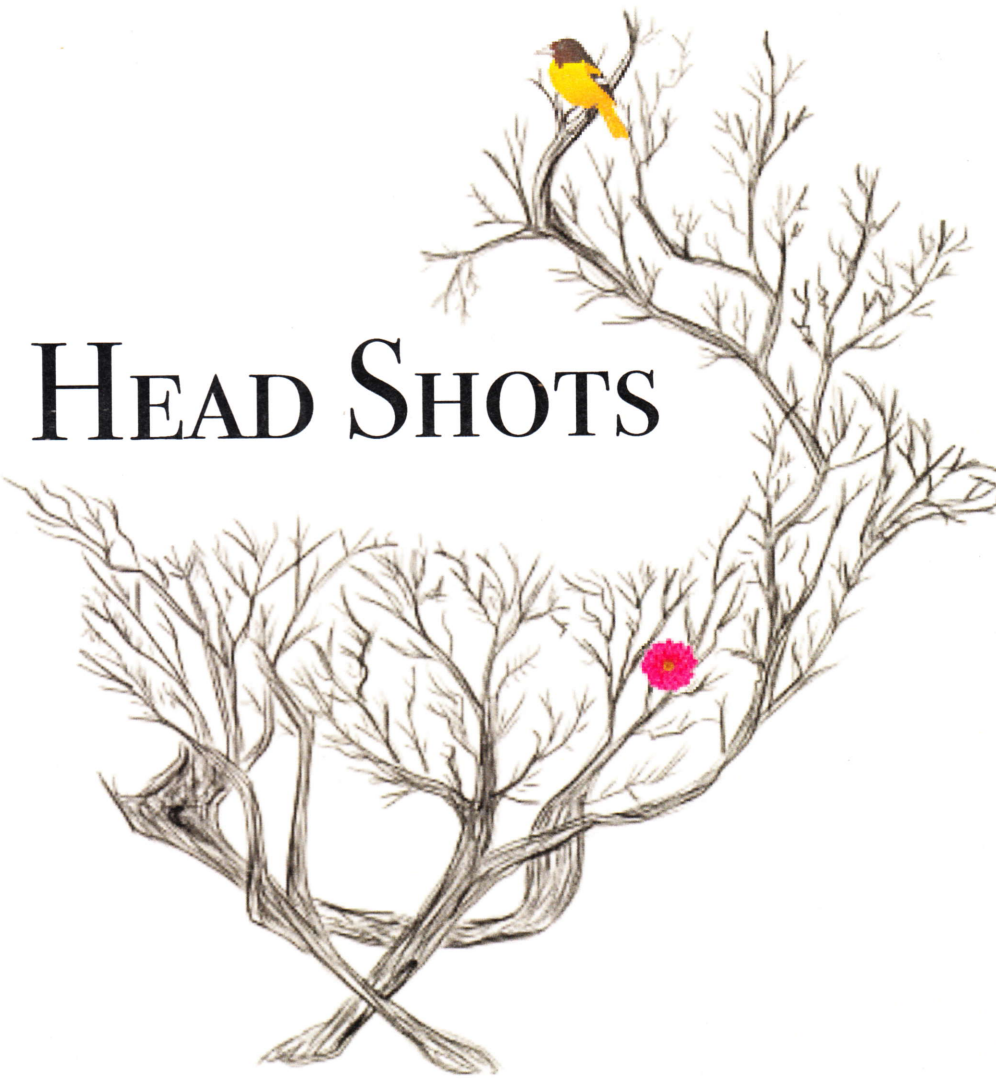




HEAD SHOTS

Janice Zerfas

Head Shots

Janice Zervas
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August Fair Time

This time of year the search lights go up,
late August, on the pick-up's fog lights, for
does kneeling in soybeans, gut piles hidden
in illegal deer bait. All that matters

this time of year is the weight
of anything stretched on a tarp, urine-
spilled and soaked abruptly. Even the guessing
of weight by looking at deer rubs or measuring
by eye a deer bed. Early a.m. Deer spotters.

