

If the Stars Were Black, the Skies White

If pin stripes connected the dots of constellations.

If airplanes flew along them—if birds.

The constellations living now.

A man shackled to the wings of—

leaning into and telling secrets about.

He swings from beneath, clubs their feet.

If you ate like an insatiable cat,

drank like a crow who wanted a gun in his mouth.

If the house had a heartbeat, blood lines,

blue and red pulse. An organ in each room.

When water is the only recognizable feature,

a ribbon through swatches of land.

If every road were a bone—a femur.

The Dissected Maps that Form the Heart

There: a blue-eyed boy leaning
against barn doors, his fingers in his mouth.

Slip into the stream we grew out of,
splashed our feathered tails in.

Tired of the bridle hanging
without the horse and without the rider.

Tired of the snake tasting the air,
tasting the dog barking at its master.

As cold as the crescent moon,
yellow streetlights and unscarved throats.

Wake to the howl of a freight train,
your brother sprinting towards the tracks.

Your Algae-Coated Lungs

The earth wobbles you
right out the sky, grounds
you in the fog. You're a water-
breather, all gills and sharpened
talons. The picnic table slick
and soaking. You're kissing
like a scarecrow, thinking
I lost my feathers in the fight.
A hooded rooster, lunging,
in love with the sun-glare
flooding through the slats.
You prop open
the storm cellar,
you dress yourself
in papier-mâché.

Somewhere else the fog lifts—
you crush a leopard frog
in the quick click, puff
your chest full, eyes caviar
and wild against the muted leaves.

Arid/Aren't You Satisfied

Texas made your nose
bleed and throat go raw.
It was all dying rhino,
drying in the orange desert,
 folded sand banks,
 brittle breathing/brittle hide.

Or white pigeons splaying
wings back, plucking
nightshade, snatching out
each other's berry eyes.

You could look so smug
and proud, the blood-drenched
muzzle—a red fox basking
in a tundra blanket, curling
tail around long-gloved paws.

Mummification

Caribou neck swoops
and yawns, goes stiff
against slender, callous
oak. Rain freezes
everything in gloss sheets,
fish gasp at hollows
in the lake. Cream against
white—the antler chandelier
drips long ice daggers.

It's not even night yet,
and you're already hungry.

You think *white snow*,
white stag, *white shadow*,
in the autumn Adirondacks,
whispering *they eat the trees*.

Your fingers itching off
birch bark in brittle, powder
scrolls. The roots like thighs
straddling glacial boulders,
like they're aching for you,
like they grow fox fur
for you alone.

6

Works-skeletal

One: Weld the skull to a body, any body,
any body-like thing, send a current

up the pistons/spine. Springs contract
(condense), release you into movement,

into click, whir, long-dead beak,
and fractured jaw. *How long have I*

been dead? Guard your poppy seeds,
your peapods. Guard your wind chime

bones. Wind yourself in horsehair or pivot
on your copper-coil neck. Fill your

abdomen with neon, draw the beetles
to your many heads and feed.

Two: Fill your abdomen with nitrate,
breathe in beetles through your

exposed jaw. Springs latch your
mouth shut, snap. Slam your skull

8

against another, bleat your programmed
lines. Your organs are tick-tocking,

churning down a dead-end track. Beat
your brother, beat your molded clone.

Heat your blood up to a boil, release
steam through your gasket heart. Stuff

your limbs with straw, flap your thin-skin
wings and never leave the ground.

Three: Flap your skin-thin limbs against
your brother-clone. Memorize your

script, play it on loop, play it like a
record scratched. *Did I miss my cue?*

Let's move. Screw your joints tight,
wipe the rust off of the wheels. Fidget

with your buttons, your bowties, your
lacquered tail and bones. Turn your skull

translucent, let the spotlights penetrate
your brittle socket eyes. Break the bell jar

with electric beak. Blink on and off and
on again, blue/white blown-fuse brain.