

## MEGHAN STERLING

### *Before the Wolves*

I.

From the air, birds strung as though on wires,  
The presence of a mother, paper lanterns crushed by the traffic of the body,  
the pressure of pants against the abdomen, the tight seat.  
Breathing lightly, the moon, wrapping the body in memory, spins like a top as you dream of  
Falling, reaching for a bird, puddles, stars, mud.  
The person next to you sleeps. We kill the world with our talk.  
And then, there is flight, when you can solace yourself in memories  
Before men, dawn crowning majestic on golden wings, yawning like a lover,  
Filled with an aching like rings of water. Inside us, all water,  
Despite the years that accumulate on our bodies.  
The years that steadily increase their demands.  
Revealing more--a landscape turgid with memory, a surface to cast a reflection in, losing  
forever whatever's after.  
Ask the heron, swooping low over the pond, to bring you a wish, spun from reeds, the self  
that you lost, that you keep losing. Imagine that this plane will never touch down.

II.

The Mirror is an addiction. One last addition  
And I will be perfect. Time a cell the face can never escape.  
I dropped the ball, sweltering in the revisioning of  
A heat that passed into nothing, but left me looking older  
Than my thirty-something years. The romance of it, in a sweater and large pants,  
The moonlight reeking of your old aunt's perfume, mending  
The dark like a sock. Another many-houred night facing poems.  
The house is swallowed in quiet—  
Like Job, trembling in the belly of the kitchen,  
A notebook before me, the dishes in the sink,  
Bags of sugar and flour, one lighted lamp.

III.

As if it were damning to know the truth,  
To have seen it, naked and grey as an old church  
Waiting in the shadow of the skyscraper which dwarfs it.  
I was a lover once—I had none of the rage, the cloud to fill a house with, the  
disappointment That begins as an agony, becomes a companion. I had no house then.

O, my song of jealous sanctuary, bridge his river, his moat. Bridge my own,  
Despite the lonely nights I fill with the pursuit of what I call my art.  
I was dealt cards and I shuffled them back in again, here,  
In the Vegas of my re-imagined fate, before the wolves came circling.

*Strange Land: A Sonnet*

A cold winter then, a cold winter now—  
I have forgotten how it is I knew  
That history is made by pushing through,  
Bearing the waning light, bearing the plow  
That carves its way across the fallow fields.  
With the fog came sorrow, came the flame  
Of quiet trees the neighbors knew by name,  
While I ached to remember how it feels  
To belong to a landscape—to belong.  
The leaf-drift burying the steps like snow,  
The coyote call, the geese flying low,  
And the night approaching, silent and long,  
While the dead, in one voice, whispered their song,  
“Nowhere to go, nowhere to go.”

*The Shell*

Where is the conch shell? Once on the windowsill,  
Its downturned spiny grimace holding wind  
Inside the pink mouth, communicating  
The nothing that the winter will become.  
Wind and weather, the procession of years  
Pass the window like gulls. The shell a reminder,  
Presence of a longing, no more than waves.  
Solitude, the still surface along which  
The poem sails, provides the starfish,  
Angelfish—delicate creatures from the sea,  
Swept onto the deck by constant storming.  
All that's heavy, graying like decaying teeth,  
Is lifted out, poured teeming into poems,  
The only things my body can create.