

Poems

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—WEIGHTS

I can still feel the summers there.
Local wisdom says humidity's worst,
not the heat. As though quantifying a weight
lessens its load.

I remember the always:
the always-sweat on forehead and lips
in a climate that siphons the spirit.
Our uniforms stuck to thighs and bellies
as fans spun futile arcs in classrooms.
Palms too damp to hold hands, I tasted salt
on a dozen boys' throats behind the art room.

By sixteen, I developed a weak belief
in fate in place of any agency.
To forget that is to forget entirely.
I painted my nails with 'Blue Lagoon' and waited
for life to begin or end.
I misunderstood the stakes.

Years later, when the women and girls went
missing from my home town, I was long gone.
I watched the snapshots accrue on the evening news.
Some things have an awful inevitability.
I had no shock to offer, though
shock's the least that they deserved,
for I have lived there, felt the weight.
I knew that things would fall.

—MEASURES

A cattle town, a caterpillar town,
it has been waiting to transform
since before my parents were born.
Built on the back of a goldrush
the ornate domes and iron lacework
seem quaint now,
beside tidy brick homes and the
occasional, coveted swimming pool.

By the oleanders, my mother showed me
a chrysalis that shone like golden syrup.
Later, alone
I split the tiny sheath
with a twig.
No one told me that, even for girls,
desire is a weapon.

For six months my brother slit throats at the abattoir.
Mum and I would pick him up after work
the sedan thick with the smell of blood
as it stiffened his sneakers and football socks.
This is what I think of when people say
that town has violence in its soil.
This, and the lost women.

There is nothing I can give to the lost, except this:
I have a responsibility I need to fathom.
I have a sorrow I cannot weigh.
I want to give back my belief
in the mundane horror of the place.
There must be calculations.
Causes and effects.
There must be a way to understand.
I just don't see it.