

Commute

If I tell you about the woman struck
last year, killed, at Beacon & Mass
Ave, about her thin mermaid's hair

wound around the bike's gears,
chainwheel flung, thin whitewalls
spinning like a rifle-slackened fawn—

if I tell you, will you hear the truck
rumble, shift, already thundering, long-
gone up Storrow West, wedging its boxy heft

into a zipper of earthly traffic, one man
gesturing, at no one in particular,
another dialing, then hanging up—

will you hear? Will you listen for it?
Back at the scene, pedestrians crouch, some
do, plugged by earbuds to wash themselves,

to wash her, body of once was,
with bass, with talk radio, with anything
other than the soundless shape of this

casual unmaking. What I mean to say
is, whenever you have to be away
for work I don't sleep till the sun rises

in its globular bloat of peace, face
swollen white from deep water, the whole
night I've curved myself against the space

where your body would be, if not
lying somewhere far away, both of us
rehearsing the day we cross an intersection

toward this train, or that, sure any
minute we'll hear someone welcome us
home, lower the blue gas, place the spoons.

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Week Six of the Fire

after Aimee Nezhukumatathil

I have faith in the spindle of an aspen.
I have faith in its sugar-drenched bark, in the scorched-butterfly
bruise left by an elk's incisors. I have faith in the tree's skeleton
branch, in the flat stems helping each leaf survive the whiplash of mountain wind, I have
faith in anything with a steady tremble. In light that leaks through.

I, too, once trusted the itch of a velvet antler
to carry my hunger toward a grove. I trusted
something—instinct, desire, the buck's lung-shaped tracks—to keep me moving
through the fire, through scarves of molten citrine wafting in a vaulted sky, which is to say
out from under your body, beyond the memory of its long, easy weight,
its stack of ashen bones.

The fire blooms into its sixth week.

My faith grows heavy, a cloud baggy with grim rain.

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Honey

Of the sheep's four stomachs,
which would we jar, which stir
into tea? *Abomasum, omasum,*
reticulum, rumen. Amen. Cud
does loop the gullet like prayer.
And lettuce-hem *reticulum* shares
its name with the honeycomb's
net. But for a throat flayed raw
who among us would slice
the distended balloon, harvest
its porridge the color of bloat,
spoon it on a child's tongue?
Tell me how honey's different.
Even bees, crocus-drunk, split
their nectar, guttering most,
flume-like, into the loose purse
of a second stomach, sweet syrup
reservoir. Once back at the hive,
each bee regurgitates its swill into
the rapture of a waiting mouth. Gut
to gut, so nectar passes, in chains,
the fury of 20,000 wings boiling off
all water. And what do we produce?
What sap? Bees' profound necking
falls beyond our French kiss, closer
to the queer plunger of live birth.
Yet, in the dim thrill of evening
we advance. Why does a body turn
inside out like a sleeve at the soft
shock of lips unsealing, letting us in
and out like a canal's lock? To those
I have kissed, on granite stairs and
idling trains, under a roof cut out
to frame the sky: What passed
between us? How did it harden?
Whom does it nourish now?

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City Life

My 4-year-old starts to rename everything in terms of rats. At first the playground behind our apartment: *Rat Park*. We visit a rose garden, then suddenly it's *Alive Rat Park* vs. *Dead Rat Park*. She's young enough to fear the living more than the dead, the way they hug the garage walls, run marble-eyed when we return at dusk. I hear her laugh at the blue bike some new tenant has fence-locked by the nest.

She's learning to live a city life, asking if I've heard that, and that, tipping an ear to the alley, cupping it with her hand small as a raccoon's paw. For her, death is the longest nap imaginable, maybe four hours. But we always wake at the end. I think of telling her, but don't, how I used to be afraid of rats, a transplant, more accustomed to field mice who'd come in through the Dutch door dividing

cornfields, forest and grass airstrip beyond, how my first year here I stopped rush hour to wrap a hit pigeon in a blanket, insisted on some natural dignity for the squirrel fallen from a tall Brahmin tree, brains frozen to the blacktop. How I tugged, then wrenched. But never for the rats. For months I stepped around the fat wolf-colored one

skull-knocked by a parking jeep outside my office, as it grew flat and flatter, gas and liquid and old poison leaking into familiar ground, until just tufts of rind and hair remained, and only for those who remembered. How I kept my distance, day after day until I came to love him, just in time.

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