We Wade Through Junipers

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Recommended Citation

Murphy, Megan (2017) "We Wade Through Junipers," The Laureate: Vol. 16 , Article 34.
Available at: http://scholarworks.wmich.edu/laureate/vol16/iss1/34
Shannon weeps as the sun falls in the Mojave Desert. Beauty is the golden light that reflects off the hearth of her iris. Our tears melt like embers. Three crows undress a carcass. She sings “Tiny Dancer.”

We ascend the iron mountain and scream over beds of sage! Visions of my father: mint aftershave, olive threads from a sweater worn on cold days. Cold coffin, wildflowers on mahogany. Each memory pulls on my heart’s hangnail. Shannon and I stand under the freckled moon—shining girls. Lyrics make the rattlesnakes hiss beneath the brush. My whispers quiver like the silver strings of Orpheus’s harp. Eurydice spills a vial of Jupiter. Gold flakes that once swirled around my father’s pupil trickle out of the sky, and I watch him drip down the surface of every blue cactus. He bit into thousands of Fuji apples, and when he laughed, pieces of fruit fell from his mouth.

When you walk to the bathroom you will look into the eyes of someone who has felt pain. Through the green parks, alone in the creaking woods, down rows of velvet pews, stadium bleachers, the peopled counter of a café, uptown, sitting quietly on the last bus, someone who knows: the likelihood of blood, the taste of carpet burns, someone entering who shouldn’t, the “what if?” the bad man in a disguise, the bad man who drives too slow down the street, the wolf in the nightgown, the bad man pretending to be just a wolf in a nightgown.

Just like the stories, just like they said he would, the pencil sketch on the news, a snapped twig beyond the tree line, the person you’ve never seen before, the person you know, he takes something from you, before you could comprehend that you have something to give.

This is a hole. I say it like it happens smoothly. Can things like love and poetry fill anything up? Drip, drip, collect, it’s fuller now—the echo, deeper now. It’s dripping; it fills up, it pours over.

Can it?

You thrust cupped hands under leaking pipes, it’s you vs. the soil, you vs. the sun, you vs. the well. Can you drink a well dry? Ask yourself.

A waterless well is just a pit. A cavity for rot and sediment, a hole in the ground, rusty metal pumps, thirst, the nightmares you wake up from and don’t remember, the nightmares you wake up from and do, fear collects with sweat on your lips, trembling memory: a place where water used to be, something someone used to need, a lung you stand on until it won’t breathe again, collapses silently, where dogs get trapped, and boys fall where their bodies, forgotten, their souls echo on limestone, their teeth break on rocks and coins eating the wishes thrown down by drunks, children, yearning throats of the downtrodden, we reach with cupped hands, wish for more than water.