Kim Fu

The Fox

Through an overheated room of people
is another overheated room of people,
and through that, down the stairs,
out the door, I see the fox.

As we walk to meet each other
in the road, I’m convinced it’s a cat or dog,
from its incautious, expectant approach
delicate steps and back-and-forth swish
of a finishing-school debutante
until we are less than a foot apart,
its nose almost touching my knee.

Broken fox, I decide,
like squirrels and pigeons squatting over gutters.

We circle each other and I retreat first,
head down below the sightline of the road,
through snow deep enough to bathe in,
to the south end of the river where the water still runs
in emerald splits and rivulets,
where no one has drilled and human footprints cease.

I lie on my back on the ice,
in the center of nothingness, beatific white.
The moon begins bright as a work light,
occluded over time by fog
like a thickening swarm of insects.

My bones settle and rearrange as though for sleep.
A lulling warmth spreads through the fat of my thighs
and the webbing between my toes.
I can hear my breathing and then I can't.

I can hear the crackling of foolhardy company,
ice snapping from ice.

Incredibly, the fox has returned.
He scampers weightlessly to safety,

places his body parallel to mine,
stands still and waits
to see what I will do.
To deny sight is to lay an ear to rail,
its couplings – white noise ringing
in flange that steadies the line,
the echo that frames the city’s arrival.

We choose no kin but adopted
strangers, a coda of arms
that tear at the back of a woman’s
neck, the lineaments that linger

as she’s divided, sense by sense.
Past eight Union’s platform rises
to meet the rush of bodies paused
in daylight’s corneal scratch—they pass
in an arc of sweat, sibilant disarray—
not the ground, but our legs moving away.
Corals Zheng

Public Art

Our hands, chain linked fences,
Your arm, my support,
Your height, my shadow.
It was provocatively mundane.

Mall art galleries, free of pretension,
Trying to sell you, public art, free art,
Passing by, art,
Instill a sense of, something,

That you couldn’t put your finger on it,
Something’s, off,
One wrong shade somewhere, continuously painted over.
I couldn’t hear it.

Couldn’t hear our clocks slowly ticking. Out of sync
with time, and our hands, long
short, thin, slowly
moved, just

A little bit faster,
The lights grew brighter,
The crowds came, dirty
hands all wanted to touch

this public art.
A [woman] alone in a forest sees others moving beyond the shadow of the trees. She’s frightened and senses through her fear that they’re bigger and stronger than she is. She names them (the bodies of those others) (which might, who knows, pounce like lions, charge like bears) Giants: Giants names the fear they draw out in her (which is of and in her body, its discrepant size and strength). Over time she studies their faces, their arms and legs; she watches their chests rise and fall with breath, notices their taut waists as they run. And she measures her own body: they’re neither bigger nor stronger than she is—

Fear will have diminished, dissolving the distance between her body and theirs.

They no longer embody her idea of Giant, so she invents another name that refers both to herself and to them, woman perhaps and women. And the memory of the experience of fear persists. As does its name. She now restricts Giant for the fiction conjured by her passion. The idea, not the word, transposes: Giant names an inner feeling, an aberrant perception that swings away from the beings it perceives. To the fear that interprets that perception. Fear textures the forest—

It’s a passion, Giant.

“That the first language must have been figurative,” writes Rousseau. That discrepancy figures giants to decorate the forest. Figures decorate and: they impose ideas. Fear becomes the distance—Giant—between what she felt she saw and the bodies themselves moving through shadow across the forest floor.

She will have sensed fear as the Giant’s body touching her from the inside of her smallness.
At first women felt with their organs (only much later did it occur to anyone to fear)

A woman alone in a forest sees others moving beyond the shadow of the trees. Heart thuds, pulse quickens, breath shortening. Sweat. Her organs press her into a future whose intensity is the present, the will-be-/will-have-been-lost gathering dimension on her skin.

Her body, poised electric, activated for fight. Or paralysis. A suspense of no duration, wrapped in the body’s movements—to sense her heart’s thudding, to sense through that thudding—paralysis, flight.

Fear approaches softly through the forest.

Becomes a surface, warm with life. Beneath which she shivers. Her body extends through the forest, and the others, extending to meet her, give her body back to her, small and trembling, a thin film of sweat covering the skin she shivers under. Becomes a skin through which her body touches theirs.

Through fear they’re bigger and stronger than she is, names them Giants. Giants move shadows over the forest floor.

Over time, their faces, their arms and legs; their chests rise and fall with breath; their taut waists as they run. Her own body: they’re neither bigger nor stronger than she is—she is a woman, they are many woman, become women.

The Giant passes softly by.

Slips into the future, beneath pine needles at the base of a tree, slides between ground and sky, its dusky half-presence texturing the forest. Caves and gullies, a tunnel of rotting logs clammy to the fingertips. For having once become skin then touch, fear now gathers the future into the giant’s hands. Which press against her present, press against her past. And in touching, burn.

Without leaving a mark.
O Kelowna, who has rolling hills
winding on forever upward

and hell’s angels drink well
and are ready to dance,
though you fear
the useless law
the burning forests
will raise the price of furniture
as they tumble with flame
and lie in deep ash:
let a good chair
be made from cinder,
dust and brine
to sit on in a game
of leap-frogging
some will call Frogger

Kelowna, give me that greatest gift,
a good prawn.
I want a fellow-citizen of mine
to go summersault straight
into the deep
from your rooftop bars,
on a night of rubbish
when the blackest sky is tarred

The man’s totally skull,
knows no more than
a two-year-old chimp,
asleep in its father's
lice-pooled arms.
some poor bride
is in chains and tears!

We tire of passing figs,
eating grapes
discussing your weak new love
We fill a Ligurian ditch
with fog and hearsay
Who knows if your wife
is real or phantom art

Such is his prosaic nature,
he who doesn't see, or hear,
he who doesn't know
what day it is,
or whether he is
pet or houseplant.

Now I want to toss him
Hercules style
from your rooftop
happy hours,
the mules
will nudge his bloody shoes
with their useful noses.
You couldn’t call them scissors in her hands if the clashed swords of scissors slash and shear her blades whispered through a void of thick black paper their strokings calling up paddlers and plodders gallopers and swoopers spelling lions from mane-shaped cursive sweeps Baghdad minarets from strips of lacy trim and Cinderella’s poverty from a ragged hem her art not merely deft fingerwork but transmigration of souls her own into stone rounds of tracery or the muscular vertical of an eagle taking wing and the beholder’s into a genesis that turned tapered shadows to rosy flesh of thigh and flank grey stripes to sunlight and the gap between pose and pose to limbs in action while she fled the Nazis’ impenetrable shade the stick-figures pushed into ovens the metal silhouettes of tanks treading Aladdin’s sands her most moving creations weightless not with absence but with the magical flights of bodies wholly grounded in the passage of light.