

CHRYSALIS

It wasn't the leaves that descended upon you
or the horse that knelt on the river's edge
pushing his nose through mist
 a root that wanted to peel itself into a flower.

It was ash, dry as the skeletons of drained soup cans
on the river front
where a man's coarse throat bleeds
because the language is a dying thing,
covered in blankets, beaten with forks and spoons.

These baskets have become graves
a shot glass of tears tucked between the legs of a veteran
a wristwatch pulled tightly around his tongue
 so that he may savor this hour
 when death drags its tail across the necks of hunted children.

We are shivering again, under the sun's sharp chin
half awake in a boat on a shore of grey gulls
as we press grapes into our eyes
drinking the wine that leaks from our shadows.

Cities break into sand before the approaching shovel;
their windows glisten in the soft light of the Milky Way
as I remember it.

 How young I was to read the passages of the bible
my wings caked in earth
mud forming in my footsteps
water seeping from my lips when He came to drink.
He came to drink and would not stop.
He was a bee pollinating the milky surface of the moon reflected in the rearview mirror.

The deer blinked and all was well again,
calm as the breeze blowing through prison gates.
I shave the edges of my mustache and imagine cutting the policeman's arm from his flashlight.

But still did not stop the lions from sniffing the snouts of dying bulls
or the red squaw from selling her jewelry in the aisles of restaurants serving leaves and grass.

And no, there is no one here.

This casket: the seed of a blood clot.

Bread dipped in gun powder is to be fed to the first graders in that moment when their hair
is cut

and a ruler is snapped, and their whispers metamorphose into a new chrysalis of thought.

A new wing emerging from the lips of these Indians.

Who are no longer passing thoughts in the paragraphs of an oil-soaked dictionary
but hooves carved into talons,

hilltops from which light is transformed into the laughter of crickets.

I want to remain here

where He doesn't drink my lips

or remove the cocoons my eyes have become.

Rattles erupt on the north horizon.

The harvester unties her shoelaces.

I see the sun, eclipse it with my outstretched palm
and dig away my reddening skin.

"It wasn't like this before," I tell myself.

When I am thrown into the fluorescent room where the sink hunches,
like an eagle claw

it stops

pulls the wind to a breathing space the size of a mouse's lung
and I am drowning in the air around my feet again.

A pit bull is hunting for spoons in the kitchen.

Antelope are gnawing into the walls of the city.

And those Indians are braiding yucca roots into the skin of their scalps again.

I want to fall beside them

count their fingers:

five hundred and five rows of spilled blood marking the trail home.

The trail will not be followed again,

because there in the ears of the Indians
are echoes of the hissing belt
and the laughter of thieves
measuring the length of a treaty
with the teeth of the jury that is seduced by the glimmers of gold.

It's ash, all of it!
Fruit flies buried in the skin of onions,
canyons seeking the river that has left them orphaned,
cars cruising their velvet wheels over teeth and beaks,
eyeless dogs barking in hailstorms,
and owls, two of them coming from the east,
carrying the night between them: a wet blanket designed by a woman who dreams of
 lightning
saying that we have finally become mountains
rising above a valley of weeping dishrags that cling to the ground below
raising fences and crosses and houses.

And no, this is not about sadness:
the gasp of a mute burying his legs in the arroyo bottom
when the first drops of rain pepper his forehead,
who earlier that morning brought a leaf into the front yard,
saying that we may grow from this
we may inch into the next world
and rummage for nectar in the thinning bones of shadowless thieves.

This plate before me is made from broken tusk; this fork, the fingers of a rat
and we eat leather behind the train tracks.

These caves where our hair breaks into ash when washed
is a place of birth;
the first cry echoing from the amphitheater
was the song sung in thinning air.

This is not about the rejection of our skin;
the mud dries as it is poured into ears.
But the linguist still runs his hands over the length of our tongues
perplexed that we even have a tongue at all.