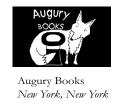
AMERICAN GRAMOPHONE

POEMS BY CAREY McHUGH



for Rob

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You will come first as a sound and then a breath

will come like a cold spell a hipbone

your lilt above the lake a crowcall you will come as expected in

iron weather will craft a blade

from the horse's winter stall

In the barnlight I count the stiff ribs of my rifles gun oil

the floorboards gold with shells

there is migration in your coat your crawl hinged the moon rusts

on its antique swing all winter over

you will find me armed

One

American Gramophone

Crows returning in large flocks to rearrange the body of a tree. The sound of something black and sharp flying into its own reflection; a folktale spoken aloud; a spell. In this verse a neighbor with one good hand lays a bridge across his creek. What is more reliable than this new wood growing full of holes. The day is wasted watching horses drag their shadows the length of the field and back. The spine spoils its own alignment—serpent curve like a shelled thing, seaborn. Legless. Weighted, the gate calls out. If I could choose, it would be a seat out of earshot. If the song were played again from the beginning, it would wind its own notes down.

The Somnambulist

From airshafts I hear rummage. And summer long. A matter of joint-rot and den,

a toothsong constant as a clatter of calves

and as blind. The needlepoint is (rootfringe on a dead fig) fine. Concentration here,

crosshatched rag and gall, the fibers gouged

with stitch-lift. Awareness is like this, the stirring low of swallows banking and impossibly

flown. Then a lamping in the wicker hour,

a stall, suspicion summoned or released, awake all evening like cattledogs unhooked from sleep.

Speech after the Removal of the Larynx

This transcription is a measure of the distances between sounds and their captors. My earliest memory: silence, a waterbird's insistence, hovering. There are some currents that take up anything that falls. I took up the yarn, wound it repeatedly around the hands. I said my earliest memory is of rabbits darkening warrens. A swarm of hornets is articulate. There is no difference between sound and communication; I am satisfied if the strong consonants trigger memory. It is quiet here. Let speech be heron.

Comes again like a costume of foxglove

inconstant at every entry. Survival is a morning habit, a declaration of reversal,

a southravel. I learned balance from the collar bone, from water filled

with windswill. To pour is to allow the possibility of an animal

in repose, an enemy long in the arms. Comes again this version of night:

sandflies ticking themselves into a dry spell, igniting downwinged

in the earlywood. The sickness of violins. New sage greening in a blackbottom pan.

Winter Drowning

Then our words fell (fly-ash on a river) and failed us. Then the riddling

began: Because of the wooden well-top

shelved on the shore. Because of the old well's open eye. We stood straighter: clavicle

and spine, common with timber

in mind. Catchweed called us back by the ankles. We considered the passageways

required for breath and everything slowed—

the snow filling the woodlot, the foxes, their stillness mistaken for self-possession.