

Between

I watch as a spotted cow tenderly licks another cow
beneath an ear shaped like one leaf of a four-leaf clover

in a barnyard shouldered between secondary roads
and a brand new modular home, where three guys heave-ho

at a cable big around as my arm, trying to get the house
hooked up to a utility pole, and for some reason

they remind me of subjects in a painting, a bucolic pastoral,
or a heroic tableau of some legendary battle's pivotal moment—

planting a flag, hauling in a lifeboat of the half-drowned—
you know, the kind where if anyone's dying, they're doing it

so monumentally it's only an aesthetic, abstracted kind of sad?
I rely on that distance. Anything to keep the brick off my chest.

But I can't stop looking, either, and the cows are spavined,
underfed, the house someone punched the clock hard to buy

is ugly, almost windowless. And the men are stalled. They spit,
look defeated. Then again, maybe I'm wrong, maybe they're just

taking a break. I can't always tell the difference between sad
and sweet; sometimes they taste the same to me. It's a confusion

to which I'm prone, an allegiance, I won't say religion, but
it could be the only way I know how to pray. I keep tasting that ear,

tongue, those muscled backs, sweat and indecision, tenderness,
disappointment. A little bite of each, a redistribution of weight,

a feeling like a door in my chest scraping across its threshold,
and something else, a vibration, maybe a swarm of bees.

(Eve) Talking to Herself (Mother's Day)

You start where you always start, with the body. You like to get close, imagine body as landscape, yourself supine among furred hills, muscular plains. Let's be more specific. You're restless. Let's be direct. You're unreliable. You shift. You're itching to get back to that dark, leafy spot where you trampled the grass, culminated your heart out, crossed innocence, that narrow divide. When it comes to infidelity you're torn. You're tempted to define it as being faithful to what you really are. Let's talk about that, what you really are: turned earth, sticky pith, bitter milk of dandelion stems. Admit it. In this creation no matter what gets sowed you'll always be slut, never gardener. Who wouldn't ache for something new? You keep busy. You count all the beasts, catalogue every flying, crawling, swimming, wriggling, curled-up, unfurling you can find. You've got books, big ideas. But you're forever cleaning up somebody else's feathers and wax. Leaning on a broom, giving in to nostalgia as robins burble their evening song, you watch a boy aim for the net, over and over. You almost feel the ball leave his hands, each near miss trailing a helix of disappointment and aspiration. Awkwardness punctuated by grace. A boy becoming what he is. Making what he can make. Practicing. You made him that way.

Because the Moon is a Cliché & Not Exactly Steadfast

Moon, hearts, stars, flowers.

All of the above. And by above I mean where the stars are pinned, winking as they burn.

Because I'm not allowed to talk to the moon anymore.

Because the moon has amnesia. A sideways smile that always becomes a blind eye.
The moon is a recurring mistake, history's dumb rotation.

If you're going to touch me that way, I want you to look at me.

If you're going to touch me. Which we've agreed will never happen.

But let's say I could address you. Let's say a rag-rich page lay before me, blank and white
as your deckled skin, and I'm the one in the morning coat, a velvet collar for my chin
to brush against, consumptive quill in my grip, blood spot on my handkerchief.

What would I say to your vacant expanse? Something like, Moon, this time, take me with you
when you go. Or, Moon, are you really that cold?

Isn't heartache sweet? It tastes of everything you ever wanted. The rain-soaked lilacs
I pressed my face into as a child, knowing, even then, something I needed was there,
unreachable.

If you're going to touch me, I want you to drink the water from those lilacs.

Through Line

Innumerable robins, dandelions
gone over to perfect

overexposures poised for release an iron bridge
spanning a steep-sided river, shadows

falling sideways through the cables:
no climbing, no jumping, no rappelling

at any time the roadside
an uninterrupted stream of ripening

timothy, bird noise and cow
their brown and white arrangement, their undisguised

inquiry as we pass breaking up space
like the barbed wire's staccato

of uprights and horizontals a flimsy boundary
when you consider

what we're made of and that somebody
—despite the brand new barn's

acknowledged comforts and the farmer
checking for gaps

hawkweed, celandine and buttercup
might mask—

somebody might change their mind
something could break

and how would we know with all of this
blooming this temporary

rise and fall and light rain softening our edges?