

THE GUNNYWOLF

The Gunnywolf loved secrets. How they curved
and thickened and beat the air green.

The problem with memory, he said,
was how once you told it, then the telling
was all that survived. Poof the actual thing.

He was lying on his back, whittling
leg-bones into beads to take to market.

Ryan Gosling's face on half, strangers on the rest.

Sometimes people choose a face that reminds them
of their father. Sometimes people fill a whole bag
with the faces then make a run for it. But of course

the Gunnywolf catches up. He's been selling beads
for years now; look closer and there they are
around the neck of everyone you know. Ryan

Gosling Ryan Gosling when two people come together,
face against face. Oh the secrets taste
like salt, they gather like wool. An engine
trying to turn over. An engine in the water
trying to turn over.

TOMORROWLAND

Family dinner night, and we are deciding what to save:
polar bears or slipper limpets. Girls in Afghanistan

or the wolf. We can't save everything
but the kids are ready

with their banks, the season's extra, the not-
ice cream. How does the Afghan girl feel

to make our list? We bring more and more
money to the table but the list outruns it.

My mother comes in from visiting a friend in hospice,
sick from all the chemo. When I get whatever it is, she says,

I want you to do nothing. It's only May
and already they've declared a statewide drought.

Yesterday I hiked over a river that was not there.
Coral reefs, my son says, that's what I want

to save. And so we do. Whatever is happening to us
is deductible. Silence of the was-river,

was-bear. In the movies everyone is building
some kind of ark.

THE GUNNYWOLF

The Gunnywolf said hey white girl.
I was at the kitchen table
with my mother-in-law
talking about wasps injecting their eggs under the skin
of caterpillars (she had a picture
on her phone)
and how when the eggs hatch
they eat the caterpillar alive
and finally crawl out through holes
they chew in his skin. She had some other
animals on her phone too. Hey white girl
I heard through the screen door.
I had been saying I wanted
to use the Gunnywolf poems
to get closer to talking about race,
not this lyric whiteness but something elastic
where I could stretch and push a little
against the ribs of the folk tale.
That afternoon they arrested the cop
because of the video. We need it all on video,
the mayor said, we need to have a way
of seeing what is happening to us.

THE GUNNYWOLF

The Gunnywolf has posted a sign
in all caps at the edge of his forest:
MY NARRATIVE IS NOT FOR YOU
and there is a longer handpainted one
along the highway by the fireworks stand
but no one can read it at highway speed.
The fireworks stand likes this conversation
and has made several small signs
like lines of a poem every half-mile
between mailboxes and cedars.
There are so many cedars in these poems
I tell my friend she needs to stop
having them in her poems.
We are driving to the mountain
thinking we can handle it, just five
miles, but we are the only ones there
and all it is is switchbacks then stairs.
Everyone we meet has climbing poles
and tells us we're not even halfway.
But it's beautiful up there,
they say, a dozen mountain goats
sunning themselves, totally worth it.
I can't figure out how they got here
but they are all on their way back down.
I wanted the mountain to give me a poem.
My friend turned back at the treeline
but I kept going on my hands and knees
thinking I was earning my poem.
Near the top three goats were headed down.
They pushed past me on the narrow trail,
they stared with coinslot eyes,
tired of my kind. I sat down on the trail
to keep from falling as the goats kicked rocks

down around me. Was this their narrative
or mine? I was too afraid to notice the lyric sky.
Too afraid to get out of the way.

THE GUNNYWOLF AT MIDCAREER

The Gunnywolf wants a nom de guerre,
a cape. Something to set him apart.
He's been working as a Celtic fiddler
for thirty years now. Half wolf
half fish, he writes on his blog,
up to sixty laps a day in the pool.
Can really feel the difference in his lungs.
He's out of the woods now
living back east, near his folks.
I remember the smell of him
in our rented house. Up the stairs
late at night after a show, into the back
where my mother was. After her
he went to France and taught the zither.
Before he left he drove me home
in his paper-filled car. He liked to drive
with his knees. My friend was in the back
and as we passed the city jail
the wolf was telling a story
that kept going about how everyone
had loved his encore. Christmas
his big time. He liked to fold himself
into small spaces, he loved
a crowd. Our hatchback
slid across four lanes
and the cars around us made room.
We unspooled as he sang it back to us.
Near the center barrier my friend called out
and he swerved us back
and told me I'd never make it, never
find what it takes to make real art
because to do that you need to let
your little coffee cup life go—the car

was full of cups and he smashed them
one by one against the windshield,
the windows, the wheel.

PRAISE SONG

Praise the asterisk's puckered mouth
its channeled paths into the forest
praise the rain-ruined map
where it led me and where it did not
praise the small stones
the cedar taken down the fire
the path my approach has emptied
praise everything I have emptied
in my pursuit praise my father
young on his bed counting out coins
praise the metal weight of our money then
praise the empty days praise the descent
the turning back praise the bottom of the cup
the hold left in the rock its empty eye
praise the summer workers praise
the winter wren its song too long for the body
praise the stones which have risen
from the center of the earth to hold
our bodies our bodies empty and wild

LENA LAKE

This one life
the fish are making circles of.

At the center of every galaxy
a supermassive black hole.

A wife is made
of some of this.

Yellow-gray birds shut their wings
and fall toward what they want.

How about this one?
No, too much I and you.

For ten billion years
we have been dying

and still the universe expands
trading this for that.