Aiming their fog lights across a field, though
not to shoot, just to pinpoint where they browse
and breathe. Illegal, like sugar beets
or hardy chestnuts for deer bait,

but they make a routine of it this time of year
as if the Perseids dropping their weight far away.
Running their pick-up across the tomatoes will
bring the sheriff, the soybean farmer and his worm-
infested dogs. Today, they have aroused

a tripod of fawns and their doe. Without leaving
any bait, just the noise of their trampling,
they believe the doe will still be there still
in October. When the hills are no longer bracelets

of red hemorrhage. When their hands,
if they get it right, won't be carmine.
Where the gut pile will be hidden under leaves
and breathe. Where if they get it right,
the only weight will be the imprint their boots

make on the two-tracks crossing the field.

Head Shots

Chart your own head shots. As in: the tripod
legs that hold a telescope to watch the meteors,
tracks made as if in dirt, a star shower pre-light year,

pre-anchorite. Hold it with your trigger finger between
the wood stock and both of his deer blinds,
between the tarpaulin caving in holding rain-missives

and the dark struts of mice, between the gladiola
tip bent, splintered on dry grass, and everything
in the back acre that's going to ruin. Between

your picnic table that's lost its red flesh, your
eyesight scoped into a crisscross of dreadlocks
falling from the choke cherries, a lock of hair

that makes you wonder why you forgot to retrieve
it over funeral cake. Between the native yellow-gold
tiger lilies and the praying mantis cleaving in.

Between the air inhaled and the air exhaled
and no wind-shift between. Between the head shots,
taking a breath, and then you've nailed it, the rye
grass like his hair.

County Fair

A thousand wood planks look down on them.
One stall has horses with milkweed hair spun
from their heavy feet, a thousand hairs a day,
leading north as if north was the only direction.
One looks, from above, like a white cross
made into a beam with a pasture underneath,
and hay bales rolled in white plastic as a hedge.
One is a length of a sloping butterscotch back
resting, one I take my hand and run across
her side as if a field, wondering if I can hear
any breathing, calm as a barn door before it's
opened, the cistern cracked, granite under
the wood planks all that's left framing
my breath. Stalls where I hid,
easy to hide under the bales, notebook paper
cut with dead wasps, flattened walnut skin mixed
with a left-over red rag and a broken wire
from a muskrat trap the creek forgot. Here
I hid my aunt's long dresses, and added or
decreased their ballast if I wanted, here I found
a violet made-of-plastic pitchfork with a broken tine as if
my scepter, sprays of horse hair tails that I could swing
as if I was a horse of another color and myself,
where the air above lingered into pollen, and
I could exhale as if it was frost. Not that I favored
horses as girls do, as a sheared lamb would do.

Stalls that remembered calves held as prayer shawls. I hid deeper in when I heard the air of the tire pump or the milk pail delivery truck coming for its few pick-ups. Their silver hats waiting to be lifted, to be tipped over to collect a dam of milk, really ghosts in their pale skin, I wanted to say. Instead, I didn't see the live barbed wire, the roof that fell like a broken wing, the gas hose that led to the pump still running, cans of arsenic and fuel oil topped off, my notebook flapping off the barbed wire, and someone laughing.

County Fair Again

Another trip to the stalls at the county fair where the white and black spooled cows are mistaken for harlequins—spotted black, spotted white, as if at a carnival. As if the stall an ancestral cave and a blotted bull's eye, a black diadem, on white flesh. Kneeling here, looking up, my hand running along the soft field of its back, I could be looking up at the moon; matter of fact, I could insert the moon's falling cadence, along with the barn and the scythe, the village idiot and the woman knocking over the milk pail she was saying her prayers on. You could put me in upside down and then you could lay opposite myself. So much circumference equals such a long and deep pausing breath. You could be Houdini, and I'm the girl who will levitate inside a cow carrying just a few milkweed pods and milk spray buds budding from her waist. There's a barn with arsenic perfumed with oil, and a silo lassoed with sparrows. And this is only one kind of cow! Not to mention black angus or butterscotch or Longhorns or veal. They are quiet as the two tracks at night until it's time to give. Then it's a melancholy Boogie-woogie better than Louie A. or the night crowded cicadas I hear through the fan. More sacred than bread or honey, the spray of milk doused on my forehead as if I wanted a third eye. Or many! I can't tell you about the old one who used to douse me when I came too near. My skin, my forehead, my hands sticky sugared with milk spore. Was it the moon, I wondered, oxidizing on my skin? Or trying to stain me, give me an ardor, or make me rot, for what she knew was going to be mine.

