

IMPLICATIONS FOR MODERN LIFE

The ham flowers have veins and are rimmed in rind, each petal a little meat sunset. I deny all connection with the ham flowers, the barge floating by loaded with lard, the white flagstones like platelets in the blood-red road. I'll put the calves in coats so the ravens can't gore them, bandage up the cut gate and when the wind rustles its muscles, I'll gather the seeds and burn them. But then I see a horse lying on the side of the road and think *You are sleeping, you are sleeping, I will make you be sleeping.* But if I didn't make the ham flowers, how can I make him get up? I made the ham flowers. Get up, dear animal. Here is your pasture flecked with pink, your oily river, your bleeding barn. Decide what to look at and how. If you lower your lashes, the blood looks like mud. If you stay, I will find you fresh hay.

ESTAMOS EN VIVO, NO HAY ALTERNATIVO

Down here in the land of slammed doors,
the factory puffs its own set of clouds

into the sky. Fake larks fly through
them, lifelike. Let's not go into contractions

of can't and won't or how behind the line of trees,
the forest is gone. Dip that tiny brush into

your paintbox and mix up something nice
and muddy for me. We've got a lock

on the moon so now it goes where we want it—
mostly proms, sometimes lobbies.

This is my favorite sign: "Live girls, live action!"
and in smaller but still flashing lights:

"girl on girl, girl on ____." Among the permutations,
there's no "girl on hands and knees begging for her life."

No one we know wants it that badly.

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A child glanced up at her father and they named that "Buttercup." The stripes on the road (not the new ones but the ones the wheels had worn away) they named "Ghost Morse Code." They named the difference between a photograph of a red barn and a photo-realist painting of the same red barn, "One-Minute-Past-the-Hour." They left no stone unturned, naming the rock's light gray belly, the smears of soil that stuck to it, the indentation left behind in the ground. Even the damp smell of centipedes warranted a word. The Naming Books were stored in warehouses across the country at exactly 64 degrees. There wasn't much that wasn't in them, a nation of Adams flinging names across the land had seen to that. Some people rebelled and there was a name for that too. There was one hotel with no name, no sign and no list of guests. If you managed to find it, you might find a crowd huddled around a group of waiters who were flinging water at vents expelling such icy-cold air that the water would freeze in a random and unclassifiable manner, then melt as quickly as it had frozen. Or a row of long tables with bowls of something that was neither sauce nor soup and outside the window, a bonfire of pink letter paper.

THE INVENTION OF LOVE

The cave woman and cave man lie side by side, each head filled with bright images the other can't see. Even when they press their ears or mouths or noses together, the skull wall is still in the way. In one head there is a gazelle staining a pool with its bleeding hoof. In the other, a patchwork of faces and forest fastened together with thorns. They look at each other. Is that a world in the other's brimming eye? No, just the cave reflected, cold and dark and home. They bump globes sadly. The gazelle is fading. The forest is just the forest outside. "I am hungry," one gestures. "I am hungry too," gestures the other.

I WOULD HAVE STAYED

The vinedresser
of the Belvedere
having found
a very strange
lizard,
Leonardo
made some wings
of the scales
of other
lizards and fastened

them on its back
with a mixture
of quicksilver,
so that
they trembled
when it walked;
and having made
for it eyes, horns,
and a beard,
he tamed it
and kept it
in a box,
but all his friends
to whom he showed it
used to run away
from fear.

SETTING THE TABLE

To cut through night you'll need your sharpest scissors. Cut around the birch, the bump of the bird nest on its lowest limb. Then with your nail scissors, trim around the baby beaks waiting for worms to fall from the sky. Snip around the lip of the mailbox and the pervert's shoe peeking out from behind the Chevy. Before dawn, rip the silhouette from the sky and drag it inside. Frame the long black stripe and hang it in the dining room. Sleep. When you wake, redo the scene as day in doily. Now you have a lacy fence, a huge cherry blossom of a holly bush, a birch sugared with snow. Frame the white version and hang it opposite the black. Get your dinner and eat it between the two scenes. Your food will taste just right.

ODE TO THE DOUBLE-NATURED SIDES OF THINGS

God and the angels arrive in Eden to find only a scattering of stems on the ground. Noticing how the angels' wings fall from left to right as they bend over the stems, God invents a more flexible forgiveness. Things change just slightly. The usual botany class—two rows of long tables, students on either side with wildflowers in vases between them—keeps its format, but now, if a boy puts down his reference book and stares instead at a dot of green on the cheek of the girl across from him, his essay "How a Leaf So Tiny Got on Her Cheek" is relevant, may even warrant an "A." Above the sky may be dark. Below the corn may be dry. Some days recess has to be on the west side of school because it's raining on the east side.