

## Dream about water

I.

Mosquitoes and bees fill the bowl  
to the rim. The rocky beach corralled water  
into swirls—canoes circling like caravans found  
in Looney Tunes' cartoons—and it was lovely and quiet.  
What we expect of Sundays in summer.

[My ass looked firm in that bikini I would never wear awake]  
*Only the dead are free of regret.*

Strong wind and mist cooled the skin.  
We decided to jump in: turn the color of the sun.  
But *only you can prevent wildfires.*

II.

one step in: birds scatter

2<sup>nd</sup> foot: we hum in synch

calf-deep: i'm wearing pink?

butt in: toes cold

shoulders under water: pain

immersed: the body absorbs glass

the message?: casket and whiskey

\*Published in Arkansas Review

## **In the Room of Want**

The taxi hits the window of the restaurant  
knocks bottles from the three-tiered glass shelf.  
*You used to look like your mother*, she says as smoke  
bellows her mouth into a starburst kiss.  
She bends down to re-adjust the straps on her sandals,  
demands more iced tea.  
The driver of the taxi exits the window and car.  
There is blood on his arm. Our waitress grabs a broom:  
her name is Kalantha with black hair braided to form a crown,  
her great-great-grandmother was a princess,  
“she puts a period to all conversations.”  
Basil mixing in fumes.

\*Unpublished

## Ownership

In the most dangerous city in America  
I could worry about my hubcaps, car-jack, a swift fist to the face,  
even rape or a mickey-slipped blind date, but it ain't that simple.

St. Louis            Saint Louis

Saints like all saints must die painful deaths

Joan burning Houses sprawl. A city A county A town A subdivision escaping the city rebuilding on  
farmland in the middle of Missouri.

GOOD. Get out of my city. Live your 1970s Bradian dreams. This is my city. BBQ stands. A  
saxophonist opening my seasons. Shrimp St. Pauls. Rows of shotguns lining state streets. Hops  
lingering over highway 70.

The North, the West, the South Side. Oh, oh, oh the East turning tricks so fast you'll abandon your  
tongue, but she is beautiful in her pinks and flickering neon.

This is my city. Gateway to westward thinking in California sun. America tipped left and filled the  
Rockies/Sierras with stars, gamblers, beach-blond hair. They do not belong here.

Saint Louis        Saint Louis        calls my name

The river's lap a song too sweet to ignore like the voices in her head: French ardor.

There are other saints to desecrate let the muddy careen your dream to a bigger, empty avenue of  
pavement new built below the levee. Either way, destruction.

My city of pawn shops next to churches next to Chinese food next to payday loans next to laundry  
mats next to churches next to 1910 Victorian flats next to a river we can't see from 70 next to 2miles  
deep of factories next to the liquor store

back to the river where this all started and her brown suede slicks  
around this city a snake too big for just one town. So why don't  
you take her ride and go down to Louisiana where water turns blue  
a trick we cannot offer.

And my city has trees/parks bursting from our palms: a gift not yours. We hide them from maps.  
Beauty empty from the legend. But let me take you Crown Candy, I'll show you my sweet of treats  
knowing you'll want to turn round.

I'll take you to the airport or at least St. Peters or St. Charles. Enjoy the bridge, the Missouri, the first  
capital of the state. Forget you ever knew this saint.

Leave, Leave            Leave now        I do not want you. There are requirements to be a resident  
in my city.

You will not find them out here.

\*Unpublished

## Two Trains: One Commercial, the Other Passenger, at the Grand Station

Rail car wheels screech, haul coals that look like sheets  
of black glass broken in angular heaps, spread by the time  
the conductor arrives in her final destination: Missouri.

Some trains carry trucks revealed through slices of metal  
gliding fast, flashes of yellow red black. New off the line.  
I thought they were costumed cows prepped for some circus because  
don't most trains transport cows.

Her train, new, silver bolts, matte hue, parallel to the Metro tracks  
pushes through this industrial city, rattles each pigeon off slats  
guides with a light white like bleached teeth or a wedding dress.

This station is filled with scrapped steel, aluminum cans, one pork-rind stand  
under a concrete bridge from where thirteen-year old boys hurl spit,  
piss in large streams arced towards the ramp where passengers exit.

And a guy with gut slung over his belt, creeps low  
behind rows of cars, fearless. He sees me watching him  
taking a shit, wiping his ass with a Whopper, Jr. wrapper.

And I am here, waiting in a station at the Metro.  
Two suitcases packed a warm jacket, east bound  
no ticket wearing flats. A phone rings, a voice says  
“never call this number again.”

\*Published in the Arkansas Review

## To Want

By 7<sup>th</sup> grade, if you wasn't flashing signs  
you betta at least wear the right colors  
for your hood.

Blue: east of Bridge      Red: west

A rag in your pocket for the quick switch.  
Orange for them fools who thought they was tough.  
*What CDs you got?*  
Like I was really going to give it up that easy.

Not like the time when J.R. read me a poem he wrote  
and all I heard was love. He even said it.

That's when I knew poetry was real  
I could smell it. Obsession by Calvin Klein  
tanning the page.

\*Published in Arkansas Review

## **We have Reason to be Mad**

Steeple and smokestacks hold this city's screen door open in the houses burnt up and broken left to carry the dead without a name or say *hello* before the street lights turn black and reveal St. Louis Avenue to the boys with their pants so far under their ass they can't run from cops who just want to make sure that car they're fucking with is theirs or someone's home to make sure homework is done and beds are made before baths can be run. The boys of St. Louis

are lost in cinderblocks and hops fill our lungs as we lift our hands up *to the Lord* shuffling between bus stops and turnstiles on Sundays with hats filling pews and we stand up sit down stand up sit down and again there they are with their suits one-size too big: gangsters from a movie, New York City, 1929. The boys of St. Louis are here

on their corners smoking rebuilding engines to take them to the south side where red bricks build houses break windows are unattended from a rehab. They don't stray far—never moving to Atlanta or another zip code and if they do, they don't return to tell the other boys of St. Louis about cities

the same and different from our own where the piss froth broken bottles and BMWs drive down the same street cruising for a way out of the bodies hands and garages on Dr. Martin Luther King Boulevard. The boys of St. Louis are guests and strangers of city hall Roosevelt county jail O'Fallon park Natural Bridge. They are mad and we are mad and this city of glass and mortar is mad is angry is the last thing you want to encounter because the boys of St. Louis are lost but smoking and looking for Sundays and guns and love and bottles and cars and a name that means something more than nigger.

\*Published in Arkansas Review