Head Shots

We work at target practice until the Illinois license plates kick us out and then we run and hide in the nearby wetland until they disappear. They aim at anything, their rounds producing testicle size holes, scabs they make on the picnic tables, the drooping awning, the 3D targets barely recessed into the sloping hill. No matter that there's a swan billeted on her eggs nearby, the wood for the nest split wide as if a broken shield. Bored with cinderblocks, gurgling clay pigeons, the screws folding into the sawhorses, they shoot their blood holes making a new spine for the building's backside. If only the building's camera could have caught these FIPS, their faces simmering with spit, laughing at the casings they peed on, the signs asking to leave the remains. When the head shot leans sideways, they lean sideways too. When the head shot lost its forehead, they yelled even more, *sucka*. The building sweats with their armpit stain while they toast each other with whiskey mixed with Mountain Dew, throwing the greenish cans above as if the viscera peeled from a grape. We wondered out loud how they haven't seen the swan, resting like a bleached white baseball cap they could pull from the nest. I haven't seen her either now, most likely headed for the underground watersheds of Dowagiac, the wetlands extending for miles between jewels of pine sap and water-starred dragonflies swinging over my face. After they leave, we walk over the remains of the casings as if they were the protruding eyes of a praying mantis. If only they could have turned themselves into a head shot: the swan's wings caked over them, a feather dropping like a casing.

Michigan History

I hate the field trip to the Niles museum where I found a mantel from Harper's Ferry, white and cobalt marbled.

The curator says, *Would you like to see the black and white photo of Tommy James and the Shondells?*

That jerk, my ex-ex boyfriend says, tightening his fists.

He looks at the picture and says he should have taken him out.

Is it me who wonders why T.J. is still an issue?

Is it me who asks about unlived desire?

I stand attentive, watch for PTSD illuminations.

At midnight, in the bathroom, he wishes for an erection.

Never walk the dogs near the brush, I recall him saying. Hidden coyotes.

Never speak of your ex-girlfriends in the same sentence.

By 1970 the majority of men who went to Nam were volunteers.

Midnight, fireflies carbonizing her blonde dirty ashen hair.

The Medals of Honor were burned in a barn fire.

Always wanting an erection, his hands in warm water.

Always through the bathroom wall, I hear him trying.

Another *Life* photo of local Niles volunteers in Da Nang.

He identifies one with a headband, and the girl with arms dressed in silk locust.

The cobalt hue of the mantel is a strip that runs along my thigh.

No one asks what happened to the women who slept with the Mickey Mouse boots?

How did they sing T. J.'s pop song? Under my gun?

I hum the melody but have forgotten the lyrics. Under my thumb?

He comes back to bed, says try again: *Now you be Tommy James.*

Past the Beekeepers,

and their drawers of honey,
with the drones getting noisier,
climbing over each other,

looking for the absent queen that's not there today,
easily found with the pink spike,
but missing today. Instead,

gashes of ferns and eucalyptus,
gladiolas wilting below the waist,
splayed as ruts along the 4H table.

Acorns and pine cones added at the last minute.
A branch chipped of any petals where someone's
stretched a rubber on the top gladiola flower.

Pale as the flower.
The bees look across at the splintered and shorn field
across the table. Their noise gets louder

as a paper shredder. They rise as grainy waves
within their dresser box, moving more frantically.
No one's moved the rubber from the flower exhibit.

We lean forward to get a better look
at the bees scrambling and aiming faster
than any Ouija pointer. I'm wondering who

used a rubber and here! With open stalls
and hotter than a loft in a barn on a 100 degree day,
with the gladiolas looking like bone,

their leaves turning to black leeches. I look
at the judge, think of telling her of someone's prank,
but consider pulling it off, rolling it in a napkin,

the napkin the guy gave me
with my free hot dog for my PTSD inflicted service,
but I decide not to. I might break the rubber

swathed flower. At least it's ready for love,
unlike the bees still trying to get out of their box,
bursting as seed, across the flower arrangements,

still looking for their queen.

