

83 - ARCHAEOPTERYX

Risotto was the caterer's specialty. I spent hours
in his kitchen on Beacon Street rinsing it from china
and scrubbing it from the pots it simmered in.

Some days I can still smell it on my hands,
along with the slightest breath of cold prime rib
and slightly sickening bouquet of gray, day-old salmon.

As bright and beautiful as they are,
cardinals nesting in an eave of a porch
carry on their talons the worm's scent,

just as lions do the stench of the carcasses
they rip apart on the veldt, where last week
scientists found a nine-year-old's two-million-year-old skull.

It's been years since I bussed tables and washed dishes.
You would have thought the smells would dissipate, but
who can, despite the lengths he will go to,
conceal the less refined aspects of his evolution?
To wit: breaking my trumpet in seventh grade
carrying it to school in the bottom of my book bag
because I was afraid what the other kids might think,
and for years gleaning only an impression
of the world through which I passed because
I refused to wear glasses whose lenses were too thick.

I faked injuries for attention, threatened suicide
on a pier in Rhode Island after drinking too much vodka,
tried after too much wine to claim the mild abrasions
I'd suffered during a relatively antiseptic life
were an emotional match for Lainy's childhood
with a single mother who didn't quite speak the language.

I was once asked in an interview to pinpoint the moment
I became who I am, the person they wanted to hire,
as if life were stop-motion, as if we can reconcile
position and direction, but I'm never who I am,
only who I was and yet long to be.

My teeth and tail might be a reptile's
and the embarrassing fossils of my experience
preserved in layers of sediment,
but yet I hope the wings I'm sprouting lead to flight.

51 - TESSERACT

There's a story my father tells about a driver
on the trolley line that quit running along
the last leg of the bus's route forty years ago.
Joe Kelly stopped one night between stops,
invited passengers to a party at the Clancys'—
who lived next to Mount St. Joseph's—and
had to leave a half-hour later at the clang of
the bell of the car stuck behind on the tracks.
There's what happened, my father's version
of what happened, my version of my father's
version, your interpretation of my version
and, should you retell it, your audience's
interpretation of your interpretation of my
version of my father's version of the story.

When Amy and I lost track of time, we were
lucky to catch the last train out of Park Street,
got to Cleveland Circle too late for a bus.
We had to call for a ride. Standing where
I stand now, looking at me standing where
I stood then, wondering what I was thinking
imagining what Amy's father, a man who
used silence, was thinking standing where he
stood eyeing his daughter and her laughably
thin date, trying to distinguish defiance
from mistake, my present me wonders
if his present him remembers my memory.

Driving back and forth to college along the route, trips accumulated, the car like the neurons that inscribe pathways between synapses. They create the means to remember: the times of day, if the sun was out, if mist was rising from the thawing reservoir, if I drove with the window down, arm hanging in the breeze flowing past my parents' beat-up Honda, plastic Mary glued to the dashboard.

But then I can't hold it all in my head. It's too big, like one of those paintings in a museum or the apse of a church. To examine any one part of it, to notice tiny cracks in the paint, saints' elongated fingers, is to ignore the top of the canvas where otherworldly light breasts the heavens. To remember any one stretch of route is to climb the great pyramid of association—the monument store, its model gravestones littering the front lawn, and the caterer where Bobby's mother got us jobs after he was fired from McDonald's; we loaded and unloaded trucks with serving pans and boxes of boxed lunches too heavy for weak arms. But to remember is to forget, forget where the bus runs past the street on which Amy grew up, the path where I'd linger in hopes of pretending to casually run into her because I was too afraid to call and ask her out.

The bus is full, for each thought an object:
me, the annoying couple talking
too loudly about their weekend plans,
the kid rapping under his breath to what's
playing through his head phones,
the old woman with her shopping basket,
bundled, like Mrs. Whatsit, beyond
human recognition, three young women
I would have once felt the need to impress
with studied indifference, the girl reading
a textbook, her mother on the next seat
variously reprimanding her brother, who
won't sit still, and watching a daughter
learning in a language she hasn't learned.