

love song of the west

I. when the sun rises

this road slips ahead a slender black body
cutting across open plains, heat seeps from its skin
in haze between the folds and curves disappearing
where the sky caresses the land, where
i am heading there is no coming back
the same, she doesn't speak of forgiveness
any more than sun-baked soil forgives
days without rain, nights without reason
just excuses to stay in this western
land of wasted years and i taste
change in the bite of the wind stripping
flesh from bone, now she is gone and i feel
the rushing of birthing like a crazed river
raging for the fall, like dying
without redemption in her eyes, a carcass
rotten on low rolling hills between
colorado and kansas, ashes to ashes

and i drive with no rear-view
mirror, do not desire yesterday's dry winds
whipping dust into tiny tornadoes tap-dancing
across grey-grass fields, or is that everything
left of my life? remember the sound of the sea
as the sun rises from its womb? i travel to wake
in the east with the day where this road
crawls into sea and i can run
no more, but today i cry with the crows
following me, leading me, defining me
with guttural caws and careful black wings
there is a scream also in my lungs
for this land where cows still graze behind
rusted barbed-wire beside two-lane
highways without a town in sight, and men
still wear boots ride horses, streams
mold their banks, asphalt fights with farmland
deer dance with death on highways unsure

when the road will take them, a sacrifice

to days with her heart feathered
in my palm, harvested with wind-
cracked hands, and the west wins
again, there is a rising and then a falling
i stay in colorado a pillar of salt, a lover gone
sour, a moment of life wrested
from white fists, then left standing stoic
on these western plains where days drift on
forever, as does the sky . . .

II. with the sun overhead

and bare feet standing on solid ground
my escort parked deep in scorched
sand on the side of some highway i've forgotten
the number of, or don't care, the stillness of
these plains pulls me apart at the joints, her hands
mold my body and i feel her fingers
even now tracing the curve of my back, my hands
stretch to the sky gathering clouds
from her eyes and i see my face reflected
off the windshield, i never will grow old
again, i will lie on the hood staring into the sun
arms outstretched feathers flustered and full
summon rain for a baptism of the boy
i was, born in haste to wander westward trails
cutting rocky mountains, and columbines
bloom in the sound of my scream echoing
off aspens, i cannot leave
without her at my arm, cannot breathe
without her in my life and when she rests
her head on my breast we dance
even in silence. there is tomorrow
there is forgiveness and kneeling
chin on chest with new rain running warm
over my scalp, my cheeks,
taste of salt in my mouth, even the skies
mourn loss and wind whispers what is forgotten

while i peel my body from this road
turn the car back west, with weathered wings
working hard to break the skin
off my back. she is the breeze
the bending of branches and i feel the weather
is shifting . . .

III. when the sun sets

some nights it is difficult to breathe
an emptiness presses heavy on my chest
weight of everything i have ever done
inhaled in small moments, one sin at a time
she is in my life even when she is not, and i
feel crazy in my skin, and then
there is day

when the sun glows off the flat irons
gold and orange, i just stop and stare and
morning cold cannot impress me, at least
for a few minutes. i think
i need to use my body more, remember the pieces
i fall into, hike through the hills of
sanitas or carve turns into loveland
stroll pearl street a circus on sunny days
or drive out of town windows down
hair dancing with the wind, reggae
on the radio, singing through land scarred
only by road, scattered
with livestock grazing and geese gathering
over grass plains heavy with winter

there comes a time when mourning
is a must, it is rarely chosen like bends of a river
it is the meandering that catches
my eye, it is her face defines why
i no more try separating from these hollow
western plains, she is lines of a poem
aphrodite legs, every prayer carried away
by the breeze and why i fall

to my knees. she is but a woman i sing

wild with anticipation i embrace her
by letting go, in the west grace grows
from where it falls, from where i stand
there is loss embedded in these mountains, but
hope haunts these plains where men
cannot claim, where God is cloistered, it is
what compels me to dwell in the west
it is waiting and weighing hard, it is
what fastens flesh to bone and carries
sun from sky bringing

tomorrow . . .