

Karen Solie / FIVE POEMS

SKID

Black ice squats hairless
on the single-lane, teeth
all knocked out.

Molecules still
as little hands in its lap,
it hums a tune called
faster.

You asked for this,
a moonless night and snow
for Christmas. You
and your gun control,
your precious profligate antelope,
each pair of eyes a swerve. You
and your cheap all-seasons.

Black ice lays low,
laughs off the social work
of salt and sand.
One more for the road,
it chuckles, spreading. *Come on,*
you can pass this guy.

IN-FLIGHT MOVIE

Above, blue darkens as it thins to an airlessness wheeling
with sparkling American junk
and magnetic brains of astronauts. We are flung
across our seats like pelts.

Some of us are eating small sandwiches.
Some of us have taken pills and are swallowing
glass after glass of gin.

We were never intended to view the curve of the earth
so they give us televisions, a film
about a man and his daughter who teach a flock
of Canada geese to fly.

Wind shear hates the sky and everything in it,
slices at right angles across the grain of currents
like a cross-cut saw.

Fog loves surprises.

We have fuel, fire, Starbuck's coffee, finite
possibilities of machinery. A pilot with human hands
and nothing for us to do, turbulence being to air
what hope is to breathing.
A property.

Far below, a light comes on in the kitchen of a farmyard
turning with its piece of the world into shadow.
Someone can't sleep.

Do you know that cows will moan three days and nights
after their calves are taken, blunt foreheads
toward the horizon?

ANNIVERSARY

It was the summer some rank fever weed
sunk her bitch hooks in, sowed my skin
to itch and ooze, that we shared a bed
for the first time. It's not so bad,
you said, looking for a clean place
to put your hands while I stuck to the sheets
and stunk up the room with creams
and salves. You didn't cringe,
(though in those days my back was often turned)
took your showers at the usual time, rose,
a bank of muscled cloud above
my poisoned field, and blew cool
across the mess. I said, eyes shining
with antihistamines, that you were potent
as a rare bird sighting, a twenty on the sidewalk,
a straight flush. It was only falling
into sleep that your body twitched away
from mine, a little more each time
I'd scratch, and I knew then we were made
for each other, that you lie as well as me,
my faithful drug, my perfect match.

ALERT BAY, LABOUR DAY

Rusted boats — *Stella Lynn, Pacific Lady* —
photograph well on black water,
their holds filled with rocks.
The men add one each night
and yell for storms. Happy hour
stumbles in from the dock
at noon, smelling of fish —
or fish-shaped memory,
since the fish are gone.
Tourists ask if the halibut is fresh.
The waitress has a bruise
on her cheek. Walls here
are made of luck and girls
walk into them.

SALMON RIVER MOTEL

Between dry eyes of the Shuswap
a dog-day migraine pounds as high pressure goads air
into something it can't take back,
some criminal friction with sun. Neither give,
chest to swelling chest, lording it
as the Houseboat Capital of Canada squirms and sours.
A mountain south of the Number 1
begins to burn. Nothing to do with me.
Driving west, merely nightblind, I take a room
as evening starts to run its phantom deer across the road.

This is how I remember desire,
all heat and bad timing. Red sinking sun,
brief period of blindness. The panicky swerve
from nothing to nowhere
that takes your face in its hands and screams it's time
to shut the engine down.

Hell has gone guerilla in the hills,
slipping its threats under doors. I've run out of towels.
My air conditioner is cranked and coughing.
There's a small fridge for beer.
Across the street at A-1 Taxidermy two men work
to spare their dead a decent burial of fire.
Lions lie with lambs in the rusted box of a half-ton,
a furry *Guernica*.
I watch this on TV, having removed my shoes.
Only reporters are happy, changing and changing their shirts.

The town is evacuating, air thick with the terror of elk,
and I'm thinking of a man pushing a mower endlessly
along the perimeter of a seaside lawn,
how he filled my lungs with something heavier than breath.
Of the woman who calls him in to supper.
Does this make me a villain?

If I can't sleep then no one here will sleep.
It's important to stay in character. Meanwhile,
firefighters converge as though more noble aspects
could be differentiated and made flesh.
They consume food and sleep with a purity learned
from how fire is born to take unto itself
the perfumes of a forest's private lives and spiral with them
in rapture above the canopy. Tending backburn,
their bodies are as fervent
doing exactly what they should and where.
Finding those hotspots. Digging them out.
It's easy to forget they are paid.

Tomorrow I'll make a run
up the corporate limit's eastern slope above
the lake hanging cold arms helpless as a bruise,
radio advising those who must leave animals
to free them, that they will gather
on the shore and be saved.
Something to tell the children.
Fiddling the dial, water bombers no bigger than flies,
I'll be gunning for the salt heart of the Island, absolved
by virtue of passing through.