlight
like virtue and evaporated. Facts are like frames:

we mapped the plants and called them
weather, mapped the plants
and called them soil, sandy loam
rain drains right through

down to the water table, down
to Boulder Creek, to Thompson Bayou, ends up
in Escambia Bay, undrinkable. Squirrels harass
the birdfeeders and won't scare, the finches

stay away. The garden's overgrown
with weeds' strength of will, done in
by an early frost, leaves wilt and wither
under the naked-air agenda. My body

is so porous, let this weather disappear me.

To Be Free

It's winter in my body all year long, I wake up
with music pouring from my skin, morning
burning behind closed blinds. Dead
light, dead warmth on dead skin

cells, the sky is wrong
again. Hope clings to me like damp
sheets, lies to my skin. As if I were a coat
wearing my bare body out on loan,

accumulated layers of mistake
and identity, never mine.
I'm dressed as so many people, well known
wrong me reviving my old heresies,

praying them into sunset
and the weather they'll become:
folding them into snow. The forecasts
are always accurate, the only promises

kept. Foolish Narcissus frittered himself away
to a flower, Echo suffered down her life
to someone else's syllables wind throws
away. Neither knew how to survive

the period style, long days
in their disastrous completeness.
I won't let the myths outlive me, won't drown
in my nostalgia for the here and now.

I lie down in imperial purple
as if I were the sun, lay my body down
in distance. Correct all deviations
and make the moon change its tune.

The New Life

I woke in the middle of a wooded
trailer park (in the middle
of somebody's lies), lying mired in a muddle
about where I was, with nothing
I could call my own: no shoes, no shirt, no pants,

no socks, no job or occupation, income
none. Wrecked mobile homes
on either side hinted at ruin
come and gone astray, what might return
for dinner, bringing friends

and friends of friends. The earth dressed down
in withered grasses and crashed trees, pine straw
and rusted household appliances,
made a welcome for me, made a grave
to mock me back to sleep. Raw sunlight

ignited my dissolving bones,
buried me alive in my disintegrating
body. How long it takes not to move.
My tarnished-penny idioms discoloring
unfinished loam, knife-edged

and neverward, I decided
not to die that day, made my mobility
my theme: stood up to red clay dust
and downed corrugated fencing, uncollected
with the other storm debris.