

Three Poems

Emily Schulten

Swan

I was thinking of you when the radio told me
that a family of swans had been shot to death
that night in the suburbs, a father and his cygnets
laid on the grass in a line, sloping toward the pond,
their necks craning, and I wanted that to be
a good enough reason to call you. Their mother
was missing, the neighborhood with flashlights
looked around storm cellars and marigolds
for her, or even for a feather—the promise of her.
I wanted to tell you that I remembered
finding you in the kitchen, the evening you tried
to make my name with the whipped cream can,
to surprise me with the strawberries. How sweet
it tasted to be sticky then, the lovely mess we made.
The next morning you called to tell me
your mother was dead, and I lied about the swans,
I told you they'd found the one that was lost,
she was swimming.

To My Old Love, Visiting the Hospital

You brought me toys shaped like organs
while I recovered from giving one away,
sponges that grow 600 times bigger
when they're submerged in water.
You filled a bedpan and we started
with the ear, watched it for a minute,
it didn't change. So we dropped the brain,
heart, nose then kidney into the water
and left them by the window.
You weren't there when I was discharged.
They put me into a wheelchair
and stacked vases onto me, onto the chair,
flowers, some dying.
The nurse asked what she should do
with our body parts, which had risen
over three days like loaves of baked bread.
She held them above the trashcan, but
I wanted to keep them, save one for you,
so I offered her lilies to make space in my lap.

Modern Ruins

The Civil War fort grows
from the water before us, out of coral
and rainbowed bands of fish.

We toe the moat, hike up
to the third tier, inspect the grass
growing from bricks, and stalactites ice-cycling,
as if these vaulted gunrooms
have always been here.

Could we be more beautiful this way—
torn open in places, our brick and mortar
falling to the ground,
beaten by storm and sea, in complete solitude
inching toward Cuba?

The sun presses its gold
into the bricks and shoals.
Catamarans board passengers.
The salt and sand stuck to our skin
scrapes our legs where they touch.

Your arm's around me. We watch
as ruins fuse with small, clustering, birded islands
and then dissolve into complete nothingness.

Tonight, there, the stars will be clear.