

Hunger Weather

A man a woman close to creation

Proem

*All eyes above, all wing under,
mouth and hand useless as stone
to hold it: sun-like it foils
your legs, wilderness of cold
in the willow green valley.
Numb lips, paralyze tongues,
do not forgive this destruction.
Hardheaded and blind your god of deer
cripples the afternoon. Plump fruit
and quail perish in his rack.
Go into the trees and blossoms.
His hooves deepen the furrow
you can't quite see.*

*Suppose him
chewing roses. Red mash oozes
his hairy lips. Is this what you
mean? Brute tongue crushing,
jaws awry: elements elements
Look. The air is sundered. Bees
or doves or a kind of electric fish
talk in the leaves.*

*I'll be here.
Accept his palm up from your lap,
carry your own to his deadly pride,
remove the plunged and pitiful fruit,
stroke him.*

*Speak, the spell is gone,
roses fall from his lips, the sun
displaces all touch by sound.
Kiss him, he'll never go.*

*Lie down. Don't look. Lie down.
Spiders will find your eyes.
Punish the grass with love
while I club to death the muscle
of his back. I'll hang his skin
and cage among the oranges for crow.
You will be young again.*

1

River at the Y solid frozen
with ducks' feet. So cold
they don't know they're dying.
If I could walk that thin
there'd be food all winter.

Stubble field buried
in pheasants buried in snow
but thin to eat. Ducks fat
quiet before the wind.

A quail
lay in my hand like a kiss.
Neither of us warm.

Up the valley bales drop
to penned cattle. Nothing
for free deer.

2

If raven
had my knife and I his wing
river would buckle, crack
ducks, ice onto their backs
spintered deep for my weapon.

If fox
had my heart and I his tooth
wild fence rail would gut
deer for my steaming hut
stood in wet vibration.

3

Under the sun under the wind
under the layers of cloth
wound tree, better to suck
gristle in knuckled cold
than love. Better to feather
your mouth with death than beg.
How warm I will be in your belly.

4

First sun walks in it.

Then flies. It multiplies.
Part-born and dying
feed on dead and unborn,
it greens around the edges.
Then weed to belly,
something red in his beak
the sun flaps seawise,
underwings full of dark
pinion and leech. Then
the bedstone trembles,
the mud bulges, boils
and bears old skin-and-toes,
salamander, newt,
ears of webbed fire.
Long as water lives
he loves to breathe it
dry again, scorch
grass with his tongue,
rock with his hot eye
then wind up in his tail,
lie deep in the bowels
of hilarious earth.

5

Every spring as soon as rain
stops making things grow
they burn the hills.
Quail race the flame
rats and rabbits carry
whistling on their backs.
Hornets divebomb the smoke.
Grass is an animal escaping.
The slowest smother under oil,
bake from bone to scale,
crack under thin black feet
when crows turn the ash.

6

Humped in death's armpit buzzard
does not love the filth he eats
worm does not love the tight fruit
bee loves no sweetness and stings
whoever comes to it. Horses breed

on the hills a narrow fruit to herd
under them in reasonable groves.
Whatever lives here chews miracles.

7

Like cutting teeth, antlers push the brain.
Swollen flesh throbs each weather change,
rings every sound. Flies sting the velvet,
lay eggs in blood deep under it. Once the herd
breaks up the worms hatch out, blood turns
into bone, the engine is complete.
They breathe wings. Heat and gristle
tempt them into the shade. The air is on fire.
All night they thump and rattle bone to bone
hoping to shake loose the blood eating inside.
At last one wins. One lies ruined, leaves
clotting his lungs; one stands ruined living.
Swarms of blue dance in the quickening sun.

8

Fifteen, a boy's body, Tristan taught
Mark's huntsmen the ceremony of the hart.
Excoriaton: lip to belly, legs fore
and hind, slicing gently not to tear
as hide cleaves to tensing flesh until
flesh lies naked to his knife; pull
forequarters from breast, breast from chine
and flank, hindquarters as one, all lain
on the hide; his hands still so clean
his eager students rip out the guts.
Fourchée: liver, pizzle, testicles and net
bound with green bast to a green fork.
Quarry: free the pluck, quarter the heart's
lower half, detach milt and lungs, separate
the head; what's left goes to the poor;
milt, lungs, guts and heart's quarters
fed chopped to the hounds out of courtesy.
To trumpets his dismembered parts proceed
to court in polite mockery: antlers first,
then limbs, ribs, quarry all led by the breast;
at last, above these, high over their music
bobs and wavers the green forked stick.

9

One of the ducks screams.
Ridiculous sound for a duck.
Something, something in the water
not the cold, is eating his feet.
In a moment he will be free.
The others sense it. Wind
carries their duck emotions
with exquisite indifference.
The pheasants choose to ignore.
The deer no longer hear the ducks.

10

A duck will live a time with no food.
A few days, he stops trying his wings,
concentrates on understanding ice,
converses with his fellow duck.
He can hardly see the good
in leaving his feet for food
but through the hole he opens
before the water heals, wind enters,
whistles far back in its throat
and goes under. Waves kick it.
If it comes out of the hole it's tone
is flatter. If it doesn't come
probably the ducks if they hear anything
but themselves hear it as a tickling
in what they do not know they have.

11

I walk among the pheasants.
Snow explodes. Green and gold
spatter then disappear.
Another snow bank.

A few let me touch them.
Some are still
while I clear their form
then head for more snow,

When I get to the deer
I will show them:
Plunge to flatten

Pitch sideways for paths
Lie back first for hollow beds.

I will know them with my hands
on their shoulders, necks, rub
noses, flanks with my hands.

We will leap fences
for hay until the owners
come. We will go back
to snow and sleep close
and share the cold.