

Wood

Imagine a lump,
brittle, misshapen; a lump
of wood, bleached from distillation,
veined with bitter brown striation.
If I cupped it in my hand,
and lifted it, airy, cork-like,
to my eye, I would see
the tiny tunnels of worms
who burrowed in and stayed to die.
Under the sleek grooves that give lie to
the hidden shredding shedding splinters,
the little holes, narrow, rotting,
are all I need to see the light.

Spider

My heart –

a bulbous spider, it

skips

over pulses

skitters

below the draconian ridge

of my breast.

Seeking freedom

from its web of veins,

threads of demand,

it wants to be alone.

It has practice in

deceit,

conceit

in its prowess. It is –

oh, sly, it is.

A corner for it

far from the twitches

of its draining children,

there it will find its way.

Memento Mori

How lovely, I say,
about the photograph
that has peeked from the pile,
hiding behind its flashier siblings,
a toddler at a party
he doesn't realize is for him.
Look at that bonnet, I point,
with a froth of lace
like baby's breath,
like the tatted edges
of this antique snapshot.
And that cavernous carriage;
what an old nanny,
starched up to the folds in her neck,
would call a pram.
What a pretty portrait, I remark,
perhaps the child's birthday.
My mother leans over,
says, The baby is dead.
The greeting card
Was tradition.
The baby sleeps as I stare,
picturing just out of frame,
the woman who slipped his arms through the sleeves,
arranged him on goosedown pillows,
smoothed the blanket over his stomach,
wrung her hands to numbness
as her dream disappeared
in a plume of acrid smoke.

Professor

On the first day of class

– maybe the second,

it is a second-day revelation–

she tells us her son died.

She looks like my mother,

a little:

no fuss blunt cut hair

blue eyes with laugh lines,

open oval faces

that are palimpsests

of shock; below

are the lingering remains

from the hard press of events

their own mothers never wanted

them to expect.

Walking into the classroom

is like coming home.

The boards are covered in distractions,

cursive disguising the occasional

chickenscratch jag,

a mournful joy to be found

in poetry, in reading,

in other children,

in overeating.

But still stretching underneath

is that grey carpet of grief

that must be tread upon

to go anywhere.

Windfarm

Waves leaching salt shrivel
planks jutting from the shore,
encroachments of human conceit.
Windmills tower atop as monuments
to the legion of techno-wonder
that came and saw and conquered.
Stark to match spare surroundings,
camouflaged to hide against the sky,
attempts at concealment
are exercises in failure.
Blades whip like swords thirsting for blood.
The air is thrashed into submission
and clouds shy away
from a path of casual destruction.
Heedless, these colossuses
march on towards the horizon,
so certain they will never
tumble over the brink.

Grimm

From the gloom of the gallery, we watched.

Mice observing the cats at play,
we admired their sharpened fangs,
their purring smiles,
the easy way their bodies twined.

We watched
and saw in her ourselves,
concealed by a curtain of satin,
shaking small under the stillness of fear.
When they had slunk back to their beds
for more quiet growls and rumbles,
we moved from our niches and crannies.

The moonlight cold replacement
for the expense of dripping tallow,
over the floor we skittered,
moving muted through the outlines
of whipping winter branches
that juddered a beat behind.

We stood in the places where they had posed,
stumbled through motions that slid off their limbs,
dug our toes in the grooves from glass slipper heels,
and remembered a smudge; a shadow that hid
in the arch of her foot,
a small stain that we knew
would never come clean.