

Lilacs

for Deborah Digges

Or the stiff white flame
of Kleenex rising, noble
and disposable,
to cauterize a border,
a daubing remnant
in the room emollient
with sweat, tears, semen.

Lonely as a stoic,
a leading cause of dust when crumpled,
into crumpled hands, it's snuffed.

I have only words
for the face-invading flora,
the fire petals
scattered down the aisle of my birth—
the bed drift white,
some escapable sheet
flapping like a sail above the wreck:

tissue, slough, and the bloated catacombs
of termites trickle down the mast.

My allegiance runs
in all directions, invisible as flag,
making invisible the wind.

There are bodies in the body
long beyond
expulsions, and abrasions, and arrivals.

Pollen fattens into crystals
at the corners of my eyes. It runs from me
in spider-green threads
through the ebbing of rock and stream,
and so ignites
a kind of stream within the temporary
mountains that the water makes.

Mother's Day

was all hope-martins and galley-birds
on whose tablet wrote
the ghosts of riverbeds engrassed

beside the river's jellyroll
where we picnicked. Yes,
I was a boy.

Although certain and trouble
did intersect upon my boyest parts,
did loam abrade my frothy eye.

Delicacies yawned
their honey presence in my ear:
crayfish, lily, dragonfly.

And for my mother each I caught.
Slattern light through an early spring
anemia of trees and she

an idle smirk of pewter watching

from the bee-eaten bench,
her shy knees cropped.

A log came stuttering
through a bend in the neck, and the wind
in the branches rose like a train.

She thought it was cold,
but it was not cold. If I squinted,
passengers waved their spirited dues

to the fallen dead, lumbering, it seemed
over the weak back of the water.

And a child, they say, hates no one,

remarks with no disgust
the mole on the lip that feathers him
or the kink in the spine of the hug.

As When the Truth is Used to Hurt and So can be the Truth No Longer

Say broodmare
in a sullen mumble from your hat
to the mud-hole at your feet, and I think
of my mother,

not because she has anything
to do with horses,

but because of the window
leaning its pillowy cold on a bathrobe, or the slim disc
of coffee in an over-lotioned hand.

Not because it has

anything to do with horses,

was a cave found,
not at the entrance to my named life, no,
but later, eleven, Kentucky.

What had taken
the bats, damp and perfect, so long to learn
was the savor of escape. Dough,
as bound to the air as I am
to the crooked
funnel of my thyroid, will rise,
and fall...

That was years ago, and I had only parks,
ordinary creatures with whom to avoid acquaintance,
the horses, perhaps less dreamt than the crops,
and the sop, too, less real than the feet upon which,
despite sensitivity
and privilege, I stand still
for hours. No, because.

Treeward, the birds arrive again
for spring as silverware, one knife shy,
in a drawer I'm pushing shut.



Alec Hershman is the author of *The Egg Goes Under* (Seven Kitchens Press, 2017) and *Permanent and Wonderful Storage* (Seven Kitchens Press, 2019). He

has received awards from the KHN Center for the Arts, The Jentel Foundation, Playa, The Virginia Creative Center for the Arts, and The Institute for Sustainable Living, Art, and Natural Design. He lives in Michigan where he teaches writing and literature to college students. You can learn more at alechershmanpoetry.com.