Ode to a Fillet Board

What a spectral shine it has between the spread-out fish!
It seems as if to hide a ghost, his thumb holding on
to its jaw so it cannot speak. For me,
a wooden fillet board is enough, or even the back end
of my pickup. Here, the fillets are spread out
as if leaves brimmed in gold to examine, the knife
laid sideways pointing to the fish belly
whiter than my pale gut. For me,
I've never found the need to add to my line
and tackle another weight to carry
just to show off a granite cutting board
for my catch and caught, especially
the day I walked down to the river,
and saw the guy filleting his on the launch
picnic table, the launch with the camera near the trash can
with an eye viscous as a trout, the undersized ones,
nine and three quarters maybe he had clearly kept,
skinny as he was despite a baggy shirt and jeans,
always a sign of meth or dope in the back acre.
He was as pale as the soft crush of his illegal fish!
White as limestone, salt, perhaps the white background
of the periodic table!
But for days and days, driving by the misnamed local
Fisherman's Wharf, I have been thinking about his fish
and how little he got from them,
even if garlic and steamed.
Except for the waxen white bibs they made
trawled out of their wading holes,
white ruffs garlanded around a plate,
like the falling lace around a neck about to axed,
the white drawstrings falling from a cap
against the black granite shoulder.

Ode to a Scope

The first time I saw the eye
of a scope, I thought of my inner
eye—not a pimple or a red eczema blotch,
nor the red-capped head of a flycatcher.
The inner eye as real as the first menstrual blood,
or the mold spore I found on the bathroom stall,
flowering out into pitch black. The inner eye
strong as a flashlight I lost at camp,
the one I aimed as if the eye of a cabbage
moth's inner wing. I thought I lost this extra
sight that helps me see a blood pore on a tablecloth,
the rope that still binds the jack rabbit's legs,
the bird's neck not really knotted by the braided handle,
or the dark net of squares in a feather
making a calendar of night.

Intaglio.

And when I began to feel your presence again,
I rushed to the art history books,
so I could see the knob where the clam shell opens.
In some drawings, the feet outstretched hard as
a dulcimer's neck,
strings as a lathe—in others it's clearer
what the inner eye stirred up: a cat knocking
over a basket of grouse, vases and cups and grails,
a measuring cup with oil or vinegar
now spilled on its side, no longer blurring your sight.
But mostly the eye was a pollinator,
a wasp, honing in on the drops of oil that were left,
skimming them like tears.

Faith Call at the County Fair

I love the vendors at the county fair:
Methodists and Pentecostals next to honeycombs
honey jars as if they were Russian dolls. Either
the pastor or the beekeeper will come out
from around the table to ask if you want to inspect
her bees, or the pastor will supplicate you with prayer.
Be sure to respond to both to make each feel hopeful.
Furnaces, sprinkler systems, gutter helmets,
Sherriff-Goslin roofs, bath fitter refills—tools
to warm or wash the spirit. Leaf blowers
and lawn mowers to put it in its place.
Keep it from stirring too much.
The beekeeper will lift the honeycombed window,
and pull it towards you without a sting
to show you the golden knobs working in their wheel wells,
grace apparent. The pastor has nothing to show but a gesture.
He wants to lay his hand upon your flinching head. The local
political parties will be there at his flank, too timid to call and answer.
The hard concrete will make you thirst.
The local hospital offers free bottled water to anyone who asks.
I can see beyond his arms the gladiolas in the dried
flower exhibit, the tufts of petals at the bottom losing
their color. Personal lubricants, handmade soap, bee
powder and rose milk potion for stress and PTSD—
if the faith call doesn't work, there's always bee pollen.
And if it's raining, or if the 4-H exhibit stalls were scorching,
you'll be besieged with come and look, come and praise,
come and need these spatulas and steak knives, wind
chimes made of spoons, soft tingling in the wind shift,
of what you need and do not need.

Head Shots

After the Illinois FIPS have finished denting and kicking all but the stars reflecting on their windshields, we get out the coyote and turkey calls, and then practice until we can shoot two miles. Why not farther? If our girlfriends annoy us, we offer to teach them to aim at shooting stars or at the raccoon piss scrubbing a sumac nearby. The Illinois militia partiers have mixed their urine with smoke and ash from the head shots; the sandbags, long as my thigh, split as if stabbed with a pocket knife; the 3D targets exploding into white cotton while the skin the color of a sand dune presses open, not needing anyone's touch. We ask our girlfriends to tag the cat tails, to see if they get the joke; one said that the coyote call was a mix of Mick Jagger and Brian Wilson. Already the call seems different, a fake falsetto of swarming wasps and someone praying the rosary too fast. If liking to use the calls makes us seem old-fashioned and out-of-date, that's because we don't last until the end of the month. All of our hair is long and grey and tied into ponytails we never wash so that we can be scrubbed into their fur. We remember little of our story: The year he was out of boot camp? His father or himself? The woman he's holding with long black hair? His mother or a wife? The head shot rises inarticulate as dirt, and we stand nearby, with our calls, mocking it as if it was ourselves. With my last breath, I'll admit it, I'll be self-referential: lean into a coyote call.

