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FIGURE STUDY: A BARN IN FLAMES

she three. and One, the blood, at two, the dirt. One, wet bloody step, was hot: One leapt from wood. outward holds two, three a door. One, but wet scream—her circled caw—three, of metallic two, in she wet clink of wooden boots, was woman's room. she holds—was She rising—you, don't and three, the stone and lamp, mouth. One (you) screams. and the barn, the iron shape (One, you, (something had was hay, circled figure drip) inside in her scream figure two, three). and slid She, clink of silken hay, iron silk, was iron a figure (One): a room. hearing wood. muttering (One, when One—her, and hay, muttering). She mouth, mouths: bloody sound, stop at three, stepped red. blood, the caw, the barn made drip. all the while quiet up in beams— something stepped and struck a match.

DEAD FOREST

There's a forest and it's dead. The trees are dead. The fallow field is dead. The lamp that used to light the small house's porch is shattered and, in a sense, dead. The girl who lived here was accidentally ruled dead once; she was nine and jumped into a shallow quarry. Now the house is full of mice, dusty milkglass, faint smell of corn and smoke. The silos, half-full, are caving in on themselves in a slow death. Summer is dead. The stars in the black sky might very well be dead. Night still comes, history book of the dead. The words you spoke when your mother was living are dead— there's no way to recall them now, twenty years later. The city you moved to is dead. Dead people who pretend they're living walk the streets, talking about death. The bird making its nest in the house's gutters goes about its business like nothing is wrong, like the world isn't dead. When it's time for her babies to hatch, maybe—

SHOW

All of the candles turn on.
Natalie, are you coming to see the show?
Of course she doesn't answer.
The candles make balloon-popping sounds.
Or do they snap? Yes, candles snap, that's
what they do. These ones do it especially well.
That's really all they do, though.
And actually, good thing Natalie didn't come,
because we can't find our way out of here.
Come to think of it,
we don't even know who we are.

APPROACH

I don't think there was a house in your dream
but I came to it,
the morning was sound,
clouds shifting light here and there,
the sky was a wound,
the river was there
and the children too and yet
your hand didn't move, you didn't say
anything.
How could I not wonder what it meant
to be you
standing on that porch?
How could I look at your shadow on the lawn
and not ask it to forgive?

8 POEMS FROM SUMMER OF LOVE

Dry woodsmoke
in the gutted room.

Your mouth is forest-heavy
and knotted with summer.

Soon I hear trainsong
coming up the valley,

an echo of the first time
I heard you talk about God.

My eyes are pinholes of fire.
I drink wind / carry handfuls of trees.

I don't know what to say.

Here is a warped record
and two hands grasping at the dark.

Behind this sheet of rain
is the moon and its tinny voice
calling out to the river

and you.

Last night I dreamt of a planet made of mirror glass and another made of human hair. You stood on one, I on the other, while we stared in each other's direction waiting for something to happen.

I won't hold you afraid.
I'll go by a different name.
Consider distance, cliffs.
Consider that this is how it's always been—
flood-smell in the attic, dirt teeth,
summer spent clawing the ground.
Eventually there will be a place
where we can stop, build fences.
Where this kind of unknowing
is a story we tell our children.

how gotten is today

forgotten
under the footbridge

does your heart tune itself
to the corn

is your body a wicked thing

The buildings blink predictably
in the city where you sleep.

I'd like to get out of this valley
but the trees have built walls
to keep me in.

The night is a vibrating leaf.
The night is a rapidly-heating test tube
charging the air with a glowing noise.

Why do the crows look worried?
When will the moths
crawl out from under their dust hills?

Out of the dark come blue boats
drifting onto every shore but mine.

there's a place
after all this sound
a place
set slowly on fire

don't worry about the river
or whether you're alive
I can see
the lightning in Georgia
and the water like religion
in your hands

look North—
see me kneeling in the dirt
I'm not made for this
but my body keeps moving
like it knows what happens next

I watched you frog-kick
and dive underwater.

There was a sound like planets
ripping in half.
The clouds were stained and wrong.

Before I followed you under,
I looked at the matchstick trees
and swore to them
this time would be different.