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.

Originally published in North American Review
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.

*Originally published in Pleiades*
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?

*Originally published in Southern Indiana Review*
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.

*Originally published in* The Florida Review