We Learned the Orchards by Heart

After Jackson Holbert

We picked apples next to the migrants we ate head cheese with dill pickles we dusted the cukes with our ankles turned grey we tied dryer tape to the low-lying apple branches we trampled apples that were rotting in their skins like browsing deer skin until the stitches of the stars in apple cores poked out we lifted each other's apple slings stiff as our mothers' muslin dish towels we laid by the crates with the owners' stenciled names and watched as he topped off the crates we complained if he was in a hurry bruising the apples our diligent work pulling the apples in raindrops and sleet we looked for wasps in the apples as if beads in our pockets we never picked below our knees where the turkeys made their abscesses we wanted the color of apple skin on our fingernails, our lips, on our red bandanas but not on any other concavity or mouth we wanted to kiss or at least stand next to as we made the green branches an army canvas ceiling ignoring the flash flood in the ravine where he said he could build a house or put up a canvas tent for a while where no one would find it and did I want to live in it and I rubbed the tears on my t-shirt as if it was sweat when I said no and ran across the orchard grass and the apple stacked ladders and the red blood apples we held at our waists pretending we had a knob in our stomachs, still red, still ripe above our pudgy stomachs, still breathing, we had trapped an apple and then we let it go.

Head Shots

Pray I learn to aim and shoot, ruts I made in the dirt
where I fail to make the head shot that looks so much

like myself—the anatomy is the same: a blood hole
for the heart, arteries like balloon strings,

a face white as lard freckled with pink sprinkles.
I try to look as expressionless as the head shot when I aim,

hair ponytailed as a light gash,
choke cherries above constellating as if bloody drops.

I have an unfair advantage: knee bent
while my other leg holds my weight,

counting down before I take a shot,
while he/she doesn't even have prosthetics

to walk, the torso a shot-up melon
we used to knock about to see if it had

a sweeter heart. The noise has shorn bird calls away.

Looking so similar, do we think alike?
If I poke my finger into the holes, do I ask if I still believe?

If I misfire, will it be bone from my face? No excuses.
There are other possible targets—Zombie dead

or geometric puzzle cubes—with the kill zones clearly marked
(the deer's heart like a red bleeping bicycle light)

so why do I still prefer this ghostly patron,
benefactor, comatose avatar, that still

allows me to poke into his/her four-chambered heart?
I learn to exhale with the fired shot.

I learn to remember to take it off the safety.
I still recoil during the discharge.

With my arthritic wrist, I still disgorge
the sound scaring the neighbor's chickens

into the hollowed catalpa. Pray I aim too high,
or skid the dirt below. I never aim for his/her eyes, the viscosity

so much like mine, thick, protruding,
without a trail of what I've seen.

I'll let him/her keep looking
at what cannot be seen.

As if stunned to see the waxen pellucid faces,

the head shots stare back in the Louvre,
having felt the shape that light and oil spills,

a lake grey fur-brimmed hat with a feather,
or a turban with roiled coils of apple-hued silk,
another with a bear skin cap settling
on a man's head striking the shirt into red

carcass. Though he said not to think of a real
person's face while shooting, here the faces
look at you, recognize you with as much detail

as you do theirs: the man with the letter in his hand,
or the man gutting the shiny perch,
or the one you really like, the man breathing
on a bowl of coals to keep a steady flame,

wonders why the gun stock is by your side
as if a deer's leg you are slouching against.
The bowl his hands lift up and down has three
legs just like the arm rest you sometimes use.

