

Three Prose Poems

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Claims

As dark memories say to themselves, the only flower to grow now and then is nasturtiums, little elephant's ears. My grandmother opened her eye and sang the bitter batter butter song. Under the case the pillow was striped in indigo. And then a kiss like a windflower came and had a final note written on its back; and the cloud that had seemed so much like the shape of some mountain, some climax of the heart, pulled gently apart as the soft cells of lips do, the flowers, the anemones, seem to say. I try to hide it, but my wife steals. Or so I claim. And my neighbors leave their pit bull puppy out all night in the teens and the snow. My face is red, as if I have been caught. Sundays someone drives by and throws bagged spam in the yard. I crouch at the louvered dawn window but never see the car, and presentimentos turn into grandpa stink on my fingers. I roll a number into hundred penny Tampa Nuggets at a yellow linoleum table. Across the path in the woods the cardinal doop de doops around the corner of the house in the snow, but doesn't fly. I don't know where he does. I can't afford seed. Cats hunt my yard too. And my pit bull plays his favorite game: Freight Train. It's fast. That stuff seemed true as an urn just a moment ago. I have no wife but she does steal. Or so I claim. The whiteness hangs on the branches, the fences, thick and damp enough to make men with. Death grew like a garlic the ultimate cliché and then flopped over when it was ready to pull and dry. Or so these pinched flowers seem to deny, and in denying, say.

Hours

The bruises change with the hour. You lie in bed listening to the Lloyd Cole the semi-invented Russian did or did not send across the Kremlin spires like a gaunt black bird tall in the gawking sky, something foreign inside you. They are invisible, these marks, like the birds flying in the night, like the H under my tongue of orangewood, because I conceal them, even from you know when. When they are has-beens on the phone they are quieter, naturally, because they are more humiliated to be beside themselves with grief or lust or some difference slid subtly between the two. The sentence they were saying was not so important anyway that it should mean not picking up the new cell and talking to the intimate who bides his time against a pit and the husband's missing it, Hong Kong silk floral belted tops identified as black-eyed Susans. He knows the half life of bruises, how ugly they become to the beholder as the black cars hurtle down the tracks like crows that sound in the tall firs here by the Sound like carbon steel poured into a four-chambered cauldron that has no handle or name. Maybe it had a name once but the name is gone. You get me, yes? He recognizes patterns, can map the water on your cheek with a family of fingertips. The card with a folded leaf, a signature inside, got put in a place so careful it was never seen again, just like so many signs or empty chairs in by the water restaurants or a seat in black cars at the sign store where the mattress man stepped back silent into the side door of his unlit cigar or the printer that would print the photographs never materialized. This is not to say that bruises are a life unto themselves, the blue stuff in the backed up tub sufficient and verisimilitudinous, if you will pardon me that, but it is true, you must, or possibly should, admit, that looking at them reverse in the mirror is poetical, if poetical means purple, which it does, in my self-administered case. It's when they become livid and turn black and green, meaning the capillaries that got burst from the impact have begun to die and the blood pooled under the skin to rot, that one wishes to ignore their presence from behind a closed and musical door.

Jury Duty Letter

If there were a songbird in this letter it would sing. I am no puppeteer. Only what we started for would last, in our imaginings. The pillows on the bed grew flatter, and yellow with my invisible head. Someone would have said something by now, if there was a story to tell. If there were a story, my verbs would be delicious embers of a forgotten nectarine. I never forgot, by the way. It was in LAX. I was 11. Claude Schwartz, someone from my school in Georgia, was there. He had been in Hawaii. I had already eaten the nectarine. Claude and I mimicked various brass instruments around the gate. My cheeks were sore across the continent. After California, the water in Columbus tasted disgusting. The light in the kitchen was late and thin. Who let you eat bacon cooked this way, my mother would later demand to know. The linoleum was streaked on the table, like the eggs I spilled on it.