He lifts the tongs with one coal to breathe
on it to make it simmer. The way I lift my weapon—
no one says gun here!—to make the head shot simmer.
Though I don't shoot, liking the concentration on his face,

so much like mine. Standing here, we are like the red eye
flickering on the surveyors' measuring posts,
the inner eye of the scope getting the sights right.
Not even the cross hairs really help, the nostrils

bulging into flaccid knots along his nose.
Breathing on the coals, turning to powder and dust,
he doesn't really see me aiming at the tongs in his hand,
the one he carries the coal to his mouth

(but not to kiss). I lean the weapon against my shoulder,
incline my cheek against the stock, feel the trigger's curl
the way his pinky curls around the tongs.
His face is so much bigger than a head shot!

If I was more adept, I'd aim at the leather straps
that fix a button hole, or the few hairs falling
out of his winter muffed hat, the green of his coat

a forest green where with his hat he may stretch out
and be initially mistaken for deer meat poached.
Before the birds filch the silence again. I won't aim at his chest,
or the shadow the tongs make.
His breath tries to preserve what will change inevitably
the minute I exhale.

Sometimes when I take the head shot down,

removing the torso still stapled to the post, the head shot pockmarked and splitting open, I wonder about how to hold the body after the last breath. I wonder if I should give it a name: the forehead is punctured as the outskirts of a rose window, while the lines of the tracery are already pink, conjuring wounds. His body, I decide, is soft as a full-blown white rose, the kind that doesn't open, but stays thick as a socket, showing only the mouth.

If I gave him a name, should I consider the outline to have a soul also?

A soul like a rag dipped
in kerosene to wipe across the dog's flea-
ridden abscessed back. I hold the head shot,
no longer rigid, the paper absorbing the lake water
fog and fire fly spattered rain missives, and
carefully lay him on the grass.

Any moment
I expect him to breathe, the lungs rising as if
the panting dog I stirred the oil on,
just enough to give it a smell. I expect this head shot
to talk to me, but why? A rose cabbage,
cutworms dragging along the tomato stalks,
or the bee dangling like a cameo from the zinnia's
constellating face—all better to set one's practice
sights.

I hope his ghost isn't angry with me,
practicing my sights across his chest. I politely
avoid the heart and the sweat stains under his arms.
When I look again, his jeans caked with mud
and a mulberry pockmarked spray, a duffel bag
over his shoulder. Flea bitten himself, and burrs
that have nestled by the post in his hair.

I didn't expect
you, I tell him, to come back. Your self
no different than a sketch book drawing
of a torso about to be an anatomy lesson,
with the skin flayed off near the elbow to show
the rose you are within.

Pink, rather than white,
though some even make bone rings out of the bones,
amulets for the ex to recall. I lay your body
on the grass, on the deer bed where you used
to sleep, too dirty from the street to come in,
so you said.

Here, I lay you to rest,
my trigger finger aiming at a new head shot
without a name, a face I don't recall,
a memory that's not mine.

The morning before shooting season and stars,

the two tracks have already been worn
down to a well-used bolt that barely locks,

hatchets and knives held like wheat cut
across the skin, a gash cut in the field's center,

where they practice for deer that are not upwind,
meat-packing boxes and ropes towed

along the shoulders a cross bar for stringing
the truck tires and crowbar, those in cameo—

shorn of their old skin and pewter slick faces.
The early a.m. shooters have already passed

into Allegan's river-locked woods.
For the deer blind that's just a tarp

it's another windy day of huckleberries
and water mocs curling in the residue

of Swisher Sweet cigars and Jim Beam,
the deer still browsing where they always browsed,

the soft maples dropping their mass of helicopter seeds,
the only ruffled sound we'll hear in the woods.

Some days the machine said the man should eat minnows.

Behind the counter, blue plastic wine barrels with hoses
leading from one to the other, speaking air. A band

of turkey feathers on the wall as if a rainbow,
My not yet but nearly ex-lover walking through

the non-clearance lures, a fishing net knotted
next to a mounted trout as if against the current.

Next to the trout a rope, like a rope for lynching,
a rope tied around a deer's neck as if a necktie.

Dragged for so many hours that it became a harness
in-grown within the skin unable to remove it later.

The owner watches us pause beneath the deer
with its head swiveled to the left, as if looking away

from us, as if still trying to escape, as if not really
dying from the shoulder wound. The caught

looking away from the deer camp while I'm
standing here with a silver winged Tinkerbelle

around my pretty turkey guzzled neck.
Why is it like that? I asked. A smart ass,

he said, loud enough for the counter guy to hear.
Opening our blue margarine container with shavings

and worms, I heard the next day that he was caught
walking around his store without any clothes,

a knotted rope around his neck, pouring beer
in his minnow kegs, poking the minnows

with his antlers tied with a slit sock around his head.

Target Practice

And then when I haven't been target practicing
for years, no clay pigeons to spool above me,
or having a tantrum at the sumacs,
knocking off the red eye at the tip,
I wonder how I gave my eye and my stance
over to the whole thing. I remember learning
to pause, just pulling the curved trigger ring,
and count the number of pearl buttons
along my shirt, as if my chest exposed
my lungs with their branches of beaded
gemstones, as if my breathing could take
more blood in or stammer my pulse, and
could become the breathing of what
was in my scope—the large doe
walking in the zinnias by the goat pen.
I don't know how long I looked through
my scope, but I looked. And my eyesight
was such that I did nothing as a woman
leaning in to shoot, and an older woman
at that, that I didn't want to do. If I'd been
more curious, I could have sprawled
some buckshot at the creek where the doe
pushed in the zinnia wheels, or I could have
knocked out the lever on the non-working
doorbell I've never heard ring, or I could have
sprayed at the creek where she lay fat as a duffel
bag filled with useless items. I could have disobeyed
the rules and aimed at her eyes glinting as if amber
bottles in the field, long discarded. Well,
there could have been carcasses spread as if
tablecloths across my kitchen table, especially
the day I tumbled on the deer skeleton,

bent like an accordion in the field. I took
a lovely sprain! That month was an adjustment,
trying to kneel my scope along the target's wide
meteoric circles on a paper plate. I miss not
the target practice, not the sound of the crack
that I never hear hitting the doe's breath, but
I miss the long perusal of an eye looking back at me
by the creek, wondering when he would leave,
and why didn't I shoot even a warning,
just to test his nerve.

Recipe for Writing

It doesn't have to be iron (Fe)
or salt (NaCl); it could be the oriole
that's hanging around still
on the unkempt mulberry
though it's a day after the solstice;
or the neighbors late at twilight still
with their target practice,
and the sound of an AR-15
and nine-millimeter rounds
coming across the rows

of lettuce and romaine, lightweight
green beans. Just let the lines
of the rows making brown rivulets
in the garden bed, where they

have trampled their own seedlings
they planted late lead you to the creek
bed nearby, the water so low
that you may not know if the
current will make a splash and gargle
of syllables, but if you wait, count

the praying mantises and the dragonflies
hitting the water as bullets at a misplaced target,
images will come.

The County Fair Made You Want to Fly

The coming storm on the great lake is waiting to be heard.
As if waiting for an outdoor concert at the fair
when the stage lights begin to snap off, hide from the wind shift
until you find you can't cancel the mesostorm,

or run to the exhibit with the gutter helmets,
shields made of braille, that you can shake and shiver,
just to hear the noise of raft on water or hide in the stalls,
the color of fermenting cider. You'll have to accept

that you have to wait. Your purple tansy ribbons darker
now than the freshwater lake only a few breaths away. Your breath
slow as the spigot of the coiled hose, and a film of oil
and deer flies in the trough. You'll have to watch

the darkening pond of the sky come through, wind
heavier than wine barrels and apple packing crates falling
from the loft, the day you bungee-corded the house
dresses, and tried to fly. At least

the pitchforks were made of plastic, oddly lavender-hued,
lovely as candlesticks. Grain and feed sacks piled high
below even if not made of cloth. The lettering and numbers
for weight upside down. No tripping on scattered harnesses

or a random milk pail lid thrown as a Frisbee. The sound of the wind
now as if the feral kittens hidden in the dry wall where the stall
didn't meet. What made you leap off the hayloft anyway?

No older brothers with wadded t-shirts or hidden hard
cider. No older uncle grabbing and lifting you up
against your will, throwing you down. Dead sparrow.
Nor mothers or aunts with their canning aprons,

saying nothing. At the fair, everyone waiting, as if leaning
on a hay bale on a raft, trees rising as if storm clouds,
then dissipating. Your breath, your pulse slower now, just like
the flaking paint at the fair's entrance. Just like air

circulating with a fan by your feet. Aiming
at the barn wall. You can take it easy now.
Already the storm is different.
It has made the flyway clear.

CELERY CITY CHAPBOOKS



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